

BEYOND BROADCASTING:

Community media
response to emergencies



2022

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, Traditional Custodians of the land on which this publication was prepared. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We honour the dedication and expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasters and their work to strengthen and connect communities. We recognise the vital role First Nations and community media plays in truth-telling and reconciliation.

Introduction

In the face of floods, bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, community media organisations have worked tirelessly to support and connect communities when they need it most.

They have provided their communities with up-to-date local information that is in-language and in the appropriate community context. They have acted as a catalyst for community dialogue, linked people to critical services, coordinated fundraising and relief efforts and been vital points of connection for their communities both through emergencies and in recovery.

This publication showcases just a few examples of the role community media has played in times of crisis. Every year there are also many examples of the critical role community media organisations have played in crisis prevention. They provide cyclone warnings, evacuation alerts, advice on road closures and essential information on clinic services.

For 50 years, community broadcasters have been there for their friends and neighbours when duty called. They are the unsung heroes whose commitment, innovation and bravery has connected people through disasters, helped communities to rebuild and saved lives.

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Prepared by the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia in partnership with the members of the Community Broadcasting Sector Roundtable:

Australian Community Television Alliance

Christian Media & Arts Australia

Community Broadcasting Foundation

First Nations Media Australia

National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council

RPH Australia

When COVID hit Wilcannia, Wilcannia River Radio was at the heart of the community's response.

Not only did they get health advice out to the community in a way that could be easily understood, they also supported their community through lockdowns by broadcasting local school lessons and delivering more than 200 bags of supplies like milk, bread, sugar, flour, rice, pasta and toilet paper to Elders and families in isolation.

What is community media?

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. In doing so it promotes the diverse identities of Australians that enrich and strengthen the social and cultural fabric of Australian society.



Together, our organisations represent: 450+ not-for-profit community radio licensees – delivering 500+ radio services on AM, FM, DAB+ and online (these include 230 radio First Nations broadcast sites coordinated by 35 community-owned not-for-profits; 97 radio stations reaching culturally and linguistically diverse communities in 110 languages including 6 full-time ethnic stations; and 19 dedicated AM/FM RPH radio services creating accessible radio for people with a print disability across Australia); community television stations – C31 Melbourne and C44 Adelaide; First Nations media organisations – Indigenous Community Television, Goolarri TV, Larrakia TV and national newspaper the Koori Mail.

