



COMMUNITY
BROADCASTING
ASSOCIATION OF
AUSTRALIA

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Structural Reform Division
The Treasury
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SUBMISSION TO TREASURY REGARDING THE FINAL REPORT OF THE AUSTRALIAN COMPETITION AND CONSUMER COMMISSION'S (ACCC) DIGITAL PLATFORMS INQUIRY

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Government's consultation on the final report of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC) Digital Platforms Inquiry.

As the peak body and national representative organisation for community broadcasting across Australia, we value the opportunity to add our thoughts on the inquiry's recommendations and the potential impacts for community broadcasters. Our comments focus on the recommendations covering:

- A harmonised media regulatory framework (Recommendation 6)
- Funding for specialised and local news reporting (Recommendations 9 and 10)
- Philanthropic support for media organisations (Recommendation 11)

The CBAA recommends that:

- The harmonisation of the media regulatory framework continues to enshrine broadcast policy objectives of diversity in terms of ownership and control; service mix; and availability of services on commonly available equipment.
- Stable and adequate funding is provided to the community broadcasting sector in order for community stations to be able to continue contributing to media diversity across Australia and serve the needs of regional and remote communities.
- Eligibility criteria for targeted funding to support particular categories of journalism at risk must allow community broadcasters to apply.

About community broadcasting and the CBAA

Community broadcasting is Australia's largest independent media sector. It makes an important contribution to the diversity, inclusiveness and social cohesion that characterises Australia's open society. It reinforces Australia's cultural vibrancy by:

- Providing a voice to communities not adequately served by other broadcasters. 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+, specialist music and arts communities.
- Giving a platform to a diverse range of viewpoints that enrich our social and cultural fabric and promote media diversity.
- Providing opportunities for social inclusion, local community participation and media access in the public interest.
- Supporting local content production and delivering content tailored to the needs and interest of local communities.

Community radio draws its listeners from a wide cross-section of the Australian community and has more listeners now than ever. The CBAA recently published its State of the Community Radio Sector Report 2019 which shows that **5.9 million listeners tune in to the over 450 community radio stations across the country each week** – 30% of people aged 15 years and older.¹ Further, community broadcasting is the largest component of Indigenous media production in Australia and half (48%) of people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander listen to community radio during a typical week.

The community radio sector is powered by the efforts and dedication of over 26,000 volunteers.² Over half of stations are entirely volunteer run and 17% of volunteers are under 26 years of age. This 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.

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 platform 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.

Comments on Final Report's Recommendations

Overall the CBAA supports the recommendations in the ACCC's Report. Below are some comments that if adopted, will help ensure community broadcasters can play an active role in achieving the Report's aims.

Recommendation 6: Harmonising the media framework

Key legislative and regulatory broadcast policy objectives aim to promote diversity in terms of ownership and control; as well as in structural terms, through provision for national, commercial and community services; along with specific objectives to ensure a mix of services is available on commonly available equipment. The CBAA supports the harmonisation of the media framework, while continuing to enshrine these principles.

Without legislative mandate and significant social transfer pressure on Telecommunications and Mobile Network Operators, there will remain prohibitive barriers to internet connectivity serving as a cost-effective and socially equitable substitute for terrestrial free-to-air radio broadcast transmission.

In the process of harmonising the media regulatory framework, the CBAA would support the Government exploring options for new spectrum that could be provided to broadcasters specifically to enable content from licensed broadcast services to be provided on a free-to-air basis using mobile technologies, targeting mobile devices without need for a SIM card.

The CBAA supports the Government exploring what legislation and/or regulation would be required to ensure Telecommunications carriers and Mobile Network Operators are required to enable users

¹ Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2019). State of the Community Broadcasting Sector, p.3 [online]. Available at: www.cbbaa.org.au/article/state-community-radio-sector-report

² Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2017), Community Broadcasting Sector Financial Health of Community Radio Survey. Available at: www.cbbaa.org.au/sites/default/files/media/CBAA%202017%20Financial%20Health%20of%20Community%20Radio%20Survey%20FINAL.pdf

to access content provided by a primary set of licensed free-to-air radio services on a non-metered basis to users of fixed and mobile broadband services.

Under current business and network architectures, the content from free-to-air radio services is available via fixed online services and mobile broadband using consumer devices that are not necessarily freely available or operating under open standards.

