



Submission 15

The Secretary
Inquiry into Community Broadcasting
House of Representatives
Canberra 2600

Thursday, 16 March 2006

To the Inquiry Secretary,

It is with pleasure that I send this submission on behalf of Local Informative Network Community (LINC) TV, based in Lismore, Northern NSW.

LINC TV is Australia's oldest regional community TV station. There is only one other community TV station based outside a metropolitan area. LINC TV has a footprint covering approximately 27,000 people, and has been broadcasting intermittently since 1993.

LINC TV has been an extremely important feature of the Northern Rivers media landscape and the development of an audio-visual cluster in the Lismore area.

In addressing the terms of reference of the committee:

The scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across radio, television, the Internet and other broadcasting technologies

By offering broadcasting opportunities LINC TV is providing regional training organisations and independent producers with a facility to build their profiles and showcase their work. Students at Southern Cross University (SCU), Lismore TAFE along with many local independent producers and content creators have broadcast their work (including animations, dramas, documentaries and news) for the first time on LINC TV, and then gone on to work in commercial stations or build businesses in film, new-media and theatre.

LINC TV also provides support for local film festivals and training workshops (through advertising and by broadcasting the products (short films or filmed events)), and provides links to distribute North Coast material to other community broadcasting networks in Australia and overseas. This promotes North Coast content and vision externally.

LINC TV sees its role (through broadcasting and distribution) as being a catalyst for local audio-visual activity, rather than a specific training organisation *per se*. LINC TV also supports regional activity and development through the publicity of local events, community service announcements and the development of community pride and self-identity.

Content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity.

LINC TV programmers consider alternative local content key to developing a local audience. LINC TV is like the local paper. People watch LINC TV because they see people they know, watch events they've participated in and drama's that have local references. Friends and relatives may also be members or involved with the station. LINC TV broadcasts material that other stations may not broadcast as it is seen to be non-commercial (lower production values or not a commercial topic). Although not presently convened, LINC TV's structure includes a Community Council that advises the programmer on what the Lismore community would like to watch.

Content on LINC TV reflects the identity of the North Coast region. A typical week's programming would include shows from religious organisations, car clubs, poetry clubs, sporting groups and student organisations.

Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks

The viability of LINC TV has been hampered by its small footprint. When LINC gained its licence to broadcast in 1993, it planned to be a regional broadcaster within 2 years. There were a number of reasons relating to finances and infrastructure as to why that didn't happen.

More recently however, the board of LINC TV discovered that the Ministerial reservation for the 6th Channel spectrum on the North Coast had been deleted in a 2002 Licence Area Plan (LAP) undertaken by the then Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) – **see Attachment 1**.

This meant that there was no spectrum available to expand broadcast services to the population-dense coastal areas of Byron Bay, Ballina and Tweed Heads.

LINC TV was asked if we'd like to put in a submission to the LAP in 2002, but not informed of its implications, or even that LINC TV had its spectrum reallocated to other services after that time. LINC TV is now only able to utilise the analogue spectrum in Lismore, and has been told that it is no longer able to expand to broadcast to the region.

The board of LINC TV was upset when it became apparent that spectrum that was previously considered available for use by LINC TV was being used by other stations. At the time LINC TV was considering a partnership proposal by the School of Audio Engineering (SAE) at Byron Bay to extend services to Byron Bay, and due to the reallocation of spectrum previously dedicated to the 6th Channel on the North Coast, could not proceed with the partnership.

LINC TV is aware that it is unlikely that separate digital spectrum will be allocated to cover its current footprint in Lismore. However LINC is excited about the prospect of being carried by another station that broadcasts regionally in a multi-channelling arrangement.

Being carried by another channel would solve a number of issues related to a small community organisation being responsible for the technicalities of transmission and spectrum use and would also provide extra local digital content as an incentive for people to change over to digital TVs in the Northern Rivers area. Regional broadcasts would open a number of sponsorship opportunities for LINC TV and assist its viability into the future.

As regional telephone exchanges are upgraded to ADSL2+, and 3G wireless services are installed, there may also be opportunities to place more content on the LINC TV website for downloading and/or pod-casting.

Opportunities and threats to achieving a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters.

Opportunities:

- **A possible partnerships with Island Quarry at Byron Bay and Lismore TAFE. Lismore TAFE specialises in drama and audio-visual production**

A partnership with Lismore TAFE has been mooted for a year or so. Lismore TAFE is keen to use LINC TV to supplement to their training courses and LINC TV is keen to articulate students from TAFE into volunteer roles in programming and administration.

Island Quarry, a community-based cultural and environmental organisation at Byron Bay, has also taken on the central administration of LINC TV, and is keen to integrate LINC TV into its cultural activities including film festivals and youth projects.

- **Gaining a permanent licence and being able to assure potential sponsors that the station will be staying on air**

Being a permanent licence holder will be a huge step forward for LINC TV. LINC TV plans to rebrand as “North Coast Community TV”, and adopt a new working model.

- **Lowered production costs and more content in a digital age**

LINC TV recently started broadcasting (in analogue) from a digital platform (a computer playlist), and this dramatically reduced costs involved with programming time and the use of analogue tapes. More people can now afford digital cameras and editing software, and broadband technologies allow for the rapid transfer of vision from content creators to the station. LINC TV is excited by these technological developments.

- **A possible future in a digital environment through a multi-channel arrangement**

As previously explained this would realise the long-held ambition of LINC TV to broadcast to the region, provide greater avenues for sponsorship and the means to stabilise the station through generation of reliable income streams allowing the employment of skilled administrators and programmers.