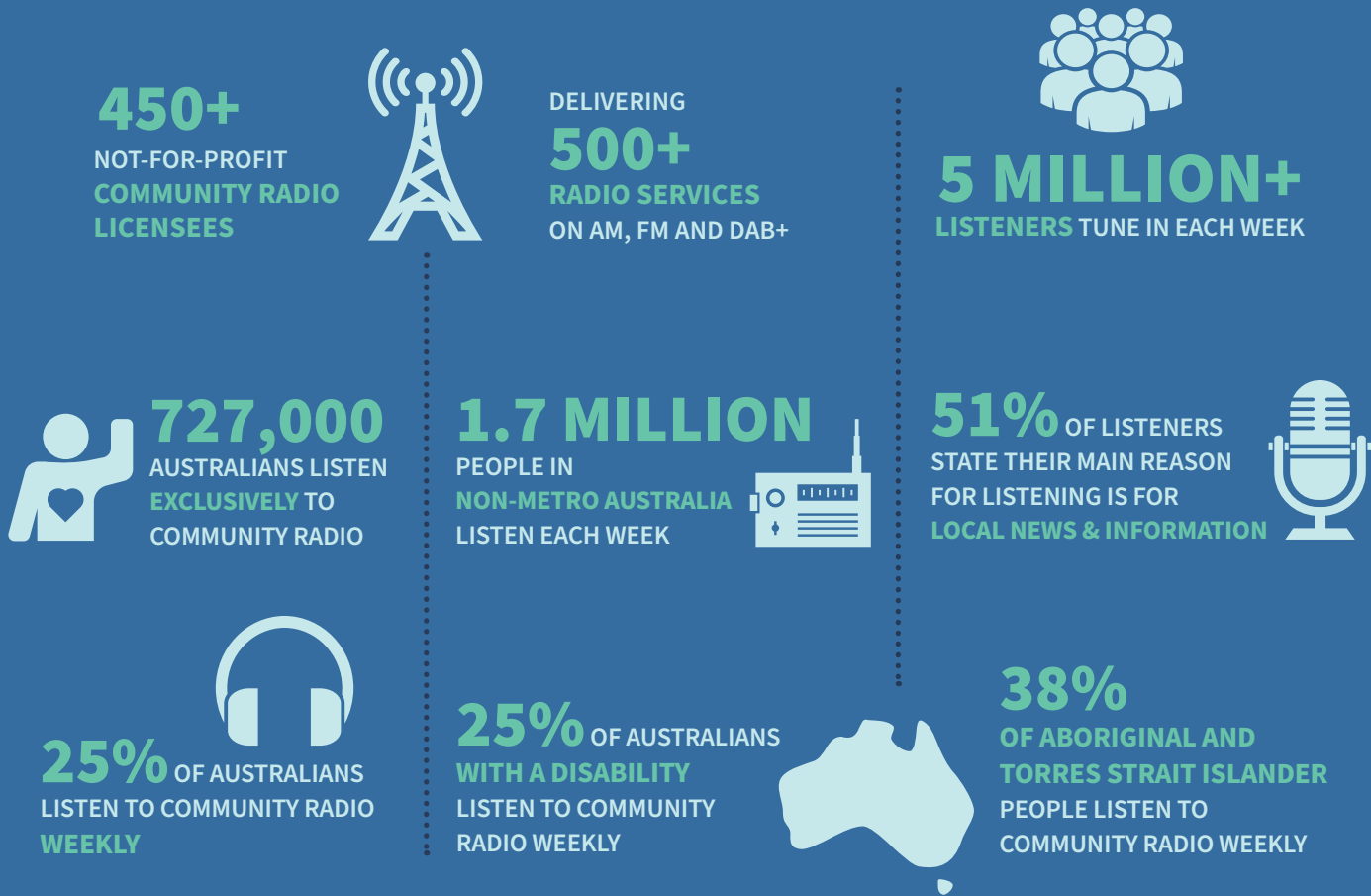
CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

Community broadcasting is powered by the efforts and dedication of local volunteers and staff who put together representative programming for diverse Australian communities.

Together they reach millions of Australians that rely on community broadcasting to stay connected.

Stations are a hub for community action. They support fundraising events, provide a focal point for relief efforts, co-ordinate volunteers, and provide a collaborative partner for emergency and health authorities looking to reach diverse audiences with life-saving messages.

Who is listening?



Source: McNair Community Radio Listeners Survey July 2022



A gathering of the NEMBC Multilingual News Service

Radio by community for community

The sector is powered by **22,000** volunteers & over **900** employees.

99% of staff & volunteers find value in working in community radio.

2/3 agree participating deepens their connection to community.



9 in 10 agree community radio

- ensures Australians hear from diverse voices & opinions
- supports Australian music & artists
- is a valuable resource during times of need (natural disasters, economic hardship etc.)
- is an important source of local news & information

Source: Community Radio Participation Census, March 2022

2019/20 BLACK SUMMER BUSHFIRES

Braidwood FM (NSW)

braidwoodradio.com.au

Braidwood is a small town of about 1,600, 60km from Canberra. When a rapidly changing fire threatened the town in November 2019, local community radio station Braidwood FM provided 14 days of near continuous emergency coverage. The studio was full of printouts of maps and station volunteers used their knowledge of the local area to keep the community up-to-date on the fire's movements. They broadcast hourly updates from the Rural Fire Service (RFS). Listeners called in to share warnings, becoming active eyes for the RFS. For some, the station was the only source of information and portable battery-powered radios sold out in town.

“When the 2020 bushfires blazed through the regions, community radio was a constant. Through the early hours of the morning and into the night, Braidwood FM was a conduit for crucial, urgent, local information. It broadcast the movements of the fire and helped the community stay safe during this devastating time. It’s more than a community broadcaster – during the bushfires, Braidwood FM was a lifeline.”

- Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland

“There were people that had the radio on 24 hours a day every day just to hear what was happening. There was no on the ground local coverage from the ABC here. It’s not like people here could turn on the ABC and know what was happening at Jinglemoney Lane.”

