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Via email: robyn.mellor@niaa.gov.au

Renewing a Vital Indigenous Voice and Community Asset – The Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Sector

Dear Robyn,

Thank you for sharing the *Renewing a Vital Indigenous Voice and Community Asset – The Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Sector* report, prepared for the National Indigenous Australians Agency by Hugh Watson consulting.

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) is grateful for the National Indigenous Australians Agency's work in this space and values the opportunity to review the findings of this report. Just over 30% of community broadcasters are First Nations stations. Four out of ten of people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (38%) listen to community radio during a typical week. The CBAA works closely with First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) and supports the response FNMA have provided to this report.

Funding and investment

Community broadcasting plays a vital role in strengthening First Nations communities. Commonwealth funding is essential to allowing First Nations media organisations to maintain broadcast infrastructure, develop partnerships to generate their own income streams, provide training and career development opportunities, support their communities through crises like extreme weather events and the COVID-19 pandemic, build organisational resilience and develop local content to connect and serve their communities. We support and echo FNMA's position that additional funding is the most important factor in supporting the sector's capacity to provide essential information services, increase jobs and skills, and improve community-controlled sector sustainability.

We join with FNMA in opposing *Recommendation 13. The NIAA should initiate discussions with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications regarding the transfer of the Indigenous grants element of the Community Broadcasting Foundation to the NIAA for use on sector-wide projects.* The Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF)'s specialist skills, knowledge and understanding of the sector makes them a more appropriate avenue to deliver grants than the NIAA. Over the last 37 years the CBF have refined and developed their peer-assessment process to ensure they best meet the diverse needs of our vibrant sector.

The CBF has a long-standing connection to the community broadcasting sector with an existing network of people from First Nations media organisations who participate in the peer-assessment process as grant assessors and grants advisory committee members. Applicants to CBF Grants have the opportunity to indicate that project proposals will be best understood by grant assessors with a particular cultural background, experience-base or skill set. The CBF is committed to principles of self-determination and assigns First Nations assessors (or those who have completed relevant cultural competency training) to all First Nations grant projects.

The CBAA was involved in the consultation on the News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code and support *Recommendation 14: The NIAA should support the First Nations Media Australia to ensure that the Indigenous broadcasting and media sector is considered when the legislation to compel Google and Facebook to negotiate with Australian media companies is passed.* However, since this legislation has now passed, no First Nations media organisations have received reimbursement for their content through the negotiation process.

Infrastructure

We welcome *Recommendation 8: NIAA should undertake discussions with Emergency Management Australia (EMA) to collaborate on the infrastructure maintenance, replacement and upgrades needs of the sector for emergency management purposes.* Community broadcasters play an important role during a crisis, for instance:

- 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.
- When Cyclone Veronica ripped through WA’s Pilbara region, it damaged Ngaarda Media’s power amplifier and their ability to broadcast local news and safety information. Ngaarda Media is the only First Nations-led media hub broadcasting across WA’s Pilbara region and the primary news and information source for many First Nations communities in the area.

First Nations community radio stations and media organisations are the fastest and most responsive conduits for getting information through to First Nations communities in a way that is culturally appropriate, accessible, in-language and timely. In 89 regions across the country First Nations radio stations are the only radio services available. Currently there is limited funding available to repair unforeseen damage caused by natural disasters. There is a pressing need for greater support for community broadcasters to fill the gap between the cost of emergency damage and the amount covered by insurance. The CBAA would welcome the opportunity to support NIAA in discussions with EMA to ensure that our critical services can remain on-air during emergencies and in recovery.

We reiterate the report’s findings regarding the need for upgrades to ageing and failing technology across the sector. Ageing transmission infrastructure, along with the attendant maintenance and upgrade costs and the need to train and upskill technical personnel, are key challenges facing the sector in regional and remote areas. We know that work towards *Recommendation 6. The NIAA, in collaboration with the Australian Communications and Media Authority, First Nations Media Australia and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications should undertake an infrastructure needs survey and cost analysis for an infrastructure upgrade program,* is underway and highlights the need for funding and support to address the findings of the FNMA’s sector-wide infrastructure audit.

We support *Recommendation 16: The FNMA should be funded to identify grant opportunities and programs that could be accessed by the Indigenous broadcasting and media sector and assist the sector to access that funding.* We note the report’s findings that there are many sources of funding available for small amounts of money with significant associated application and administrative costs. We support FNMA’s suggestion that there would be value in funding a grant writer as a resource for the First Nations media sector. Our sector is low cost/high output and even small amounts of money allocated to community broadcasters far exceed their value in the benefit returned to the community.

We thank NIAA for its engagement with the sector. As the peak body for the community broadcasters, and an active participant in research, policy and planning, the CBAA would welcome the opportunity to further contribute our ideas, experience and knowledge to your work in this area. Should you wish to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Holly Friedlander Liddicoat, CBAA’s Head of Advocacy and Communications at holly.friedlander@cbaa.org.au or via 02 9310 2999.

Best regards,



Jon Bisset
Chief Executive Officer