



Australia's regional newspapers

CBAA Submission

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COMMUNITY
BROADCASTING
ASSOCIATION OF
AUSTRALIA

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1. Introduction

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) is the peak body and national representative organisation for over 450 community media organisations. The CBAA is a global leader in the community media space, championing an independent and free media and providing a portfolio of programs aiming to strengthen the capacity and sustainability of community media organisations across Australia.

Community broadcasters play a critical role in providing a voice for Australian communities that are underserved by mainstream media – including communities in regional and remote Australia, First Nations communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, faith-based communities, youth and seniors' communities, the LGBTQIA+ community, people with a disability, and diverse arts and music communities. In doing so it promotes the diverse identities of Australians that enrich the social, cultural and democratic fabric of Australian society.

Community broadcasting is Australia's largest independent media sector – with more than 450 licensees delivering over 500 services on AM, FM and DAB+ – and is recognised internationally as one of the most successful examples of grassroots media. Alongside commercial and public media, community broadcasting is one of three important pillars in Australia's media landscape. Community services broadcast nationwide to an audience of over five million people per week, 80% of which are in regional or remote areas.

Community broadcasters are long-standing innovators. Over the past five years, we have seen growth in the number of stations saving, reviving or creating local publications, or teaming up with emerging hyperlocal publishers. This sharing of resources between community radio stations and print/digital papers/publications, particularly in regional Australia, has meant that local media can continue to thrive in communities.

Hyperlocal media is an important element of the media landscape in Australia and is critical to the wellbeing and connectedness of particularly regional and remote communities. Hyperlocal journalism provides a platform for targeted news, community information, and emergency warnings. It tells the stories that matter to local communities, advocates for them and contributes to social and community cohesiveness.

As traditional regional papers continue to close their doors, new hyperlocal publishers are stepping in, alongside community broadcasters, to fill the gaps. Since 2020, at least 74 new local, regional and remote online and print news outlets have launched by independent or SME publishers.¹ To support these new publishers, the CBAA has partnered with the Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism and Ideas to launch an Australian hyperlocal media association. The association will work to create a thriving hyperlocal news industry in Australia and provide hands-on support to establish and grow a sustainable, high-quality news publication. The Local & Independent News Association (LINA) was registered as a company in January 2022.

The CBAA is deeply committed to the survival of regional news and welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts' inquiry into Australia's regional newspapers.

This submission will focus on:

- Emerging models for hyperlocal news production where community broadcasters have drawn on their existing community support network to save their local paper from extinction.
- The innovation and creativity community stations have shown in adapting to the changing needs of their communities, and opportunities to grow their involvement in print journalism.
- The emerging hyperlocal publishing sector, and how the new Local & Independent News Association will assist.

¹ Judith Neilson Institute (January, 2022) Submission to the Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts Inquiry into Australia's Regional Newspapers.



2. Local media matters

Local media plays a critical role in connecting and supporting communities particularly in regional areas. Local media can hold local Government to account, deliver local weather warnings, monitor community development, provide information on accessing social services, celebrate the achievements of local people and share in the grieving for community losses. Local media is a vital source of local information delivered by people with an in-depth knowledge of what matters to the people around them. Local journalists care about their local community and for many people the local paper or community radio station represents connection to their friends, neighbours and community.

Local media also plays an important role during a crisis. For instance, through the COVID-19 pandemic, community broadcasters have worked to provide community specific COVID-19 updates; in-language health messages; and connected people most isolated through lockdowns. During the 2019/20 bushfire season over 80 community radio stations broadcast to fire-affected regions and undertook diverse activities to support local communities – providing locally-specific emergency broadcasts; acting as a catalyst for community dialogue; supporting and coordinating fundraising initiatives; and connecting people in regional Australia to critical services.

There is a strong need for local news and information, particularly in regional and remote communities. It is well documented that audiences feel they cannot receive localised or community-specific information from other media sources. Local community media provides content that caters to the needs and interests of local communities and is vital to the health and wellbeing of those communities.

3. New community-led models of local media

The closure of many traditional local media outlets, including regional papers, means that important community issues are going unreported. But this has spurred communities to find new ways to source and create credible, independent news, including through new media enterprises championed by community broadcasters.

Community radio stations are low cost/high output and already produce hyperlocal and national news for millions of listeners across Australia. More and more we are beginning to see new models of local media emerge where a print or digital publication is delivered or supported by a community broadcaster. 2HHH in the northern suburbs of Sydney shares its local news and sports stories with the *Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Post* and the Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Post gives 2HHH space in each issue to raise awareness of the station in the community. Regular *Byron Shire Echo* reporter Mia Armitage also heads up Bay FM's Community Newsroom in Byron Bay (NSW). The local community can access Mia's award-winning stories through broadcasts, the station's website and the local newspaper. Radio station 8CCC which services Alice Springs and Tennant Creek in the NT provides news and current affairs via their website and is planning the launch of a paper in 2022.