-Gordon Waters, Braidwood FM
Source: From The Embers, 2020



Highland FM (Bowral, NSW)

www.highlandfm.org.au

Over 7,000 people turned out to support those who had lost their homes, livelihoods and loved ones at the 2020 FireAid Concert supported by Highland FM.

Throughout the fires, the entirely volunteer-run station collated and broadcast up-to-date information about the emergency every half hour until 3 am.

After the fires, even though the team were exhausted, they doubled down to record interviews with artists and promote FireAid2020 – 7,000 people turned out which raised \$340,000 for families in the Highlands who had lost their homes.



2019/20 BLACK SUMMER BUSHFIRES



3MGB Wilderness Radio (Mallacoota & Genoa, VIC)

www.3mgb.org.au

“There are currently two bushfires that are not yet under control. Ash and embers are falling ahead of the main fires which may cause spot fires. There is a potential that this fire will be at the western boundary of Mallacoota by daylight today. It’s too late to leave. The safest option is to shelter indoors.

The Genoa-Mallacoota Road is closed. You are in danger and need to act immediately to survive. It is too late to leave.”

Source: From The Embers, 2020

This is the emergency warning Francesca Winterson broadcast on local community radio station 3MGB as the coastal town of Mallacoota was hemmed in by a bushfire big enough to generate its own lightning. Volunteers had broadcast for 48 hours straight, sleeping on the floor of the studio. When the fire hit the town’s outskirts and the station lost power, they were left sitting in the dark listening to the roar of the fires blazing past.

In the aftermath, 3MGB has worked hard to bring the community together as they struggle to deal with what’s happened. They started a regular program with their local SES Controller, to keep the community informed about recovery works. They have also broadcast sessions with trauma psychologists and locals can send in their questions.

Vision Australia Radio (Perth, Adelaide, Darwin, Melbourne and regional VIC)

www.visionaustralia.org

A survey conducted by Vision Australia following the 2019/20 bushfire period found that **34% of respondents were unable to access the critical information they needed during the crisis.**



RPH community radio services, like Vision Australia Radio, are dedicated to informing and empowering the estimated 5 million Australians with a print disability who are unable to read standard print with ease due

to vision impairment, a physical disability or a learning disability. They connect people to services by sharing accessible information and emergency hotlines.

They teamed up with the Country Fire Authority to create a three-part podcast series about bushfire safety and home fire safety. They broadcast explanations of how those affected by fires could apply for a recovery grant. They featured blind and low vision people talking about their experiences in the bushfires. They turned print articles, opinions and research on preparing for and recovering from bushfires into accessible audio.

More work needs to be done to prioritise inclusion and accessibility in times of disaster. Vision Australia Radio works to address these gaps.



COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The NEMBC Multilingual News Service

www.nembc.org.au

In response to the pandemic, the 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 new emerging communities to be informed and safe during a time of crisis.

Strategies were developed to create online radio, graphic tiles, audiograms and distribute podcasts on social media and digital platforms. Online news is distributed by government, health departments, multicultural organisations and NEMBC networks.

The MNS (Multicultural News Services) employs over 55 ethnic broadcasters, producers, and news writers, and reaches culturally and linguistically diverse listeners across Australia on radio and through targeted emails and social media.

Daily radio news and over 30 detailed COVID Explainers were produced in over 25 languages in Victoria and 18 in NSW. The daily news is broadcast 75 times a week at 12 radio stations in Victoria and 31 times a week at 9 stations in NSW.



Radio 4EB (Brisbane, QLD)

www.4eb.org.au

Brisbane's multicultural radio service 4EB has been central to the cultural, social and media landscape in Australia for over 40 years – providing vital information to and welcoming people from 50+ language groups. Through the COVID pandemic, 4EB became an even more critical service for their listeners. Living rooms became radio studios as broadcasters adapted their skills to continue programming remotely and maintain the deep sense of community and cultural connection they share with their listeners. They broadcast daily COVID-19 updates and in-language community service announcements in every program. They worked with the Queensland Government to create COVID community service announcements in 52 languages.



