



COMMUNITY  
BROADCASTING  
ASSOCIATION OF  
AUSTRALIA

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Budget Policy Division  
The Treasury  
Langton Crescent  
Parkes ACT 2600

## Ensuring funding certainty for critical community radio projects beyond 2020-21

### Summary

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) appreciates the long-standing support that successive Commonwealth Governments have provided to the community broadcasting sector – Australia’s largest independent media sector – for over four decades.

In the 2017/18 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Government provided an additional investment in the sector through the Community Broadcasting Program of \$12m over four years to support the Digital Radio Project, as well as enhanced news programming, improved online presence and industry skills development.<sup>1</sup> This investment reflected the Government’s commitment to community broadcasting, to the production of local content and, to media diversity.

This investment has been critical to the success of several ongoing projects across these targeted workstreams and the sector’s growing listenership and value to the Australian community. Targeted projects supported through the 2017/18 package include:

- Digital Radio Project (DRP)
  - DRP is managed by the CBAA to establish, operate and support infrastructure and service delivery at a national level to enable eligible licensed community broadcasters to provide digital radio services.
  - 42 free-to-air DAB+ digital radio services are currently provided across Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, as well as digital services under implementation in Canberra, Darwin and Hobart.
  - A further set of locations, including the Gold Coast, has been identified by the commercial radio industry as being next stage priorities for digital radio implementation.
- Collaborative News Network and National Radio News
  - The Collaborative News Network enables community stations to share content and collaborate on news stories. The network places a spotlight on local stories and enables resource sharing between stations to cover larger national stories.
  - The National Radio News service is a partnership with Charles Sturt University employing six journalists, combining national and international journalism with true ‘community’ content while providing a journalistic training ground. The service is

<sup>1</sup> See the Minister’s media release announcing the additional funding package here:  
[www.minister.communications.gov.au/minister/mitch-fifield/news/one-nation-support-media-reform-package](http://www.minister.communications.gov.au/minister/mitch-fifield/news/one-nation-support-media-reform-package)



COMMUNITY  
RADIO  
NETWORK



**amrap**  
AUSTRALIAN MUSIC RADIO AIRPLAY PROJECT

capitalising on the Collaborative News Network to ensure a greater availability of news sources, wider coverage of stories and maximisation of local voices and expertise.

- Central Online Streaming Portal project
  - The CBAA is developing a Multiplatform Distribution Project to streamline day-to-day station operations and workflows, build online audiences, and maximise station revenue.
- Targeted training for business and leadership skills via the National Training Program
  - New initiatives focus on enhancing the management and small-business skills of the sector's participants.
  - Alongside increased Pathways and Accredited training allocations, a number of larger scale leadership and enterprise projects will be delivered.

The 2020/21 Budget marks the final year of targeted funding allocated under the 2017/18 package supporting these critical projects

With the demonstrable success of CBAA projects and sector initiatives supported through the 2017/18 package – as outlined further in this submission – the CBAA seeks the Commonwealth Government's commitment to maintain targeted funding to these critical areas at an appropriate and ongoing level per annum beyond 2020/21.

The CBAA is committed to working with the Commonwealth Government through the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications in 2020 to ensure the successful continuation of critical sector projects and to further optimise the overall funding arrangements for the community broadcasting sector through the Community Broadcasting Program.

## Community broadcasting in Australia and the CBAA

### *1 in 4 Australians listen to community radio weekly*

Australia's first community radio station was licensed in 1972 and the sector has developed rapidly over its 40+ year history. Today, with over 460 community radio services across Australia, community broadcasting is the country's largest independent media sector, a key pillar in the Australian media landscape, and recognised internationally as one of the most successful examples of grassroots media.

The December 2019 Community Radio National Listener Survey reported high listening levels for community radio – over a quarter (29%) of Australians aged 15 years and over tune in to the more than 460 not-for-profit, community-owned and operated radio services operating across the country each week (5.8 million Australians).<sup>2</sup> This is up from approximately 3.76 million in 2004.<sup>3</sup> Of people surveyed, 5% listen to community radio exclusively – nearly 1 million Australians.

