



20 February 2023

Committee Secretary
Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission

Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience

CBAA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience's (the Committee) as it relates to the Terms of Reference (a)(iv):

- (a) Current preparedness, response and recovery workforce models, including:
 - iv. the role of Australian civil and volunteer groups, not-for-profit organisations and state-based services in preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters, and the impact of more frequent and more intense natural disasters on their ongoing capacity and capability

About the CBAA

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) is the peak body and national representative organisation for over 450 community media organisations. 90% of all radio licence holders are CBAA members. The CBAA exists to support strong and successful community broadcasters. We champion an independent and free media and provide a portfolio of programs aiming to strengthen the capacity and sustainability of community broadcasting organisations across Australia.

Community media plays an important role in connecting Australian communities that are underserved by commercial and public broadcasters – including First Nations Australians, communities in regional and remote Australia, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, faith-based communities, youth and seniors' communities, the LGBTQIA+ community and people with a disability. It promotes the diverse identities of Australians that enrich and strengthen the social and cultural fabric of Australian society.

Introduction

Community media is a key stakeholder in public safety for disaster resilience prevention, management and recovery. Community media organisations play a critical role to support and connect communities in the face of disaster. In many regions, community radio is the only local media source for information and news. Whether facing extreme bushfire, flood, cyclones or health crises, community media serve local communities in crisis.

Community broadcasting supports community resilience in times of emergency

Community media is a vital source of information regional, rural and remote places, where often community broadcasts are the only locally relevant media available.

51% of listeners state their main reason for listening is for local news and information.

1.7 million people in non-metro Australia listen to community broadcasters each week.

In disaster affected areas when power, internet and mobile reception go down, community radio stations play a critical role to distribute emergency response information. Disaster threats, road closures and available community evacuation and relief services are broadcast. Dedicated airtime for updates from local emergency services are prioritised.

In emergencies, community media organisations work tirelessly to support and connect communities. Organisations are deeply connected to their local areas, with staff and volunteers hired from their immediate community. Local networks and knowledge make community broadcasting stations essential in preparing for, responding to and recovering from disasters.

9 in 10 listeners agree community radio is a valuable resource during times of need and important source of local news.

Community broadcasting connects and informs First Nations communities in times of crisis. Just over 30% of community broadcasters are First Nations stations.¹ The First Nations sector reaches a significant audience share with 80% of people in remote indigenous communities being regular listeners to radio services.² Hyperlocal information reaches people in-language and in real time.

Community radio reaches culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD). One third of people who regularly speak a language other than English in their household listen to community radio each week.³ With people stuck at home or isolated, community broadcasters reach listeners in-language and in real time.

Government recognises community media as key for disaster resilience

The Australian government recognises community media as an important asset in disaster resilience. Access to current and reliable local emergency information is critical for the safety of Australians living in emergency. Government acknowledges there is greater need for and reliance on reliable emergency information that reaches affected communities.⁴

Government inquiries into recent natural disasters recognise the importance of community broadcasters in emergencies:

- The Report from the NSW Floods Inquiry 2022
- The Select Committee report on the Response to Major Flooding Across New South Wales in 2022
- The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements 2020

Broadcasting's viability and accessibility in emergency contexts remains an important policy outcome into the coming years as the frequency of natural disasters increase.

¹ Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2022), Community Radio Listener Survey [online] Available at: <https://www.cbaa.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census/national-listener-survey-fact-sheets>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Australian Government (2022) Prominence Framework for Connected TV Devices – Proposals Paper [available at] (online) <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/prominence-framework-connected-tv-devices-proposals-paper.pdf> pp 16.

“Empowering community broadcasters to perform a more active role across the emergency management spectrum would give community an additional trusted source of information from which to prepare and respond during a flood and other natural disasters. It might also form part of the information and intelligence collected by the SES.”

The NSW Floods Enquiry 2022

Community broadcasters are relied on during disaster

Community broadcasting stations are a hub for community action during disasters. Broadcasters collaborate and partner with emergency and health authorities looking to reach diverse populations with lifesaving communications in real time. They broadcast real-time local news, connect critical services, support fundraising events, host relief efforts and coordinate volunteers. A few examples of stations’ role in disaster resilience are captured below.

2019-20 Bushfires

During the 2019-20 Black Summer Bushfires, the ABC could not always get radio announcers into disaster hotspots such as Mallacoota, Victoria. To broadcast updates, the ABC worked with community radio announcers in Mallacoota who continued emergency broadcasting knowing their properties were at risk.

The rural town of Braidwood in NSW was fire threatened in the 2019-20 bushfires. Braidwood FM, the local community radio station for the area provided 14 days of near continuous emergency coverage. The station broadcast hourly updates from the Rural Fire Service (RFS) as listeners called in to share warnings, becoming eyes on the ground for the Rural Fire Service. The station was the only source of information as portable battery-powered radios sold out in town. The Government recognised the value of community radio when Braidwood FM was praised for their service as a lifeline in crisis by Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland MP.

Covid-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters Council (NEMBC) started a multilingual radio and emergency news service to ensure reliable daily information was available in languages other than English to assist migrant and emerging communities to be safe and informed.

Cyclones

Ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie resulted in Western Australia’s worst-ever flooding event in December 2022. Fitzroy Crossing’s First Nations community was cut off by record reaching flood levels and infrastructure was damaged. Wangki Yupurnanupurru Radio station staff and volunteers provided important information digitally through community radio infrastructure to the Fitzroy Crossing First Nations community when radio transmission went down due to lightning strike. The station became the hub of community information and provided vital information digitally in English and Kriol language. It featured Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) flood updates, and shared information on bridge repairs, postal services and access to schooling.

Recommendations to improve community media’s capacity to support local communities in future disasters

Supporting community media’s role in disaster resilience remains imperative for Australian communities. The CBAA recommends a national approach towards the certification of community radio stations as official emergency broadcasters to broadcast critical information, supported by resources and hyperlocal knowledge.

Recommendations:

- partner for opportunities in training, capacity building and the provision of infrastructure for the sector

- ensure regionally at-risk stations can maintain capability as successful service providers prior, during and after a crisis
- Strengthen communication and collaboration between broadcasters and government bodies to enhance the impact of community broadcasting,

The CBAA works closely with the Local and Independent News Association (LINA) to build collaboration across hyperlocal newsrooms both online and on-air. We support LINA's submission and recommendations to the Committee.

Should you wish to discuss our submission further, please do not hesitate to contact Reece Kinnane, CBAA's Head of Advocacy and Communications at reece.kinnane@cbaa.org.au or via 02 9310 2999.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jon Bisset' with a stylized flourish below the name.

Jon Bisset
Chief Executive Officer