



COMMUNITY
BROADCASTING
ASSOCIATION OF
AUSTRALIA

15 June 2017

Select Committee on Future of Public Interest Journalism
Department of the Senate
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Dear Committee,

Submission from Community Broadcasting Association of Australia

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) welcomes the recent establishment of the Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism.

As the peak body and the national representative organisation for community radio and television stations in Australia we are key stakeholders in the Committee's inquiry and welcome the opportunity to provide our submission.

We add to the many voices calling for greater support and certainty for Australia's community broadcasters who deliver high-quality and diverse public interest journalism, particularly in underserved markets like regional Australia, indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The CBAA and community broadcasting in Australia

As an internationally recognised, not-for-profit cultural organisation the CBAA champions community broadcasting by building stations' capability and by creating a healthy environment for the sector to thrive. Since our creation, we have served to give a voice to those otherwise not heard on air and always prided ourselves on maintaining a diverse sector, supported by volunteers and community-minded individuals.

Community broadcasting is a vital and growing part of the Australian media landscape. The 2016 National Listener Survey reported the highest listening levels for community radio on record – 5.3 million Australians tuned in to the over 450 not-for-profit, community-owned and operated radio services operating across the country each week.¹ This is up from approximately 3.8 million in 2004.

Community radio stations operate in towns and cities across Australia with the largest proportion located in regional areas (41%), a further 25% in rural areas and 34% across metropolitan and suburban locations. These stations directly support approximately 1020 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs across the country – over 250 of which are in regional and rural communities. Further, the sector consistently reports between 19,000-20,000 people volunteering at community radio stations each year. This is an average of 74 volunteers at each community radio station, putting in the hours of 13 FTE shifts per station. This varies strongly across stations and station types.

¹ Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2017). *Community Radio National Listener Survey- Summary report of findings January 2017* [online] Available at: <https://www.cbba.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census>



COMMUNITY
RADIO
NETWORK



AUSTRALIAN MUSIC RADIO AIRPLAY PROJECT

Our community broadcasters are united by six guiding principles – we work to:

1. Promote harmony and diversity, and contribute to an inclusive, cohesive and culturally diverse Australian community
2. Pursue principles of democracy, access and equity, especially for people and issues not adequately represented in other media
3. Enhance the diversity of programming choices available to the public and present programs that expand the variety of viewpoint broadcast in Australia
4. Demonstrate independence in programming as well as in editorial and management decisions
5. Support and develop local arts and music
6. Increase community involvement in broadcasting

This submission focuses on the inquiry's ToR 1D: "the future of public and community broadcasters in delivering public interest journalism, particularly in underserved markets like regional Australia, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities." We highlight three relevant areas:

- community radio's role in championing diversity in media and supporting underserved communities;
- the vital need to continue with digitalisation of radio services into regional communities and to keep up to date with other technological developments; and
- the need for greater support and funding certainty for community broadcasting.

Championing media diversity and supporting under-served communities

By its very nature community broadcasting is vital in delivering public interest journalism, especially to under-served markets like regional Australia, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Community stations provide programming that caters to the needs and interest groups of their communities and contribute to and reflect an Australia that is an open society, a strong democracy which embraces multiculturalism. Further, these stations play an important role in providing a voice for communities that aren't adequately serviced by other broadcasting sectors. These include:

- Indigenous Australians
- Ethnic communities
- Educational services
- Religious communities
- Print disabled communities
- Music, arts and cultural services
- Youth and seniors' communities

In our most recent *Community Radio National Listener Survey*, 48 per cent of respondents said that their key reason for listening to community radio was that stations have "local information/local news" (48%).² In regional Australia, 89% of respondents said that having access to local content is important to them. Over one third (35%) of people who regularly speak a language other than English in their household listen to community radio during a typical week. Further, community broadcasting is the largest component of Indigenous media production in Australia and half (48%) of people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander listen to community radio during a typical week. On a day-to-day basis, Indigenous radio is the only provider of news and information that directly affects the lives of Indigenous Australians (eg. information about community events, meetings, deaths, funerals, tombstone openings, local sporting results and coverage).

² Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2017). *Community Radio National Listener Survey- Summary report of findings January 2017* [online] Available at: <https://www.cbaa.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census>

The 450+ community broadcasting services:

- Provide a diverse range of viewpoints that enrich the social and cultural fabric of Australian society and contribute to public interest outcomes
- Provide training opportunities for future journalists
- Promote the identities of local communities and contribute to social inclusion
- Provide opportunities for participation in free-to-air public broadcasting and content production
- Contribute to media diversity
- Generate a high level of local content
- Provide a unique range of services and programs

Digitalisation and technological developments

In recent years, broadcasting media has been subject to several major technological changes which have created economic and demographic opportunities and challenges, particularly for regional media. Digital radio is the most apparent and immediate new technology offering opportunities for community broadcasting to grow its reach, particularly given 27% of Australians who live in mainland state capital cities listen to DAB+ digital radio – a cumulative audience of 3.6 million people.

In addition to current services in the cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane Adelaide and Perth, new digital services are being rolled out in Canberra, Darwin and Hobart from mid-2017 through to early 2018. The Minister for Communications has confirmed the Government's facilitation of the roll-out of digital radio in regional Australia, including through the consideration of the regulatory framework and necessary arrangements. A digital radio planning committee for regional Australia has been established, on which the CBAA is proudly a member.

Given the importance of community broadcasting and its vital role in public interest journalism it is crucial that current and future Governments provide ongoing funding certainty to support and invest in the digitalisation of community broadcasting service.

Greater support and certainty for community broadcasting in Australia

The community broadcasting sector is largely self-funded but requires commitment and certainty of future support from Government to allow it to grow its vital service. Community Broadcasting Foundation grants form just over 10% of income for the community radio sector. Community radio stations are largely self-supporting drawing support from the communities they serve through business sponsorship (40%), subscriptions and donations (20%) and other fundraising initiatives.

Community radio stations are already covering all content generation costs for digital services and, as from July this year, the metropolitan stations are now also commencing contributions towards digital platform and infrastructure costs.

Federal Government funding to support community digital radio was \$3.7M in 2015-16 but dropped to \$2.3M as from 2016-17. In the recent 2017-18 Budget, the Government provided an increase in funding (\$6.1M over two years) which was welcomed by the sector. Whilst this money was extremely helpful the funding uncertainty beyond 2019 for community digital radio continues. The CBAA is working with Government to create a more certain funding environment.

We note that the Government has recently proposed new legislation to abolish licence fees for commercial TV and radio, replacing it instead with a lower cost annual spectrum fee at – a net financial boost to licensees of \$90M. Though we are appreciative of increased funding for the next two years, in an environment of such high levels of support for commercial licensees, it is difficult to understand future reductions of funding to the community sector, particularly one that creates diversity of radio content and is so important to rural and regional Australia (where 66% of all community radio services are focused).

It is important to note that if community radio is not part of the digital roll-out process from now, the costs for other commercial broadcaster users of the transmission multiplexes increases and there is a significant social and community impact from reduced access to content. This is likely to include increased costs for government.

Numerous public surveys show that Australians highlight their need for, and community broadcasting's role in providing, local news and information, particularly at a time when many commercial media services are focused on state, national and international news. Audiences feel they cannot receive localised or community-specific information from other media sources. Community stations provide programming that caters to the needs and interest groups of their communities and, if properly supported, will continue to contribute to and reflect an Australia that is an open society, a strong democracy and a vibrant culture.

Community broadcasting is Australia's largest independent media sector, a key pillar in the Australian media landscape, and recognised internationally as one of the most successful examples of grassroots media. With the continual reduction in the number of media owners in Australia it is certain that the services offered by community broadcasting will become more valued and important for public interest journalism than ever.

As the peak body and the national representative organisation for community radio and television stations in Australia we are key stakeholders in the Committee's inquiry into the future of public interest journalism. We thank you for opening this important inquiry and welcome any opportunity to appear before the Committee or assist in other ways in its reporting.

Kind regards,

Jon Bisset
Chief Executive Officer
Community Broadcasting Association of Australia