Community radio stations play an important role in catering to the needs of, and providing a voice for, Australian communities that aren't adequately serviced by other broadcasting sectors. This includes Indigenous, ethnic and multicultural, educational, community access, religious and faith-based, Radio Reading Network for people with a print disability, youth and seniors, LGBTQI+, and

<sup>2</sup> Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2019). Community Radio National Listener Survey, Wave 2 [online]. Available at: [www.cbaa.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census/national-listener-survey-fact-sheets](http://www.cbaa.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census/national-listener-survey-fact-sheets)

<sup>3</sup> Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2018). Community Radio National Listener Survey 2018 Summary report of findings May 2018 [online] Available at: [www.cbaa.org.au/sites/default/files/media/McNair%20yellowSquares%20-%20NLS%20-%20Main%20Report%202018%20-%20FINAL-nopg13.pdf](http://www.cbaa.org.au/sites/default/files/media/McNair%20yellowSquares%20-%20NLS%20-%20Main%20Report%202018%20-%20FINAL-nopg13.pdf)

specialist music and arts communities. In metropolitan areas, there are a greater number of diverse, specialist stations; in regional and rural communities, community radio stations are more likely to provide variety within one generalist station through diversity of programming and services.

### *Local information, issues, news, voices and personalities*

Amongst the top reasons Australians give for tuning in to community radio are local information and news (52%) and hearing local voices and personalities (36%).<sup>4</sup> Importantly, 76% of community radio stations are in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia<sup>5</sup>, and 27% of Australians living outside of metropolitan areas – 1.75 million people – tune in to community radio each week.<sup>6</sup>

Regional and remote stations reflect the interests of their local communities, including music, sports, environment and arts, and connect people separated by hundreds of kilometres via the airwaves. They also play an important role in regional and remote communities by providing emergency broadcasts, acting as a catalyst for community dialogue, supporting community resilience through tough times, helping combat social isolation and, importantly, connecting people in regional and remote Australia to the critical services they need.

This has been exemplified during the ongoing 2019/2020 bushfire season. Stations in affected regions in South Australia, Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales have reported undertaking a range of activities to serve their communities through delivery of local information and providing a medium for connection and resilience—including conducting formal emergency broadcasting, sharing emergency information on air and online, developing and sharing community service announcements, and working with community groups to organise fundraising events for local communities.

Across the country the national community radio audience listens to services that contribute to and reflect Australia's open society, strong democracy and vibrant culture by:

- Sharing a diverse range of viewpoints that enrich the social and cultural fabric of Australian society and contribute to public interest outcomes;
- Promoting the identities of local communities and contribute to social cohesion and inclusion;
- Providing opportunities for participation in free-to-air broadcasting and content production;
- Contributing to media diversity;
- Generating a high level of local content; and
- Providing a unique range of services and programs.

### *Not-for-profit stations powered by community volunteers*

The community radio sector is powered by the efforts and dedication of over 26,000 volunteers.<sup>7</sup> Over half of stations are entirely volunteer run and 17% of volunteers are under 26 years of age.<sup>8</sup> This

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<sup>4</sup> Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2019), Community Radio National Listener Survey, Wave 2 [online]. Available at: <https://www.cbaa.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census/national-listener-survey-fact-sheets>

<sup>5</sup> Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2019), State of the Sector Report [online] Available at: [www.cbaa.org.au/sites/default/files/media/CBAA%20State%20of%20the%20Community%20Radio%20Sector%20Report%202019\\_4.pdf](http://www.cbaa.org.au/sites/default/files/media/CBAA%20State%20of%20the%20Community%20Radio%20Sector%20Report%202019_4.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2019). Community Radio National Listener Survey Non-Metro Fact Sheet, Wave 2. [online] Available at: [www.cbaa.org.au/sites/default/files/media/McNair%20yellowSquares%20-%20NLS%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Non-Metro%20-%202019%20-%20Wave%20%232%20-%20190101.pdf](http://www.cbaa.org.au/sites/default/files/media/McNair%20yellowSquares%20-%20NLS%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Non-Metro%20-%202019%20-%20Wave%20%232%20-%20190101.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2019), State of the Sector Report [online] Available at: [https://www.cbaa.org.au/sites/default/files/media/CBAA%20State%20of%20the%20Community%20Radio%20Sector%20Report%202019\\_4.pdf](https://www.cbaa.org.au/sites/default/files/media/CBAA%20State%20of%20the%20Community%20Radio%20Sector%20Report%202019_4.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

means that the community radio sector is an important conduit for skills, training and employment opportunities across a range of topic areas relevant to broadcasting, management and operations.

