

Community broadcasters call on the Federal Government to restore funding to Amrap and Digital Radio

The CBAA Annual National Conference held in Melbourne last weekend called on the Federal Government to restore funding to two critical national projects for the community broadcasting sector.

The Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (Amrap) provides essential support to community radio stations across the country, and to Australian musicians, to distribute and profile new Australian music.

Funding for Amrap was axed in the last Federal Budget and over the last 6 months the Minister, Senator Stephen Conroy, has repeatedly advised his department is 'looking for solutions'. Amrap operates on \$600,000 a year to provide national infrastructure to distribute Australian music to stations and broadcasters as well as a small grants program to stations.

Amrap is an extraordinarily low cost / high return project that has enormous support from community broadcasters and the Australian music industry who have long understood the valuable role of community radio in profiling Australian music.

The Amrap project has been continued since funding ran out in June with the support of the Community Broadcasting Foundation but time is running out. Unless funding solutions can be identified urgently the project will have to cease operating very soon.

Community broadcasters nationally play an average of 37% Australian music of all genres and make a significant contribution to supporting Australian music, arts and media diversity. Over 30% of community radio stations are the only providers of local content produced and broadcast in regional areas.

The CBAA Annual Conference profiled the depth of content produced by community broadcasters with the annual CBAA Awards featuring a remarkable range of programs this year. A full list of award winners is available on the CBAA website.

Future developments for community broadcasters were discussed extensively at the conference including content development, convergence issues and digital media platforms.

Adam Bandt, Federal MP for Melbourne, welcomed 250 delegates to his constituency and Stephen Mayne provided the opening keynote address with some observations on the Australian media environment and the role of independent media.

Scott Ludlam, Australian Greens spokesperson for Communications, opened up the second day of the conference and joined the morning panel discussion on 'Building Capacity'.

Concerns about community broadcasters access to the digital radio platform ran high throughout the conference.

37 metropolitan-wide community stations are currently operating digital radio services in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane with funding support for infrastructure costs from the Federal Government.

In the May federal budget the Government committed a further \$9.3m over the next 4 years to maintain the existing community digital radio services but this is approximately \$1.4m short of the funding support required each year to support current services.

The shortfall in funding to the CBAA Digital Radio Project is so severe that there will be no option but to reduce community digital radio services in 2013 unless the funding shortfall is addressed.

Community digital radio in the mainland capital cities provides a highly diverse range of services including cultural and specialist talks programming, music, Indigenous, print handicapped, religious, ethnic and multicultural, youth, educational and community access services.

At the final conference plenary Melbourne's 3RRR moved a motion calling on the CBAA to coordinate an ongoing campaign for sufficient funding to maintain all existing community digital radio services. The motion was unanimously supported.

McNair Ingenuity Research presented their latest findings from the National Listener Survey at the CBAA conference which indicated 25% of radio listeners are tuned in to community radio in an average week (over 4.4 million) and 12.3% are listening to community digital radio services each week.

For further information contact:

Kath Letch, General Manager, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) on 0409 142 301 or email kletch@cbaa.org.au