“The more people are stuck at home and isolated the more we need to keep reaching out and having those conversations with our audiences”

- Jo Pratt, Radio 4EB

Channel 44 (Adelaide, SA)

c44.com.au

Culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Adelaide worked with Channel 44 and SA Health to put together UpToDate SA – providing COVID-19 vaccine information in languages not represented in mainstream media. The community project brought together community leaders and health experts to explain facts and misconceptions about the vaccines available, address religious and cultural concerns and encourage their communities to get vaccinated.



The more people who receive knowledge about the vaccine the better it is.

622,000 people tune into community radio to hear programs in **languages other than English.**



One third of people who regularly **speak a language other than English** in their household listen to community radio each week.

Source: McNair Community Radio Listeners Survey July 2022

COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Wilcannia River Radio (Wilcannia, NSW)

redie.org.au/what-we-do/programs/wilcannia-river-radio

When crises have struck Wilcannia in Western NSW, the local community radio station has undertaken exceptional work for its community. After the Baaka (Darling River) ran dry, they distributed clean water to their community of about 750 people. To continue providing access to affordable, fresh food they took over management of the local supermarket.

When COVID hit Wilcannia, Wilcannia River Radio was at the heart of the community’s response. They got health advice out to the community in a way that could be easily understood, created awareness videos to help the community stay safe and strong, they did 138 interviews in 2 months sharing Wilcannia’s COVID response worldwide, they supported their community through lockdowns by broadcasting local school lessons and delivering more than 200 bags of supplies like milk, bread, sugar, flour, rice, pasta and toilet paper to Elders and families in isolation.



Umeewarra Radio (Port Augusta, SA)

www.umeewarramedia.com

Umeewarra Aboriginal Media 89.1FM has worked tirelessly to improve vaccination rates in their community. They hosted initiatives like the mobile Pika Wiya COVID ‘jab cab’ at the station and ran vaccinated-only sporting events like Nunga X.

On 19 November 2021, Umeewarra hosted an Aboriginal COVID Community Day that led to the biggest increase in first and second vaccinations ever seen in Port Augusta. Umeewarra collaborated with Pika Wiya Aboriginal Health Services and Kokatha Aboriginal Corporation to plan, promote and secure philanthropic support for the event, which offered \$50 vouchers to encourage people to get vaccinated. Over 360 people attended, which was 6x the number expected.

“Getting our people vaccinated is the best thing we can do to stop a devastating outbreak of COVID in Port Augusta and the region. Umeewarra has been at the forefront of getting the message out to our community.”

- Vince Coulthard,
Umeewarra Aboriginal Media Association
Source: *The Transcontinental* Port Augusta
November 30 2021

Ngaarda Media (Roebourne, WA)

www.ngaardamedia.com.au

Ngaarda Media in the Pilbara is the collective voice of more than 30 language groups of Traditional Owners. Ngaarda produces a daily five-minute bulletin focused on First Nations breaking news, sharing stories across WA and nationally.

As the pandemic unfolded, Ngaarda delivered accessible COVID messaging, busted false information through interviews with experts and community

leaders and produced videos across different languages encouraging people to get vaccinated.

When the local school went into lockdown and students couldn’t access online learning, Ngaarda broadcast lessons via the radio. The local church broadcast their services live from the studio, and Ngaarda was called upon to help film funerals.



First Nations radio services are able to reach around **320,000 First Nations people**, including around **100,000 very hard to reach people** in remote Indigenous communities.

The First Nations sector reaches a significant audience share with **80% of people in remote Indigenous communities** being regular listeners to radio services.



First Nations broadcasting returns an average **\$2.87 in social outcomes for every \$1 invested.**

Source: *Above and Beyond Broadcasting: A Study of First Nations media and the COVID-19 pandemic*, 2022

FLOODS

Bay FM (Byron Bay, NSW)

www.bayfm.org

After the 2022 floods, Bay FM became the hub for relief efforts for Byron Shire and beyond. The station helped to connect people with services and information - emergency medical care, legal aid, help with insurance claims and places to have a hot shower. They provided up-to-date localised information on road closures, landslips and dangerous conditions via their text line.

They coordinated relief efforts - explaining where to drop off hot meals and informing the community about what donations were urgently needed. They provided a point of contact where people in the community could ask for help or volunteer their time - chippies, sparkies and handymen helping to repair power tools, electronics, and furniture; locksmiths offering free help; music stores offering to clean instruments; and free veterinary consultations for pets. They also provided plenty of opportunities for elected representatives to speak to listeners in the community.

