

**SUBMISSION**

**TO**

**THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON  
COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS**

**COMMUNITY BROADCASTING INQUIRY**

**BY**

**MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY RADIO ASSOCIATION LTD.**

Radio2000 FM-98.5 (Sydney)

Inoke Fotu Hu'akau

Chairperson

Board of Directors

## **Introduction**

MCRA Ltd. is a public company limited by guarantee and the licensee for the largest publicly operated Multilingual Community Broadcasting Service in New South Wales. The structure of the company is to ensure community participation at all level of its operation, from the selection of the members of the Board at the AGM to programming, and to determine how the grant money is spend.

The Broadcasting service of the company is Radio2000 on FM-98.5, broadcasting in 50 languages per week, provides a 24 hours/ 7 days per week. The target audience is both the old, new and emerging ethnic communities who speak languages other than English (16.3% of NSW population 1996 Census). Priority concern of the service is also to ensure that language cannot be a barrier for new migrant acquirement of basic and fundamental information about Australia political, social and economical infrastructure to enhance a successful resettlement. Thus, the service informs and educates more than entertain.

More than 300 volunteer broadcasters have dedicated their time to produce and broadcast programs to their respective communities throughout the year. Since there is a high rate of mobility within these communities with respect to job and residence, there is also a lot of change of personnel within these Broadcasting Groups. Broadcasters move on and new broadcasters settling in to continue the program and that makes training an integral part of community broadcasting.

A significant portion of the volunteer broadcasters is from the general youth population of the community. Their increasing involvement is in areas of technical support (panel operator, computer operator in broadcasting software) but recently taking more control in producing and broadcasting the youth segment of their community programs.

Federal Government funding through grants administered by the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF) subsidizes the broadcasting service. This subsidy amounts to about 30% of the cost of delivering the service. The communities through airtime levy and the rest from sponsorship take up the 70%.

### **THE ROLE OF RADIO2000 IN COMMUNITY BROADCASTING**

Radio2000 is an integral part of a network of not-for-profit community operated broadcasting station all throughout Australia.

#### **As a Training Ground for Community Media Personnel.**

Radio2000 in New South Wales is the largest publicly controlled and run multilingual broadcasting service statewide. It has over 1000 members from diverse ethnic background. It also has more than 300 volunteer broadcasters producing and broadcasting community program to their respective communities every week.

Training of community volunteers in a vast array of broadcasting skills is an ongoing process in the operation of the station. In the short term, the station and its service benefit from having trained and skilled pool of volunteers that guarantee the quality and professional level of the service. Nevertheless, in the end, the general community at large will benefit from having trained communicators throughout the population and especially community organizations and government services. In that sense, our in house training program is open for general member of the community. About more than 1000 volunteer broadcasters and community personnel that have been trained by the station in the past ten years of operation.

Training is also available and paid by the station for those who want to take broadcasting as a career path. Registered Training Organization conducts training programs for certified qualification in broadcasting within the sector.

### **As Contact Point Between Service Providers and Community.**

The station, since its inception in 1992, has become an information hub for the communities that it serves. It has been a focal point for both government and non-government media release. It has an excellent rapport with local government services throughout Sydney metropolitan and rural areas.

About 90% of all programs are broadcast live from the station. The information is up to date with local content. The fact of the matter is the community produced the programs for themselves. They make it relevant and express in the most appropriate way in context of vernacular and tone of expression. That makes information from service providers much more easier to digest.

Beside the content, the facility that the station makes available to the community for production and broadcasting, the network of over 300 volunteer broadcasters have created an atmosphere of respect and tolerance through understanding of the cultural differences and needs of their respective communities. However, of utmost importance is for the network of broadcasters to mold out of this diversity, a multicultural community that is uniquely Australian.

### **The Opportunities and Threats to Achieving a Robust Community Broadcasting Sector.**

#### **The Opportunity**

The opportunity is that Australian Multiculturalism was by design not by accident. This social policy is complemented by the Broadcasting service Act in the creation of the Community Broadcasting Sector.