Legislated under the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 and guided by the Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice, community radio stations are operated as independent not-for-profit organisations (many of which are also charities), actively encouraging access and participation by members of their communities in all aspects of operations. In addition to independent revenue-raising through sponsorship, many community radio stations receive government funding through the Community Broadcasting Foundation: an independent, not-for-profit funding body for the Australian community broadcasting sector.

### *Championing the future of community broadcasting in Australia*

The CBAA is the peak body for community broadcasting stations in Australia and an internationally recognised, not-for-profit cultural organisation. Since our inception, we have strived to provide opportunities for voices otherwise not heard on air and always prided ourselves on maintaining a diverse sector, supported by volunteers and other community-minded individuals.

The CBAA champions community broadcasting by building stations' capability and creating a healthy environment for the sector to thrive. We work toward ensuring that community broadcasting is recognised as an excellent, innovative, sustainable, accessible, trusted and diverse industry, and a key pillar in Australian broadcasting that contributes to an open society and cultural vibrancy.

The CBAA proudly works with the current Department of Communications and the Arts, and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), to strengthen and support Australia's community broadcasting sector in delivering on the Government's desired policy outcomes.

## **Digital Radio Project supporting community digital radio**

### *42+ increasing to 55+ on-air community digital radio services*

In 2020 and beyond, digital radio will continue to be a vital and growing element in Australia's multiplatform media environment. Commonwealth Government funding support enables community broadcasters to provide and deliver digital radio services on a basis that is affordable to the community sector.

Digital radio sits alongside AM and FM (analogue) as an alternative radio transmission platform. Like analogue radio, it is broadcast on a free-to-air basis over the airwaves. Digital radio does this via DAB+ technology. Digital radio is future facing and is a vital element in Australian's multiplatform media environment. A positive transition to digitisation is well underway, with 30.4% of all radio listening (where DAB+ is available) happening via digital radio.<sup>9</sup>

Community digital radio is facilitated by the CBAA via the Digital Radio Project (DRP). The DRP is managed by the CBAA to establish, operate and support infrastructure and service delivery at a national level to enable eligible licensed community broadcasters to provide digital radio services. The primary purpose of the Digital Radio Project is to provide assistance to community digital radio broadcasting licensees to supply digital radio services within the framework and requirements of the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 and the Radiocommunications Act 1992.

The CBAA provides ongoing technical and operational support, platform infrastructure, connectivity, data management, and coordination, including the payment of transmission access fees on behalf of community radio licensees.

During 2018/19, 42 full-time free-to-air digital radio services were provided by 37 eligible community broadcasting licensees across Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth. A further 13 full-

<sup>9</sup> Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2019), National Listener Survey, Wave 1 Data report, July 2019. Listening using DAB+ digital radio, community stations, 30.5%, average time spent listening of 13.8 hours per week.

time digital radio services are under implementation in coordination with the eligible licensees across Canberra, Hobart and Darwin. This will increase the number of full-time community digital radio services to 55. Services are on-air under test, pending formal launch. A further set of locations are under planning consideration, including Mandurah in Western Australia and the Gold Coast, Queensland, as identified by commercial broadcasters.

The presence of community broadcasting services on free-to-air digital radio meets long-standing Government public policy objectives to support community broadcasting, local content and media diversity. The inclusion of community services on an affordable basis, and as part of a primary mix of freely available broadcast services to the community, is a critical part of the process of radio digitisation. Digital radio broadcast is a key mechanism in that process, as well as developments for integrated and hybrid approaches, including voice activation, online fixed/mobile and small-scale digital solutions relevant to the community sector.

The May 2017 Federal budget announced the funding level for community digital radio would be lifted from \$2.3m per annum by an additional \$1.9m per annum in 2017-18 and \$2.0m in 2018-19.<sup>10</sup> Later in 2017, as part of the Government's media reform package, the additional targeted funding to support community digital radio of \$2.0m per annum was extended for a further two years through to 2020-21.<sup>11</sup>

This improved annual funding level reinstated funding to support metropolitan services in the five capital cities, and provided additional funding to support the extension of community digital radio to regional areas. It is an essential minimum funding level to maintain community digital radio services in major metropolitan areas and planned expansion to regional areas.