Bay FM also provided the latest flood recovery information and advice on air - how to tackle mould, what to do with asbestos, not to start a flood affected car without getting a mechanic to check it first, how to get electronic appliances tagged and sockets checked.



Koori Mail (Lismore, NSW)

koorimail.com

When the floods devastated the Koori Mail office on the lands of the Widjabul Wia-bal people of the Bundjalung Nation in Lismore, staff coordinated hundreds of volunteers to set up the largest flood relief centre in the region. The team worked night and day to turn their damaged building into a relief centre stocked with groceries, cleaning supplies, household items and basic supplies.

They had a medical team on site with doctors, counsellors and massage therapists. They ran a round-the-clock kitchen that provided up to 1,000 meals per day. They organised supply drops to communities cut off by flood waters. They organised caravans for people needing temporary housing. They coordinated a volunteer register to connect flood victims with supporters. They raised \$1.3m for direct distribution to affected communities. People came to the Koori Mail every day - to access support or to just sit and yarn surrounded by the care of their community.



“Relief and recovery is not our day job. We’re a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander newspaper - our staff are journalists, my job as a General Manager is to navigate a business.

I’m not a rescue operations officer of any kind by any means. But coming back to the foundations of what the Koori Mail stands for, in that we’re an independent media organisation. We determine what it looks like to deliver news and stories for our people, so we now can determine what it looks like - with the support of our Aboriginal community here on the ground - what it looks like to care and provide relief to our people and our communities.”

- The Koori Mail’s Naomi Moran
Source: From *The Embers*, 2022

FLOODS



99.9 Live FM (Townsville, QLD)

livefm.com.au

On 3 February 2019, Townsville experienced one of the worst monsoonal events in its history, which resulted in flooding that affected over 20,000 homes across the city. 99.9 Live FM took a lead role in convening the city's flood response. Partnering with Youth With A Mission Townsville and the Combined Churches of Townsville, they worked with Townsville City Council to recruit local volunteers to visit the homes of flood-affected people directly after the tragic weather event.

The campaign engaged hundreds of volunteers who visited 17,500 households, and offered care, emotional support, and connection to vital recovery services.

Live FM turned the studio into a call centre where people could ring in for assistance, and a donation centre where people could drop off supplies for community members in need.

After weeks of 24/7 live broadcasting to communicate with the thousands of homes without power, announcers conducted outside broadcasts daily at the Flood Recovery Hubs around town, bringing hope and cheer to those in need. The teams endured some of the hottest days on record in Townsville in their efforts to connect with local residents, to ensure they were OK and help them access funding, wellbeing checks, furniture assistance, mould removal services and much more.



Two in five Christian radio listeners (41%) **have reached out to help someone** in their local community, specifically because of something they heard on their radio station.

Almost 1.9 million Australians **tune into Christian radio** each week and 53% of listeners engage with Christian radio several times a day.

Source: *The Social Impact of Christian Radio in Australia, 2022*



An asset to build community resilience

Community media organisations are deeply connected to their local areas, drawing their staff and volunteers directly from the communities around them. Their local knowledge and local networks make them uniquely placed to assist in consultation with local communities. When disaster strikes community media is a vital source of emergency information, in many places community media is the only locally relevant media available.