The establishing of the Multilingual Broadcasting Services both in government (SBS) and non-government sector (Radio2000) has been instrumental in the success of Australia migrants' community during the resettlement process under the Multicultural Policy.

## The Threats

Based on my experience in managing the company and its broadcasting services in the past eight years, the following are factors that threaten the development of the sector:

- With the funding level at 30% of the production-cost of program which in real term value is between \$80.00 - \$120.00, struggling to cope financially is the norm for most community stations.  
To compensate for the funding shortfall, the organization or company should have a low overhead and low cost operation model. Volunteer concept can only support the service to a certain extends, but for a stable, consistent and continuous operation, a proper management salaried structure has to be in place. In the case of Radio2000, there are two full salaried employees and one casual. The management is supported by committees of volunteers covering different aspects of the operation of the company such as Conveners Committee, Complaint Committee and Program Committee.
- The other major factor, which directly affects the liquidity of community broadcasting stations, is the Policy and Guidelines for Sponsorship. These restrictions:
  1. Limiting of the sponsorship to 5 minutes per hour.
  2. Tagging of the promotional announcement.
  3. The licensee should be a not-for-profit organization or a public company limited by guarantee.

imposed by the Act on community services affect the station in the following ways: **(i) (1) acts as a limit to revenue collection capability.**

- (ii) (1), (2) are used by the narrow-cast commercial licensees, which also target the migrant communities market, to record and monitor community licensees for breach of license.**

However, the perceived rationales for the constraints are: Firstly, the sole purpose for these constraints is to differentiate the Community License from the Commercial. The claim is that since the Commercial operators paid millions for their license, Community operators get the license free of charge. AND Secondly, to restrict the revenue collection capability of the organization in a way that community licensee poses no competition to the commercial operators.

## The Myth of Free Community Broadcasting License.

It a classic argument to rationalize the restrictive nature of the Community License is the fact that it is free. This line of justifying the constraints on community broadcasting sector is based of valuing the services is to espouse the narrow path economic rationalism.

The obvious flaw of this line of thinking is the fact that if we quantify the commercial value in millions as in the most recent auction results of licenses as around \$156 millions. In addition, it is always the case that these licenses

are commercially operated by Media Corporation with the sole purpose of maximizing the profit. Add on to it the advertising dollar which is solely based on the new world order of consumerism (now called the 'mainstream') and it is obvious that there is either very little room or not at all for the new migrant communities.

However, if we equate the \$156 million with the social and economic costs to government of having a growing 'uninformed' and therefore 'unskilled' sector of the population will make the \$156 millions insignificant. However, if we fail to inform and educate this sector, then the outcome is the creations of ethnic enclaves within the general population, which will in time, pose the biggest threat to the established social values of the Australian way of life and security.

## **THE PROPOSAL**

I have to make it clear that we are not arguing for 'Community Broadcasting License' without the constraints (The Threat 1,2,3) but for the government to reconsider the rationale for them and their relevancy in today's market place. However, we fully support that the Sector should remain Not-for Profit, but we would like to ask your Committee to consider the following proposals:

- 1. That the sponsorship time should increase from 5 minutes per hour to 7 minutes per hour to be in par with community television.**
- 2. The 'tagging' of sponsorship announcement should not be a compulsory part of each announcement as it is in the current regulations. OR**
- 3. This acknowledgement of the sponsors (tagging) can be made, either once at the beginning or at the end of the program.**

With the continuing decrease of funding in real term and the growing cost of providing the services, the slight adjustment to the regulation can give community broadcasting stations a fighting chance to ensure the growth of a robust community sector.

In today's world with increase threat to peace and security, we need a vibrant Community Broadcasting Sector more than ever.

Regards,

Inoke Fotu Huakau  
Chairman  
Board of Directors  
Multicultural Community Radio Association Ltd.