Community radio relies on journalists embedded in community to innovate, through a trusted voice. Alaina Earl was a journalist but lost her jobs at local papers and magazines due to the decline in regional media offerings. She is now a broadcaster with 4RFM community radio station in Moranbah, Queensland hosting three shows, acting as community liaison officer and producing a community magazine called *Moranbah Community News* – now the only local publication of its kind. While other media companies broadcast to the town, 4RFM is the only outlet with a physical base in the community. 4RFM and the



Moranbah Community News, aside from sharing local news, have focused on combatting vaccine misinformation, and encouraging uptake of the COVID-19 vaccination (the community's current vaccination rates are low at 63.5%)².

The following case studies highlight the determination of community radio stations to keep their local newspapers going no matter the challenges involved. The sharing of premises and people power to maximise resources have led to exciting new community-led models of local media and the success of these radio-newspaper relationships has been reflected in community cohesiveness and morale.

Case study: Torres Strait Islanders Media Association's 4MW and *Torres News*

On 27 May 2021, *Cape & Torres News* ran its final edition. For the Thursday Island and Outer Island communities this marked the end of a long history of Torres Strait local newspapers. The paper had been in operation since 2015, when *Cape York News* and *Torres News* were forced to merge to cut costs and allowed *Cape & Torres News* to continue operating as one publication.

But with the movement of people from the region to the mainland less people are speaking the Torres Strait Creole language. With less people living in the community advertising revenue has also declined. Then in 2020 the COVID pandemic hit. The paper was losing money and would have closed without the support of JobKeeper. In 2021 when their main writer retired and there was no one to take his place, the paper could no longer find a way to continue operating.

The Torres Strait Islanders Media Association (TSIMA) saw an opportunity to return a regional newspaper to the area by sharing resources with its community radio station, 4MW. The paper was gifted to 4MW and relaunched as *Torres News*.

The newspaper journalists work in conjunction with 4MW journalists, covering stories from Thursday Island and the 14 other communities in the Outer Islands. The service provides community grassroots storytelling, information, profiling, and good news stories. It bolsters other work that TSIMA is undertaking outside of radio operation such as film, music, and events.

Published weekly, the newspaper is available online and in print, with online subscriptions available across the country. It is printed in both English and Torres Strait Creole, providing a valued in-language publication for Torres Strait Creole-speakers and keeping the language alive for the next generation.

Torres News
Thursday, 20 January 2022 | Edition 15 | \$2 incl GST
EDITORIAL | E: editor@torres.news | ADVERTISING | M: 0419 828 639 | E: ads@torres.news

Pleas for 'no panic' as COVID spreads

Families and friends of those in communities where COVID is confirmed are urged by authorities not to panic, but to be vigilant, Torres Strait Island Regional Council Mayor Philomena Mosby says.

"Be diligent and comply with the Chief Health Officer and health directives," he said.

The Torres & Cape Hospital and Health Service (TCHHS) reported more than 200 cases across the region earlier this week.

Of those more than 10 were on Whitsun, more than 20 in the NHS.

and at least 15 were on outer islands of the Torres Strait, including Balu and Maning.

Cr Mosby said he was very concerned.

"Going forward, we will continue to manage all variables which are within our control to mitigate the further spread of COVID-19 in our communities," he said.

"We remain committed to working with Queensland Health as the lead agency to protect our people and communities."

He said all agencies (government and non-government), businesses, and residents were asked to "strongly reconsider" non-essential travel.

"I'm really thankful for the positive feedback I've been receiving from other Councils from our 15 divisions about the safety precaution measures that are being practiced by community members," he said.

"I commend you and I encourage you to continue keep up those safety measures."

"Jobs will show to all family members that are keeping to the family groups, that's very important, and a way that we can stop or slow the rapid spread of COVID."

He said there was no need to panic.

"Please no panic," he said. "We have got support systems in place. If you need any information or social support, pick up your phone and call your local TSIRC office and they should get you onto the right person to support you in whatever you need."

"I want to say big love for those family members who comply."

TSIRC MAYOR: Philomena Mosby

Our best are looking after our most vulnerable

As part of the Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service Covid-19 Response the health service has partnered in the Torres Strait with local key stakeholders to work together to provide care, services and support to vulnerable clients.

See full coverage P2

Picture: MEMBERS OF THE VULNERABLE CLIENTS MANAGEMENT TEAM - L-R: Ivo Waihu, Maria Akhenge, Aggie Harkin, Manuel Kitchell and Betty Sogit.