- **Greater distribution of content via broadband and mobile devices.**

The advent of second generation broadband along with pod-casting and 3G mobile technology may open up opportunities for LINC TV to gain even greater audience reach, and also for the development more interactive models of broadcasting. These opportunities however may be tempered by the restrictions imposed on access by telecommunications companies.

Threats:

- **Staying in the black with the current footprint.**

Providing eight hours of broadcasting material a day for a potential audience of only 27,000 people is labour intensive and generally unprofitable. It has been difficult for LINC TV to find enough sponsorship to pay for the electricity for the transmitter, let alone any wages for administration and transmitter repairs. Intermittent broadcasts that have resulted have only compounded the difficulty in finding sponsorship or people to buy airtime.

- **Uncertain Licence**

LINC TV operates on a temporary licence, and has done so for the last 12 years. The uncertainty that this created prevented LINC TV from entering into any long-term arrangements with sponsors or partners. LINC TV is currently in the process of applying for a permanent licence, and, if successful, this will alleviate some of these difficulties. It is not known at this stage whether or not LINC TV will be successful in gaining a permanent licence.

- **Lack of Human Capital**

Despite the dramatic reduction in labour and costs needed to run broadcasts on LINC TV, and the potential stability of a permanent licence, the greatest threat remains lack of sponsorship due to the small audience. The other flow-on effect from that is that there is no paid administrator to run LINC TV, and this is very destabilising for the association. LINC TV has survived in the past on the generosity volunteers and people engaged in work-for-the-dole schemes.

- **Audience erosion due to digital conversions**

Audience erosion as a result of people switching to digital TV hasn't really affected operations at LINC TV up til this point. It may present a problem in the future however.

And finally, it is my opinion that LINC TV, like many community broadcast facilities, is under utilised by governments. LINC TV provides access to niche markets and a potential avenue for government messages and broadcast material.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry. LINC TV board members would be interested in being part of public hearings should they be held on the North Coast.

Kind regards,

Alicia Cameron
Past Chair – LINC TV

On Behalf of the Current LINC TV Board: Shane Rennie (Chair), Ian Slade (Public Officer), Karey Patterson, Chris McIlwrath and David Hannaford.

Figure 1 – from the 2003 Licence Area Plan for the Northern Rivers showing a Ministerial reservation for a Community Channel across the entire region (to be deleted).

Frequency Allotment Plan –Northern NSW Analog Television
August 2003

SCHEDULE ONE

FREQUENCY ALLOTMENT PLAN FOR VHF/UHF TELEVISION BANDS - EXISTING ENTRY UNDER T07 NORTHERN NSW TO BE DELETED

Area	Transmission Site	Total Capacity	Channels Available	Licensed Services			Ministerial Reservations for Future Service		Comments
				National	Commercial	Community	National	Community	
Armidale	Little Duval	7	1	1	3		1	1	Total capacity includes a channel that may be used by the existing 5A service if it is to move from its existing channel.
Ashford	2.4km ESE of town	7	1	1	3		1	1	Total capacity includes a channel that may be used by the existing 5A service if it is to move from its existing channel.
Ben Lomond	The Brothers	6	3				2	1	
Bendemeer		6	3				2	1	
Bonalbo	Browns Hill	6		1	3		1	1	
Bouddi*	Bouddi Trig	8		2	6			1	Refer T1
Byron Bay	Reservoir Hill	6			3		2	1	
Cassilis	2km SE of town	6	2		1		2	1	
Coffs Harbour	Sealy Lookout	6		1	3		1	1	
Collaroy	Redwell Rd	6	2		1		2	1	
Currabubulla	Slippery Rock Hill	6	2		1		2	1	
Currumbin*	Farrell Lookout	8		2	6				The 6 commercial services include 3 from Brisbane and 3 from Approved Market (B). Refer to Currumbin T3 - Brisbane

Figure 2 – From same 2003 Licence Area Plan for the Northern Rivers showing the services to be inserted.

Frequency Allotment Plan –Northern NSW Analog Television
August 2003

SCHEDULE TWO

FREQUENCY ALLOTMENT PLAN FOR VHF/UHF TELEVISION BANDS - D ENTRY UNDER T07 NORTHERN NSW TO BE INSERTED

Area	Transmission Site	Total Capacity	Channels Available	Licensed Services			Ministerial Reservations for Future Service		Comments
				National	Commercial	Community	National	Community	
Armidale	Little Duval Mountain	4		2	2				
Armidale North	Kellys Plains	2		1	1				
Ashford	2.4km ESE of town	4		3	1				Alternative national assignment in event of unacceptable digital interference
Bonalbo	Browns Hill	4		1	3				
Bouddi	Bouddi Trig	7		2	5				The 5 commercial services include 3 from Sydney and 2 from Approved Market (B). Refer to Bouddi T1 - Sydney
Cassilis	2km SE of town	2		1	1				
Coffs Harbour	Bruxner East Point	5		2	3				
Collaroy	Redwell Road	1			1				
Currabubulla	Slippery Rock Hill	1			1				
Currumbin	Albany Ave	8		2	6				The 6 commercial services include 3 from Brisbane and 3 from Approved Market (B). Refer to Currumbin T3 - Brisbane
Dungog	Cooree Hill	5		2	3				
Glen Innes	Carpenters Hill	5		2	3				
Gloucester	Kiaora Lookout	5		2	3				