The 2020-21 Budget marks the final year of targeted Government funding for the Digital Radio Project.

At **Appendix A** we have attached the Digital Radio Project's 2018-19 Annual Report which further details the importance of digital radio, digital radio listenership in Australia and highlights the project's success to date and future plans.

Affordable access to the digital free-to-air broadcast platform for community broadcasters has long-standing cross-party policy support. This is important because experience has shown that where digital radio is rolled out, community radio listeners will follow and if we are not there, listeners will not be able to find their favourite stations.

## Enhanced news programming

Regional and local media is in crisis. The ACCC's recent inquiry into Digital Platforms highlighted the reduction in local news reporting due to the closure of local newspapers and newsrooms, and because of the financial pressures faced by commercial news outlets. In short, newsrooms are closing, products are being dropped and vital services aggregated to cut costs. However, in this time of greater concentration of media power and control, community radio is emerging as a safeguard for local content, news and alternative voices.

The community broadcasting sector has a long history of delivering local news and public interest journalism to regional and remote communities across Australia. At this critical juncture, the CBAA is collaborating with community radio stations and other media organisations around the country to increase coverage of local and state-wide issues and boost reporting from underserved regions.

By facilitating the collaboration of the community radio sector's newsroom and journalists, the CBAA is ensuring more local news reaches more people. This in turn is boosting community

<sup>10</sup> See Minister's media release: <https://www.minister.communications.gov.au/minister/mitch-fifield/news/new-funding-community-radio-broadcasters>

<sup>11</sup> See Minister's media release: <https://www.minister.communications.gov.au/minister/mitch-fifield/news/one-nation-support-media-reform-package>

engagement throughout Australia and creating new opportunities for the next generation of journalistic talent.

The CBAA, with the support of Commonwealth funding through the CBF, is making significant investments in journalism. This is revolutionising the way community radio stations and other media partners engage their audiences. Collaboration is key. Stations across the country are sharing resources and producing more of the journalism that their communities need.

The CBAA is enhancing local news and reporting in four key ways:

1. Building a **Collaborative News Network** that capitalises on the sector's existing newsrooms. The Collaborative News Network enables stations to share content and collaborate on stories. The network places a spotlight on local stories and enables resource sharing between stations to cover larger national stories. The network ensures a greater availability of news sources, wider coverage of stories and maximises local voices and expertise.
2. Embedding **community journalists** in community radio stations or Regional Journalism Hubs across the country, particularly in Australia's news deserts where communities are journalistically underserved. Community journalists will live and work in the communities they report on, and encourage more reporting from local areas that are losing local media. The CBAA is focusing on finding community journalists from a range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, designed to reflect the rich diversity of the communities they'll serve. In partnership with training organisations and universities, the CBAA will equip participants with the skills they need to report on local news and current affairs via radio and online.
3. A new and improved **National Radio News** service in partnership with Charles Sturt University, combining national and international journalism with true community content. Based in Bathurst and employing six journalists, the service is capitalising on the Collaborative News Network to ensure a greater availability of news sources, wider coverage of stories and maximisation of local voices and expertise.
4. **Innovative new business models** to support sustainable community radio stations. The CBAA is helping stations revitalise their local news and information ecosystems.

There have been some major achievements from our news projects including:

- Being selected as one of 23 winners in the Google News Initiative Asia Pacific Innovation. The CBAA's winning project uses digital philanthropy and digital content (including online and social media) in community radio news to help stations increase sponsorship revenue and innovate their business models.
- Expanding the 20-year National Radio News service partnership with Charles Sturt University. As well as producing 84 bulletins per week for community radio stations, the partnership provides the students of Charles Sturt University with a training platform and the use of rare news infrastructure so important to the development of the next generation of broadcast journalists. Alumni include new ABC Q&A host, Hamish McDonald. Our expanded partnership has improved editorial policy guidelines, ensuring self-representation and regional stories with a national focus are central to the journalistic process.
- Appointing a National Radio News Director to work in the national newsroom. The Director has extensive broadcast media experience and is already making significant improvements to the service by providing enhanced story oversight and guidance to the team's junior journalists.

