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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS
Submission No. 24

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

15 March 2006

Dear Sir/Madam

The Committee of Management of Orange Community Broadcasters Inc. (OCB), licensees of FM107.5 in Orange NSW, welcomes the opportunity to address the House Standing Committee on issues pertaining to community broadcasting.

The main points we would like to make to the Committee are:

- Community broadcasting has the capacity to engage people across boundaries which normally separate them in everyday life.
- The building of a robust network of community broadcasters across the nation is dependent on building viable, sustainable broadcasters in every medium.
- Viability and sustainability are a function of the capacity of broadcasters to maintain operations while simultaneously facilitating the participation of members of the community. Most people join our Association with varying levels of ability and understanding of what is required of them as volunteers.
- The sector is diverse and while some broadcasters are financially and operationally stable, smaller regional, volunteer-based generalist radio stations like ours struggle with the capacity issue.
- Community broadcasters need support to realise the full value inherent in the license they have been granted. This is not just a request for direct subsidy. It is a request for an investment in programs that build the capacity of marginal operators to engage communities and harness the human resources they contain.

Orange Community Broadcasters, the licensee of FM107.5 (Call Sign 2OCB), is a membership-based, incorporated association based in the Central West of NSW. It uses a transmitter on nearby Mt. Canobolas to broadcast across a Local Area Plan that extends as far north as Wellington, across to Lithgow and out to Cowra and Parkes.

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We propose to address the Terms of Reference as follows:

- **The Scope and Role of Australian community broadcasting across radio, television, the internet and other broadcasting technologies.**

No other platform is as successful as community broadcasting in engaging a wide-cross-section of the general community. 2OCB is an all-volunteer incorporated association whose members come from every part of the age and ability spectrum as well as from across the diverse range of cultures represented in the region's multicultural community.

OCB currently has 35 members and partnerships of one sort or another with a range of community-based organisations that include Orange Multicultural Group and the Regional Conservatorium. We have conducted joint fundraising activities which benefit both this Association and other agencies active in the community including Careflight and Orange Base Hospital.

FM107.5's Local Area Plan covers large regional centres like Orange and Bathurst, a number of progressively smaller rural centres (e.g. Cowra, Blayney, Millthorpe) and a significant number of agricultural properties. As such its community of interest is geographically dispersed, economically and socially fragmented and culturally diverse.

Nevertheless we have been able to achieve significant successes. A collaborative project with the Central West Writers' Centre and Orange Theatre Group produced a series of locally written and -performed short drama pieces for broadcast. This has been recognised nationally both on the CBAA's website and in last year's CBAA Awards where it was recognised with an Award for the Most Innovative Project. CB Online recognised these achievements in the recent 'Toot you Own Horn' competition.

Our collaborative approach to fundraising was also acknowledged in these forums. Special mention was made of the way in which we designed events like talent quests to involve the local community, develop local talent and provide a platform for locally produced content.

- **Content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity;**

We support the local content quotas established in the Codes of Practice. We have been proactive in engaging sectors of the community - previously unrepresented in our programming line-up - to produce their own material for broadcast (e.g. local multicultural communities). We have also worked in partnership with other local agencies, to develop innovative drama and concert music content.

The station's current programming schedule of 28 announcers includes young people from age fifteen upwards to seniors in their seventies. While the principal language of broadcast is English, we have had content in up to five other community languages simultaneously including Arabic, Spanish, Japanese, Mandarin and German (currently Spanish/Filipino, German and Japanese). The range of music featured spans the spectrum but includes country and western, classical, jazz, heavy metal/thrash, youth-oriented r'n'b/hip-hop, contemporary top-forty and spoken word.

- **Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks;**

Our Committee of Management is conscious that new technologies offer considerable opportunities. For example, we have experimented with live-feeds from announcer members in remote-locations (we ran a successful test broadcast from Brisbane) using the internet. We have also used our website to cross-promote a range of other activities which support the station's key broadcasting role.

Unfortunately 2OCB is a regionally-based, volunteer-run, low-cost – and low-capacity – station. We struggle to attract and retain people with the required skills to plan, install, operate, troubleshoot and train other volunteers in the uses and operations of new technologies.

Technology that is not easily operated and maintained, affordably supported by the manufacturer and updated regularly enough to avoid the risk of technical failure from over-use can undermine the viability of a station. If the organisation can not attract members with the required skills in maintaining the technology, the technology can overwhelm the membership skill-base. Identifying these problems in advance and developing business planning strategies which address these threats is a skill in itself which our Committee lacks.

- **Opportunities and threats to achieving a robust network of community broadcasters;**

The greatest opportunity for community broadcasters is the opportunity to find new ways of developing and engaging audiences. Self-sufficiency for individual broadcasters holds out the possibility of economic activity generated to make communities more sustainable; skills development and training pathways available to local people; and opportunities for community engagement across boundaries of age, culture, ability and life-experience which are not available in any other forum. Community broadcasters have this opportunity because of the value inherent in the license to broadcast and the access to spectrum this gives them.

The greatest threat to community broadcasters – both individually and to their capacity to achieve a robust network – is in the danger they will not be able to access the full value of the license. For 2OCB, this is like being presented with a gold bar or the keys to a Porsche. We know the gift is valuable but we can't put it down on a shop counter and buy the things we really need with it. We lack skills to convert the value inherent in the license into forms of value we can actually use: people with the skills we require or, failing that, sufficient staff resources to coordinate the contributions of a diverse volunteer membership of varying degrees of ability and capacity.

The Committee of Management of Orange Community Broadcasters appreciates the opportunity to have made these representations on behalf of our station and the sector. We look forward to reading the Committee's future reports with great optimism and interest.

Yours sincerely


John Carrigan
Committee of Management