This may not be of great consequence while there is a parallel free-to-air broadcast platform however were online streaming to become a primary means to hear content from free-to-air radio, then there is a public interest imperative to ensure no market capture by third-parties.

The CBAA supports the Government exploring what legislation and/or regulation would be required to ensure there is full transparency and no imbalance or impediment to the 'discovery' of audio and related content provided by licensed free-to-air radio services introduced by makers of third-party devices, including voice activated devices, smart speakers, mobile smart phones, or connected car user interfaces.

Recommendations 9 and 10: Funding for specialised and local news reporting

The ACCC report highlights the reduction in local news reporting due to the closure of local newspapers and newsrooms, and because of the financial pressure faced by commercial news outlets. The community broadcasting sector has a long history of delivering local news and public interest journalism to diverse communities across Australia, and is well-placed to continue providing and enhancing this offering. In our most recent Community Radio National Listener Survey, 49% of respondents said that their top reason for listening to community radio was for 'local information and local news'.³

Such changes in the media landscape often mean that community broadcasters are now the only publishers of local public interest content in rural and regional areas. For example, in Bourke in NSW, 2WEB is now publishing *The Western Herald*, saving that iconic paper from closing. This means the station is sharing local news and journalism both on air and via the paper.

Community stations are well-known for broadcasting information regarding local government, broadcasting from local council meetings and providing regional public interest journalism. For example, Bay FM's 'community newsroom' in Byron Bay NSW is an active gatherer and presenter of local news, reporting on issues of importance to Byron Bay and Northern Rivers, including public interest journalism on a range of social, political and cultural issues.

The sector is not only well-positioned to provide public interest journalism in regional and rural communities, but also in a community-appropriate way, as stations are apt at serving diverse communities such as First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse, people with a print disability, youth and seniors. For example, Ngaarda Media is the only First Nations media outlet in the Pilbara in Western Australia, and delivers news and journalism via radio and online about local issues. The station was recently successful in securing funding from the Judith Nielson Institute to support a roving reporter to further the number of news bulletins produced.

The sector also has a long history of collaboration and is working to improve models to enhance local news offerings across the country. The CBAA's Enhanced National News Project (ENNP) will build capacity for local reporting, particularly in regional and remote areas through linking Contributing Stations. The National Radio Newsroom based in Bathurst (NSW), and serving the community radio sector for over 20 years, will continue to be a vital component of the ENNP. Stations, particularly those in regional and rural Australia, will be able to access national bulletins,

³ Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2017). State of the Community Broadcasting Sector March 2019 [online] Available at: https://www.cbba.org.au/sites/default/files/media/CBAA%20State%20of%20the%20Community%20Radio%20Sector%20Report%202019_2.pdf

present them in their local voices, while having more time, resources, and support to craft local news.

The ACCC's Report recognises that some new media players and 'digital natives' can help contribute to media diversity and provide some of the types of journalism impacted by the changing digital landscape. In this media plurality, it is vital to recognise that community media is already well-placed and well-established in regions across the country, existing because of strong community relationships and earned community trust, and with training initiatives and processes in places to provide for local news and journalism.

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 for, 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.

As recommended in the ACCC's Report, we agree that the 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.

The CBAA also strongly supports the introduction of targeted funding to support particular categories of journalism at risk. If direct grants targeted at local reporting are introduced, replacing the Regional and Small Publishers Jobs and Innovation Package, eligibility criteria must allow community broadcasters to apply.

As noted in the report, there are some issues with the Regional and Small Publishers Jobs and Innovation Package eligibility criteria, which has not allowed for not-for-profit media organisations. Similar criteria for any subsequent grant scheme would not only preclude community broadcasters, but would sit at odds with the ACCC's recommendation regarding encouraging philanthropically-funded and not-for-profit media organisations to play a more significant role.

Recommendation 11: Tax settings to encourage philanthropic support for journalism

Many community radio stations are charities. The CBAA supports recommendation 11.

The CBAA is committed to working closely with the Government, Treasury, the Attorney General's Department and the Department of Communications and the Arts to further share our ideas, experience and knowledge on implementing the ACCC's recommendations. As the peak body for the sector, and an active participant in research, policy and planning in broadcasting reform, the CBAA is well placed to provide further advice.

Kind regards,



Jon Bisset
Chief Executive Officer