- Commencing a new collaboration between National Radio News and Curtin Radio to produce an hourly Western Australian news bulletin as a result of Southern Cross Austereo withdrawing from the local market.
- Appointing a Federal Press Gallery journalist to work with the Collaborative News Network.
- Supporting Indigenous community radio station Ngaarda Media to obtain funding from the Judith Neilson Institute for community journalist salaries, which will enable a greater volume of news bulletins to be produced at Ngaarda Media in Roebourne, WA and for them to join the Collaborative News Network.

As well as continuing and expanding projects underway, CBAA is exploring a number of future enhancements, including:

### **1. Appointing a National Producer**

- A National Producer would lead volunteers and staff within the Collaborative News Network. They would identify local issues repeating on a national scale, coordinate and facilitate collaboration and create a more coherent flow of regional stories with a national focus. A National Producer would ensure a greater variety of news sources are used in nationally relevant stories and maximise the use of local voices and expertise.

### **2. Establishing Regional Journalism Hubs**

- With over 460 community radio stations across the country, more than 26,000 dedicated volunteers and over 70% of stations located in regional and rural areas, the community broadcasting sector is ideally situated to fill the gap created by closing commercial newsrooms and address the reducing coverage of local news and issues in regional areas.
- Regional Journalism Hubs could be established to link up to six geographically close community radio stations. Regional Journalism Hub stations will work together and share resources on a local scale. A professional journalist, based in a lead station in each Hub, will produce local news content to be shared and used by all stations and other local media organisations, such as local newspapers.
- Editorially sound content could then be shared locally and nationally via the CBAA's Collaborative News Network.
- The hub journalist could also deliver journalism training to stations across the regional hub.
- This model will ensure one journalist's expertise has the greatest impact across a region, whilst ensuring enthusiastic local volunteers have the editorial oversight to provide high quality journalism.

The success of our projects to date has been supported by the targeted funding announced in August 2017 of \$0.8 million per annum over four years. The 2020/21 Budget marks the final year of targeted Government funding for enhanced news programming.

In its response to the ACCC's Digital Platforms Inquiry the Government stated that:

“The Government recognises that public interest journalism is important to Australia's democracy, and local and regional journalism is essential in informing and strengthening

local communities. A sustainable and adaptable media sector is necessary to support the provision of such journalism.”<sup>12</sup>

Through enhanced and ongoing funding for community radio news programming from 2020/21 the Government can deliver on its stated support and enable the CBAA to continue to foster an expanded news culture across the community broadcasting sector. The continuation of these critical sector projects will see a new wave of participants interested in news and current affairs at local stations. It will also build capacity for localism in journalistic reporting, particularly in regional, Indigenous and underserved communities.

## Improved online presence

Every community radio station in Australia needs to be available in the places that listeners expect – live, on-demand, and as podcasts. The CBAA wants communities to experience a seamless, personalised digital experience that enables them to readily engage with community broadcasting. The CBAA is supporting the sector’s transition to multiplatform delivery in order to meet listener and community expectations.

Following extensive consultation across the community broadcasting sector, the CBAA’s future initiatives to improve the sector’s online presence include a Multiplatform Distribution Project. Through this project, we hope to:

- Futureproof stations to remain competitive in a disruptive media landscape;
- Increase listener access to community radio;
- Increase time spent listening to community radio;
- Increase community radio’s monthly listener cumulative audience;
- Increase interest and volunteerism in community radio;
- Reach younger audiences by providing access via new and emerging technology;
- Highlight and champion community broadcasting to Australians;
- Increase the discovery of local Australian music and diverse independent content to the Australia population; and
- Increase donation and sponsorship revenues across community radio.

The CBAA will do this through:

- The provision of encoding, streaming and on-demand solutions, with a central metadata solution and API. This will be used as a foundation for the development of an aggregation app, an Amazon Alexa Skill and integrations into smart speaker platforms such as Google Home, Sonos and Bose.
- An API that will feed community radio station websites, station apps, and platforms such as iHeartRadio and TuneIn. In future, the API will be used to support new developments within the connected audio ecosystem.
- Apple CarPlay and Android Auto integrations, supported by the aggregation app, ensuring a connected in-car presence for community radio stations.
- Building industry-standard analytics into the streaming solutions, aggregation app and smart speaker integrations, ensuring that listening can be measured and tracked.

