

17/3/05

*The Secretary,
Standing Committee on Communications,
Community Broadcasting Inquiry,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA.*

Dear Sir,

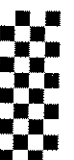
*Submission to the Community Broadcasting Inquiry
Attention: Mr Anthony Overs (FAX: 02 6277-4827)*

PREAMBLE

1. I am very pleased to note that you have a "New Inquiry Tuning into Community Broadcasting". I am a retired professor of economics from the University of New South Wales where I spent most of my academic life (1952-1987). My interest in broadcasting started with a double major in economics and political science (SU-1951) and so I have consistently viewed community broadcasting as a vital part of a participatory democracy. Community broadcasting performs a vital role in participatory democracy because it gives access to the media by a wide range of special interest groups who otherwise would find it difficult to gain access to the media, if at all. And may I add that Community Broadcasting is and should be a wonderful educational experience for most of its participants.
2. Correctly supported Community Broadcasting is by its nature innovative, building on and sharing the diversity of interests in the community.
3. Thus Community Broadcasting does vital public duty by deepening understanding and providing a very efficient means for the delivery of services (eg MBS and RPH services and potentially educational services).

MY INTEREST IN BROADCASTING

4. My interest in broadcasting deepened greatly while undertaking PhD studies in London from the end of 1957 to mid 1960 when FM broadcasting was being established in the UK. The rich musical experience in London, the high quality of the British weeklies and quality productions by the BBC led to firm resolve to innovate on my return from sabbatical.
5. Here are some of the major ventures I have been involved in:
 - (i) Founder and co-convenor of The Listeners' Society (1960);
 - (ii) Foundation Chairman of The Music Broadcasting Society of NSW Co-operative Limited (2MBS);



- (iii) Founder and Foundation Chairman of Radio for the Print Handicapped of NSW Co-operative Ltd (2RPH) and of The Australian Council for Radio for the Print Handicapped Co-operative Limited;
- (iv) Founder and Foundation Chairman of Radio Eastern Sydney Co-operative Limited (2RES);
- (v) Convener of Sydney Public Affairs Radio Foundation and Sydney Open Channel;
- (vi) Convener of Centennial Park Community Video and Cable Association (Telstra's Centennial Park Optic Fibre Trials were the forerunner of FOXTEL);
- (vii) Sometime Economic Consultant to the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal.

There were numerous other ventures such as Community Radio House, Uninet and Schoolnet that have not been successful but have some interesting lessons for social innovators. A proper inquiry in Community Broadcasting with in depth surveys (see below) is long overdue. You may recall the vital role of the Senate Inquiry in getting FM (re-) introduced in this country.

6. The failure of the ABT/ Federal Government to award a fourth FM licence to Sydney Public Affairs Radio Foundation was very damaging in my view to innovation in Community Broadcasting and has been widely condemned. SPAR had as members and potential contributors a wonderful collection of community bodies from both the trade unions and corporate management and a wide variety of community organisations and institutions. ADT Chairman Bruce Gyngell was impressed with SPAR; but he was forced to concede to the ABT majority, although the ultimate decision rested with the Federal Government as the ABT recommended a fourth metropolitan community FM licence for Sydney in a compromise decision. Although many of SPAR's ideas have been taken up by other broadcasters there is still scope for what Gyngell saw as a "mother ship" to complement Sydney's low power community stations.
7. My greatest regret about the development of Community Broadcasting is the failure to develop educational broadcasting and to link this with comparable and other international enterprises. Vice Chancellor Sir Phillip Baxter secured three radio licenses and a TV licence for UNSW but he had limited support and vision for his enterprise within the academic community. The fate of 2UV is well known in spite of its pioneering role with emulation and development elsewhere (eg SUV, 2MCE). Similar inertia and lack of understanding was also encountered in the NSW Education Department and in particular schools in spite of the tremendous scope for the deepening and more efficient delivery of educational services. The resources are there but the imagination is not and this problem needs to be tackled in a more creative way. Erroneously teachers and academics feared educational programmes would take their jobs rather than enhance them. In my six months stay at the ABT compiling a report on financial and economic reporting I discovered that the regulator was equally frustrated with many educational bodies.

8. The Commonwealth has a very mixed scorecard in Community Broadcasting. Here are just a few comments:

- (i) The Huxley Committee and the DOC misled the Government about the development of FM radio in the UHF rather than the VHF band. This costly error was reversed following the McLean Inquiry.
- (ii) Federal support for the MBS initiatives led to the introduction of FM in the internationally recognized VHF band and the immediate award of FM licences to 2MBS and 3MBS.
- (iii) Federal support also led to the successful introduction of Radio for the Print Handicapped. As far as I am aware the US and Australia are still the only countries where there are effective policies of support for RPH. These policies could be applied to other areas.
- (iv) Confusion about the role of Community Broadcasting in the development of cable television continues in spite of the many initiatives in the Centennial Park Optic Fibre trials. Cable continues with much unused capacity. In the US the allocation of 15% of gross cable revenue to community purposes recognises community purposes as distinct from purely commercial purposes. By contrast the present situation in Australia is most unsatisfactory.
- (v) The ABT's Osborne report did much damage to the development of Community Broadcasting by attempting to confine its role to local affairs rather than to gaps in the existing delivery of services. This "gap" approach to potential demand is not an elitist as view as one commentator has suggested. The latter view reflects a failure to understand the effective limitations in the development of the spectrum especially creative programming and the importance of specialist services such as MBS and RPH and most importantly educational services.

9. Here are a few final comments:

- (i) Existing vested interests can hold up innovation in broadcasting as the history of Community Broadcasting demonstrates. What actions should be taken to limit the scope of vested interests? More regular inquiries?
- (ii) Modern technology has delivered a multitude of delivery channels that are not being fully utilised for community purposes. Why not reinstate some of the community initiatives on cable?
- (iii) The efficient delivery and deepening of educational services is hampered by lack of program creativity and simple initiative; educational TV is not necessarily dull but its development initially probably needs to be outsourced.
- (iv) International linkages are being ignored or are poorly resourced. Who would watch Worldnet or NASA or a joint NASA /Australia venture ?

- (v) A carefully thought out public health and medical channel is possible and overdue. Consider the implications of a pandemic. How could the Commonwealth assist?
- (vi) Many professional groups and institutions should be encouraged to make an input (eg town planners and architects). A survey of this potential is surely essential.
- (vii) Is "tuning in" the main test? Surely this is a test of commercial viability? What are the other tests to apply to Community Broadcasting?
- (viii) Cultural integration is as important as cultural and linguistic diversity. For example, to what extent are own language programmes accessible to others? Are we utilising the cultural diversity of a multicultural community for educational purposes including language learning in schools.
- (ix) Has local government failed to realize the potential of local broadcasting?
- (x) Does Community Broadcasting need an enhanced status by more publicity and federal support to deliver its potential.

Thank you for your attention. I would be willing to answer questions or elaborate on the above.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Neil Runcie ✓