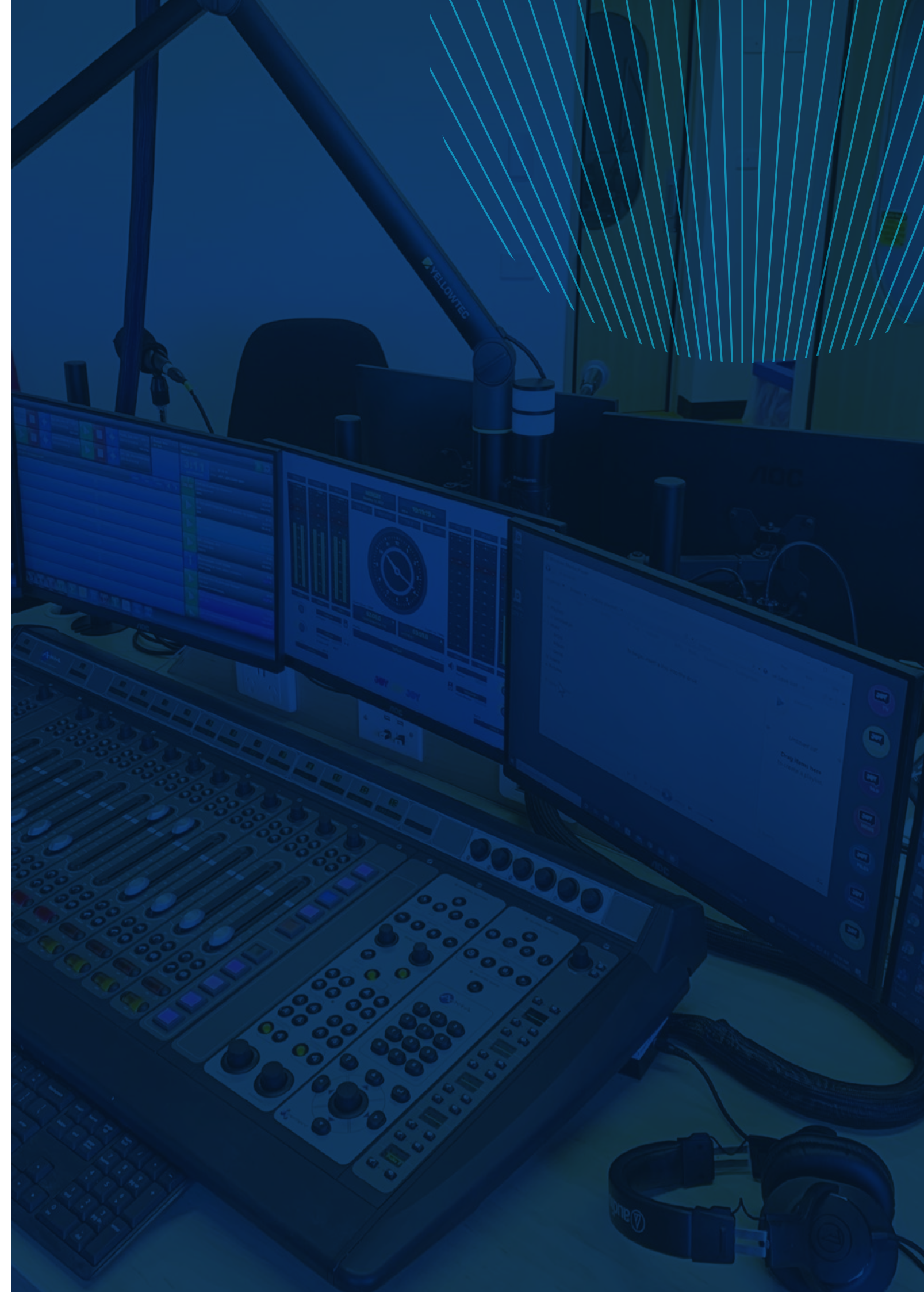
The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements recognised that community radio stations “offer an important source of information during emergencies, particularly for Australians living in remote communities” and have been able to provide “information to isolated and rural communities when they are unable to receive landline or mobile phone communication, use the internet or watch television.”

The Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee’s inquiry into lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian bushfire season 2019-20 also acknowledged the important role played by community media in providing “prompt and accurate emergency and warning information” that saved lives.

The Committee recommended the consideration of a rollout of the Victorian model of emergency broadcasting where a strong formal relationship exists between community broadcasters and Emergency Management Victoria to other states.

The Select Committee on the Response to Major Flooding across New South Wales in 2022 recognised “the valuable role community broadcasters played in the emergency response”. They highlighted local radio as an “example of community organisations that the government needs to better incorporate into emergency responses” and recommended that the NSW Government “work with the community broadcasting sector to identify ways in which community broadcasters could be better supported to provide critical services during natural disasters, with a view to providing them adequate long term funding”.

After experiencing first-hand the pressure that communities have felt during recent bushfires, floods and COVID, the community media sector is motivated to work closely with Government and emergency management bodies to ensure community media can continue and enhance its emergency broadcast and recovery support services, particularly for communities where other media and communication services may not be available during a crisis.





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