Our solutions will streamline day-to-day station operations and workflows, build online audiences, and maximise station revenue.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Government, *Regulating in the digital age Government Response and Implementation Roadmap for the Digital Platforms Inquiry*, p9



To make this project a success, we will draw on the economies of scale that come from leveraging our member base (90% of the community radio sector's permanently licensed stations), utilise the expertise of our world-leading commercial partners, and tap into our understanding of the needs of the diverse community radio sector.

These projects are supported by targeted funding announced in August 2017 of \$0.6 million per annum over four years. The 2020/21 Budget marks the final year of targeted Government funding for improved online presence.

## National Training Program enhancing leadership skills

The Community Media Training Organisation (CMTO) is responsible for the delivery of the National Training Program, and enhanced targeted funding has enabled them to deliver a new program of activity that focuses on the development of business, leadership, management and social enterprise skills for participants in the community broadcasting sector.

In 2018/19 the CMTO delivered training to 1499 community media volunteers and/or workers across 321 community media stations and organisations. 70% of stations that received training were in rural, regional and remote locations.

CMTO's Pathways and Accredited training program designed for delivery in 2019/2020 has a strong emphasis on leadership training for the sector. This allocation includes a total of 1,840 training places, with 180 training places in accredited courses, 560 training places in leadership and enterprise courses, 380 in technical training, 410 in broadcast training and 310 in RPH Radio Reading specialised training.

A number of larger scale leadership and enterprise projects are also underway and in development, including:

- Leadership and Enterprise Training project – 560 training places at 55 stations allocated in June 2019 for courses in business, leadership and management skills.
- The Think Big Mentorship – a three-year online learning and mentorship program for targeted station managers/coordinators to develop their stations as successful social enterprises, commencing early 2020.
- Delivery of the nationally recognised qualification, CUASS00043 – Community Broadcasting Marketing Skill Set in 2021.
- 'Secrets of Successful Community Broadcasting Boards' delivered in partnership with Our Community – a one-day workshop covering the unique opportunities and challenges for community broadcasting organisations.
- 'Community Broadcasting Fundraising Campaigns' delivered in partnership with the CBAA and Start Some Good – a one-day workshop covering digital fundraising campaigns for community broadcasting organisations.
- 'Community Media as Social Enterprise' delivered in partnership with Centre for Social Impact, Swinburne – a workshop about developing community broadcasting organisations as social enterprises.
- The development of leadership projects for youth, women, gender non-binary, culturally and linguistically diverse and First Nations volunteers and workers in community media. Recent workshops have been conducted at the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council Youth Conference in Brisbane, the First Nations Media Conference in Alice Springs

and the SYN Media Bootcamp in Melbourne for over 70 youth leaders and station managers from across Australia.

- Professional development forums for trainers and mentors in the sector, to increase the number of trainers with business, leadership and management skills in community media. Recent forums have been conducted at the Brisbane Indigenous Media Association for trainers in the south-east Queensland region, RTR FM and Harvey Community Radio for trainers in Perth and South West WA and at the South Australian Community Broadcasting Conference for trainers across SA.
- Nationwide leadership summits planned for years two and three of the project.

The National Training Program has been supported by additional targeted funding announced in August 2017 of \$0.6 million per annum over four years. The 2020/21 Budget marks the final year of targeted Government funding to enhance management and small business skills in the community broadcasting sector.

## Ensuring funding certainty for critical community radio projects beyond 2020/21

The 2020/21 Budget marks the final year of targeted funding supporting sector projects and initiatives across digital radio, news programming, online streaming and skills development. Given the demonstrable importance of community broadcasting and its pivotal role in supporting media diversity in the public interest (independent from commercial or political influence), it is crucial that current and future Governments ensure that sector funding has ongoing certainty, supporting and investing in Australia's community broadcasting services. The current arrangement of having the sector rely on yearly budget decisions for significant funding is unsustainable in the long-term.

With the demonstrable success of these sector-wide projects and initiatives, the CBAA seeks the Commonwealth Government's commitment to maintain its targeted funding across all streams announced in 2017 at an appropriate and ongoing level per annum beyond 2020/21.

We note that in its Report released on 5 February 2018, the Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism recommended that "the Commonwealth provide additional surety in future funding for the community broadcasting sector beyond the forward estimates, in particular what component will be set aside for training and education, and ensure that the sector is fully consulted in the national rollout of digital services." (Recommendation 2.)