Proudly delivering another year of essential services to Cape York and the Torres Strait in 2022!

See Swift are dedicated to keeping our people and the communities we serve as safe as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Check our website for the latest news and update for your community.

- Regular services to the OTSI and Cape York Peninsula
- Safety focused
- Community focused
- Customer focused
- 9 Depots and expanding!
- ASQ+ staff
- 28 vessels

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² Regional Australia's media options are declining. This rock radio broadcaster is fighting back in coal country <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-01-05/community-radio-in-coal-country-queensland-alaina-earl/100736630?fbclid=IwAR3BKj8AHKClm9iBGgyqzMvIMb1za-7sBhDz44Md2Zx9abDJzUSseB-kn9UY>



Case study: Outback Radio 2WEB and The Western Herald

Bourke's local newspaper, *The Western Herald*, has documented the events of outback NSW since the establishment of towns along the Darling River and the coming of the Afghan camel trains, the paddle steamers, railways, the wool, cotton and mining industries, the beginnings of the rural trade union movement, the great depression and two world wars.

In 2018 after 131 years in operation, *The Western Herald* was threatened with closure due to declining advertising revenue.

"*The Western Herald* has a long and rich history," said Ian Cole chairman of the WREB Co-op Limited, a community body that runs community radio 2WEB in Bourke, "and throw in the fact that Henry Lawson wrote for *The Western Herald* when he visited Bourke in the early 1890s, and you have a proud heritage worth preserving".

At the time the paper was threatened with closure, community radio station 2WEB in Bourke purchased the paper. Not only have the local jobs been retained, the paid editorial and journalistic staff have grown from 1.5 to 5 journalists. Community morale has been lifted and volunteers feel a sense of belonging and purpose every Thursday when they gather to put the paper together.

"Since we began, many local residents stepped up to help with photos, columns, newspaper preparation, inserts, folding, mailing and delivery" Mr Cole said. "Without the voluntary effort that we already had at the radio station, we could not have continued – it's been a whole of community effort, including help from the Clontarf Academy boys from Bourke High School."

To save on costs, the newspaper operations were relocated to 2WEB's studios. Joint sponsorship packages for both print and radio are available, providing a strategic income source for both independent, community-owned news services – at time of acquisition, revenue was up 50% because of the new packages.

Local news is now still available in the region – with important synergies created between the newspaper and the radio station. News output is now created by a single team and shared in print, online and on air, as the only locally produced and locally relevant news service to a wide, outback region. By acquiring *The Western Herald*, 2WEB has ensured that robust, local news reporting has remained in Bourke.

4. Regional community radio can enhance its impact

In recent years community broadcasters have faced, and continue to face, significant challenges. But the sector is weathering the tough times thanks to the determination and creativity of staff and volunteers who are constantly innovating to remain relevant and valuable to their loyal community of listeners.



Despite the times, community radio continues to grow year on year. Last year's [Community Radio Listener Survey](#)³ of more than 16,000 Australians shows that over 5 million listeners aged 15+ across Australia tune in to community radio stations each week (24% of the Australian population). Listenership is up from approximately 3.76 million in 2004. Of these listeners, 690,000 listen exclusively to community radio (that is, they listen to community radio but not commercial radio or ABC/SBS radio).

The top reason listeners give for tuning in to community radio is to hear local information and news (51%). 80% of community radio stations are in regional and remote parts of Australia, and 25% of Australians living outside of metropolitan areas – 1.63 million people – tune in to community radio each week. 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. In some regions, these stations are the only source of local news.

Community radio stations are closely linked to their local areas and communities, drawing their announcing, producing and support volunteers and staff directly from the towns and locales where they broadcast. The community radio sector is powered by the efforts and dedication of approximately 688 full-time equivalent jobs and 22,200 volunteers.⁴ The investment of communities into their local radio station and their willingness to volunteer their time to keep stations operating, is a big part of what makes the community broadcasting model so vibrant and adaptive.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted station resources, staffing and volunteers, and revenue sources in sponsorship, donations and fundraising. Station revenues, which are particularly reliant on sponsorship from local small businesses and the music and arts industries, are down in many cases over 80%. Many stations were forced to lay off staff ineligible for the Government's support measures and many volunteer workers, particularly in vulnerable groups, are understandably staying home. The severity of the impact of COVID-19 has accelerated pressure on local community radio stations to find ways to deliver key broadcast services efficiently and economically, while transitioning to an entirely or partially remote content-production and broadcast model. Staff and volunteers have shown incredible innovation in figuring out new ways to work and sourcing low-cost technology for home recording.

