



MEDIA DIVERSITY IN AUSTRALIA

Submission from the Australian Deer Association to the Australian
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

December 2020



Introduction:

The Australian Deer Association (ADA) is a National, membership based, non-for-profit organisation which actively advocates for evidence-based management of wild deer in the Australian landscape and for the role and interests of recreational hunters.

Recreational deer hunting is a niche and often misunderstood activity in Australia. Hunting has an impressive safety and animal welfare record. Reliable data on hunter numbers nationally is difficult to obtain, however, in Victoria alone there are currently over 45,000 licenced deer hunters, an increase from around 7,000 fifteen years ago.

The ADA has continuously published a bi-monthly journal, *Australian Deer* magazine, since 1976. Along with providing educational and entertaining material, *Australian Deer* also publishes research and chronicles the movements in deer management, hunting, land management and firearm regulations. The National Library of Australia maintains a complete set of *Australian Deer* magazines.

Complimentary to *Australian Deer* magazine, the ADA also publishes an up-to-date website and produces an *Australian Deer* podcast.

In partnership with Field & Game Australia, the ADA publishes *Conservation & Hunting* magazine — a specialist public policy publication which is distributed to Parliaments across Australia.

The ADA's media portfolio is managed via the provision of a Journalist at 0.4FTE and design, sub-editing and proofreading on an as needs basis under contract from a large, independent, regional media company.

The ADA is also a foundation sponsor of a magazine style outdoor adventure/ hunting television program, *Beyond the Divide*. A genre which is common internationally (including in New Zealand and UK), *Beyond the Divide* was the first program of its type featuring Australian content when it premiered in 2013. *Beyond the Divide* currently airs on free to air Community Television (Channel 31 Melbourne and Channel 44 Adelaide), pay television (Foxtel Aurora) and via online streaming services as Community Television proved to be the only viable platform for such a program.



Product	Medium	Distribution
Australian Deer Magazine	Print	Newsstand and Australia Post
Conservation & Hunting Magazine	Print	Direct distribution
Australian Deer Podcast	Audio Stream	Website and Streaming Services (Apple Podcasts, Google Play, Spotify etc.)
Webpage	Online	Co-operate platform
Beyond the Divide (Sponsor)	Television	C31 & C44 (Free to air), Foxtel Aurora C173 (Subscription)



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Discussion:

Community television stations are non-for-profit, open access broadcasters which provide niche services to capital city communities in terms of airing religious content, multicultural content and bespoke sporting and interest-based programming (including hunting).

There was an inquiry into the future use of the sixth television channel (the spectrum on which community television broadcasts) conducted in 1997. It found that the community television's use of the sixth channel provided "the opportunity to correct market failures". Part of the market failure was seen that current free-to-air television had "abandoned localism".

The inquiry also noted that there were economic benefits from community television's use of the sixth channel in promoting the Australian production industry. The stations also provided training to students and other

community members, some of whom would undertake roles within the commercial industry.

A Department of Parliamentary Services report in 2014 made important observations about Community Broadcasting:

One thing is agreed — community media contributes significantly to the pool of media voices available. Community broadcasting in particular, as an alternative medium to public service and commercial media, fosters citizen participation and helps to preserve cultural diversity, while promoting an overall 'Australian-ness'.

Most importantly, since its beginnings community media has been local media — the voices of communities that echo their interests and concerns.

Survival is difficult for broadcasting community media because they most often

operate on small budgets, receiving a fraction of the support which the Federal Government provides to public sector broadcasters and operating largely as a result of support from the communities they service.

The broadcasting community media in Australia is more a source which fosters participation than radical idealism; it is the voice of ordinary Australians who mostly do not seek to reorient the world, but to ensure everyone gets a 'fair go'. It is alternative in that it provides a form to promote cultural diversity within the framework of an overall national culture and in that it delivers strong local voices in a media environment which is increasingly homogenous.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the community broadcasters played an important role by airing religious services.

In September 2014 the (then) Communications Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, announced that community television licences would be phased out on 31 December, 2015.

The continued uncertainty since then has damaged sponsorship and has led to the closure of three community broadcasters (in Sydney, Brisbane and Perth).

Channel 31 (Melbourne) and 44 (Adelaide) were given a 'last minute' reprieve from closure in June 2020 when Minister Fletcher made a surprise announcement of a twelve-month licence extension during an appearance on ABC Television's Q&A program.

The original rationale for the closure was to allow space on the "sixth channel" spectrum for the commercial and government broadcasters to test MPEG-4 compression technology. In Senate Estimates in October 2020, the following exchanges were recorded between Senators and the relevant Department:

Senator Smith: ...*is there (a) plan for its immediate use once the spectrum is vacated?*

Mr Richard Windeyer — Deputy Secretary Communications and Media: *Senator, there is no immediate plan for the use of the spectrum.*

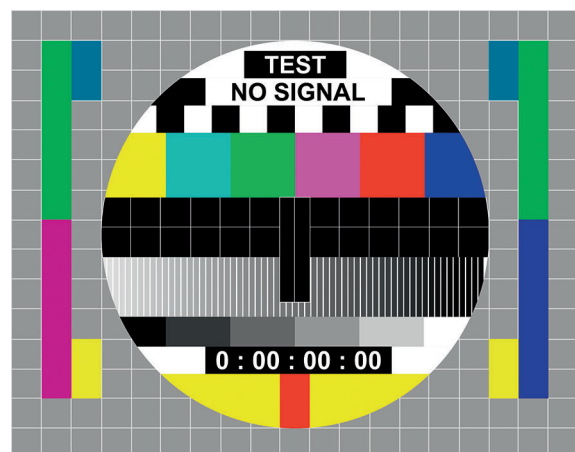
The Department also confirmed that there is no significant cost to Government to extend the licences that enable community TV stations to serve their audiences on-air:

Senator Smith: ...*The cost to Government of continuing the extension for another 12 months would be zero? Is that correct?*

Mr Windeyer: Very close to, Senator. Yes.

The continued uncertainty has damaged sponsorship and has led to the closure for three community broadcasters (in Sydney, Brisbane and Perth).

The ADA suggests that the Committee recommends that Community Television Stations be granted long term licences and additional Australian Government support in order to restore the damage.





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