In its response, the Government noted this recommendation and stated its support and recognition of the valuable service community broadcasting brings to groups in the community that are not specifically served by commercial, subscription or national broadcasters, and its contribution to the diversity of the media landscape.

A new funding commitment from the Commonwealth Government will strengthen its efforts to support media diversity and access to a heightened level of relevant and local media services for all Australians, particularly those in rural and regional areas.

The CBAA is committed to working with the Commonwealth Government through the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications in 2020 to ensure the successful continuation of our targeted projects and to further optimise the overall funding arrangements for the community broadcasting sector through the Community Broadcasting Program.

## Sustainable long-term funding for the community broadcasting sector

Community radio stations are able to achieve their significantly low-cost/high output radio production, with strict regulations limiting their commercial fundraising capacity<sup>13</sup>, through self-funding via sponsorship, fundraising and membership contributions and the efforts and commitment of community volunteers and employed staff.

Commonwealth funding as a proportion of station income varies greatly by individual stations, depending on a range of factors. There is great diversity in community radio licensees, and some sections of the community broadcasting sector are more heavily reliant on government income than others. This reflects the greater difficulty these stations face raising commercial income due to their targeted community interests or remote locations.

The small budgets that stations operate within, and the difficulty of quickly mobilising ‘community capital’ to face funding shortfalls in the same way as financial capital, makes stations vulnerable to shifts in their existing income sources, especially where these are unforeseeable and outside of their control. Recent feedback to the CBAA from community stations in drought-affected areas note that sponsorship is increasingly hard to secure because local sponsors are more often than not, businesses directly related to farming and agriculture industries. As a demonstration of this, revenue from sponsorship has slipped from 40% of total revenue in 2016/17, and 44% in 2015/16, to 33% in 2017/18.<sup>14</sup> Income from fundraising/gifts has also slipped from 22% in 2016/17 to 16% in 2017/18.

On top of fundraising challenges, community radio stations are facing many of the same challenges as the commercial radio sector, as seen in the decrease in sponsorship revenue. As noted in the ACCC’s Digital Platforms Inquiry final report, the digital environment has disrupted media organisations’ traditional operating models.<sup>15</sup> Alongside increased operational costs, this has resulted in a noted increase in applications to the CBF for general development and operations funding. Despite the rising costs facing community broadcasting stations and the demands this has placed on the CBF, the CBF’s Development and Operations Grants via the General Sustainability and Development (GSD) fund has not received an increase in Government funding since 2011.<sup>16</sup> Due to its need to manage limited funds, the CBF has been unable to meet the increased demand for general development and operational funding.

As recommended in the ACCC’s Digital Platforms inquiry report, we agree that Australia’s public broadcasters should be securely and adequately funded to provide for local reporting across Australia. Stable and adequate funding must also be provided to the community broadcasting sector in order for community radio stations to be able to continue contributing to media diversity across Australia and serve the needs of regional and remote communities.

In its response to the Digital Platforms inquiry, the Government clearly states its recognition that “public interest journalism is important to Australia’s democracy, and local and regional journalism is essential in informing and strengthening local communities” and that a “sustainable and adaptable media sector is necessary to support the provision of such journalism.”

We encourage the Government to recognise the important role of community radio and include our sector when designing and implementing measures to safeguard and enhance Australia’s media landscape – for example in the improvement of the Regional and Small Publishers Jobs and Innovation Package.

<sup>13</sup> The Broadcasting Services Act (1992) places limits on the amount of advertising, in the form of sponsorship, that community broadcasters are permitted to put to air.

<sup>14</sup> Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2019), Community Broadcasting Sector Financial Health of Community Radio Report for the 2017-18 Financial Year, p.14. Available on request.

<sup>15</sup> Digital platforms inquiry – final report, available here: [www.accc.gov.au/system/files/Digital%20platforms%20inquiry%20-%20final%20report.pdf](http://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/Digital%20platforms%20inquiry%20-%20final%20report.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> In 2011 the CBF was awarded \$3 million to the Content Development Fund, which has since been streamlined as a result of the CBF Structure & Governance Review, including approximately \$1,564,000 amalgamated into the General Sustainability and Development fund.

The CBAA is committed to working with the Government to create a more certain funding environment for our sector and would welcome further partnership with Government to ensure the sector's contributions as a public good for all Australians can continue.

Kind regards,



Jon Bisset  
Chief Executive Officer