The changing way the world consumes media has also significantly impacted community broadcasters. Stations have had to learn and adapt to changing technologies. Most stations now stream their programs online. Some stations have developed apps and the CBAA is about to launch the Community Radio Plus app – featuring every community radio station in Australia. Most stations have an online presence and the majority of stations also maintain and create content for websites and social media accounts. These pages are often already avenues for the sharing of local news and information and are beginning to function like online newspapers.

The community broadcasting sector is funded by the Australian Government at \$20m per annum. This funding is the critical baseline to support community radio stations and sector-wide projects (like community DAB+ digital radio, training, news, online multiplatform infrastructure), and ensures that stations can continue to meet their evolving community needs.

This funding is distributed via competitive grants through the Community Broadcasting Foundation, and alongside revenue secured through sponsorship, fundraising, donations and membership, is critical to the maintenance of community radio stations. These grants support stations to continue operating in difficult times, to keep up with changing technology, to build organisational resilience and to explore and develop new ways to deliver news to their communities.

Well-resourced stations have a strong base from which to explore new ways to serve their communities – and Australian Government funding is critical to this. This is evident for the stations mentioned earlier, who are innovating their news production. In 2020/21 the Torres Strait Islanders Media Association's 4MW received \$49,000 to fund specialist programming for their community. 8CCC receives a multiyear development and operations grant which allows the station the security to

³ Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2021), Community Radio Listener Survey [online] Available at: <https://www.cbba.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census/national-listener-survey-fact-sheets>

⁴ Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2019) CBAA People and Community Survey Report for the 2018-2019 Financial Year.



retain and invest in staff, support core operations, and maintain technical infrastructure. In 2020/21 2HHH received \$20,000 to employ a Community Engagement Coordinator and make necessary improvements on their transmission tower. All three stations received a crisis grant to help them through the COVID-19 pandemic. But for every station that receives a grant there are many stations who miss out.

The community broadcasting sector can continue to innovate in this space with an increase in funding. CBAA is calling for the sector's total funding to be increased by \$5m to \$25m per annum – ongoing, recurrent and indexed – which would increase station operational ability and increase the amount of local news reaching regional communities.

5. The Local & Independent News Association

Hyperlocal news organisations have been filling the gap vacated by traditional regional news outlets. Hyperlocal news outlets are print or online publishers that are community-focused, independently owned and original, covering public interest news and issues of local importance, and most likely working within a particular local geography. The locality served by a hyperlocal news organisation might be either regional or metropolitan.

In partnership with the Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism and Ideas (JNI), the CBAA has been conducting research into the hyperlocal media landscape in Australia. The research revealed the pressing need for a hyperlocal association, focused on capacity building and shared services.

In response, JNI and CBAA have established the Local & Independent News Association (LINA). LINA will be tasked with fostering a thriving hyperlocal news industry in Australia. With LINA's support, members will serve local audiences with quality, original, local, public interest news and coverage of important local issues. LINA will help to reduce the number and scale of news "deserts" in Australia. LINA will help existing hyperlocal media to survive and grow, and to encourage new hyperlocal media entrants by providing capacity building support, expert advice and access to critical third-party services.

LINA will reach a large number of hyperlocal media organisations, providing them with training, networking and access to critical third-party services.

The CBAA and JNI are uniquely placed to understand how best to engage, educate, and assist the hyperlocal news industry on its journey and will incubate LINA during a three-year pilot. The pilot will allow LINA to test new methods and ideas, learn from other models of support for hyperlocals globally and develop new ways of working. Ultimately, they will seek to develop a model which serves both new and existing hyperlocal publishers to produce high-quality public-interest news at a local level and develop the quantity and quality of local news in Australia.

6. Recommendations

Encourage new community-led models of local media

The community broadcasting sector has the potential to support and nurture new community-led models of local regional media. The sector is already an important source of local news and information, is supported by an engaged workforce of committed local staff and volunteers and is deeply enmeshed in communities. The sector is low input/high output and every dollar spent on a community radio station far exceeds its dollar value in the benefit returned to the community. The sector can continue to support and explore new, community-driven, value for money ways to connect local communities if the sector's funding is increased from \$20m to \$25m.

Increase the community broadcasting sector's annual funding allocation from \$20m to \$25m on an ongoing, renewed and indexed basis to support station core operations and their capacity to adapt and innovate to serve their communities with local news.



Support the Local & Independent News Association

The CBAA is seeking Australian Government funding to support the setup of the Local & Independent News Association, alongside funding from the Judith Neilson Institute.

7. Conclusion

Thank you to the Committee for your consideration of this submission. As the peak body for the community broadcasting sector, and an active participant in research, policy and planning, the CBAA is committed to further contributing our ideas, experience and knowledge to this inquiry.

We thank you for opening this important consultation and welcome any opportunity to appear before the Committee or assist in other ways in its reporting.

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