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COMMUNITY  
BROADCASTING  
ASSOCIATION OF  
AUSTRALIA

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Budget Policy Division  
The Treasury  
Langton Crescent  
Parkes ACT 2600

## **Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) submission to the 2018/19 Federal Budget**

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the discussions and development of the 2018-19 federal budget.

Much has been achieved and great confidence gained in the last year as a result of the Government's commitment to community broadcasting. Even so, the year by year budget allocations continue to undermine the certainty and sustainability of community radio in Australia. Given that the diversity of media and access to relevant media content for all Australians is under intense scrutiny, it seems timely to make a permanent commitment to community radio by moving the sector's funding allocation from the budget cycle process and making it ongoing.

The CBAA are committed to working with Government to create a more certain funding environment in order to optimise the benefits of community radio for Australia.

### ***About the CBAA and community broadcasting in Australia***

The CBAA is the peak body for community radio stations in Australia. As an internationally recognised, not-for-profit cultural organisation, the CBAA champions community broadcasting by building stations' capability and by creating a healthy environment for the sector to thrive. Since our creation, we have served to give a voice to those otherwise not heard on air and always prided ourselves on maintaining a diverse sector, supported by volunteers and community-minded individuals.

Community broadcasting is a vital and growing part of the Australian media landscape. The 2016 National Listener Survey reported the highest listening levels for community radio on record – 5.3 million Australians tuned in to the over 450 not-for-profit, community-owned and operated radio services operating across the country each week.<sup>1</sup> This is up from approximately 3.8 million in 2004.

Community radio stations operate in towns and cities across Australia with the largest proportion located in regional areas (41%), a further 25% in rural areas and 34% across metropolitan and suburban locations. These stations directly support approximately 1020 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs across the country – over 250 of which are in regional and rural communities. Further, the sector consistently reports between 19,000-20,000 people volunteering at community radio stations each year. This is an average of 74 volunteers at each community radio station, putting in the hours of 13 FTE shifts per station. This varies strongly across stations and station types.

Community radio stations play an important role in catering to the needs of, and providing a voice for, communities that aren't adequately serviced by other broadcasting sectors. 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', LGTBIQ, specialist music and

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<sup>1</sup> Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2017). *Community Radio National Listener Survey- Summary report of findings January 2017* [online] Available at: <https://www.cbaa.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census>

arts content. In metro areas, there is a greater diversity of specialist stations; in regional and rural communities community radio stations are more likely to provide this same diversity within a generalist station through diversity of programming.

The national community radio audience listens to services that contribute to and reflect Australia's open society strong democracy and vibrant culture by:

- Sharing a diverse range of viewpoints that enrich the social and cultural fabric of Australian society and contribute to public interest outcomes
- Promoting the identities of local communities and contribute to social inclusion
- Providing opportunities for participation in free-to-air public broadcasting and content production
- Contributing to media diversity
- Generating a high level of local content
- Providing a unique range of services and programs

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) champions community broadcasting by providing services that build stations' capability and create a healthy environment for the sector to thrive.

### ***Greater support and certainty needed for community broadcasting in Australia***

We are extremely appreciative of the government's decision to reinstate previous funding cuts in the previous 2017-18 Budget (\$6.1m over two years) and for the provision of additional funding during this year for digital radio rollout, enhanced news programming, improved online presence and industry skills development. These additional resources have been warmly welcomed by the sector.

To ensure community broadcasting remains viable and can operate in an environment of certainty, our request in the 2018-19 Budget is that our funding becomes ongoing, rather than an allocation which happens according to the annual Budget.

Community radio stations are largely self-funded through sponsorship, fundraising and membership contributions. Federal funding is around 12 per cent of station income on average, although this varies widely.

There is great diversity in community radio licensees, and some sections of the community broadcasting sector who are more heavily reliant on government income. This reflects the greater difficulty of these stations in raising commercial income due to their targeted communities of interest and focus on addressing inequality in our communities.

Community radio stations are able to achieve their significantly low-cost/high output radio production, with strict regulations limiting their commercial fundraising capacity<sup>2</sup>, because of the efforts and commitment of over 25,000 volunteers supporting around 680 EFT employed staff, and the support and goodwill of their communities.

Given the demonstrable importance of community broadcasting and its vital role in public interest journalism it is crucial that current and future Governments provide ongoing funding certainty to support and invest in Australia's community broadcasting service. The current arrangement of having the sector rely on yearly budget decisions is unsustainable in the long-term.

The CBAA are committed to working with Government to create a more certain funding environment and would welcome a partnership with Government to ensure the sector's public good contributions for all Australians can continue.

Kind regards,



Jon Bisset  
Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>2</sup> The Broadcasting Services Act (1992) places limits on the amount of advertising, in the form of sponsorship, that community broadcasters are permitted to put to air.