



COMMUNITY
BROADCASTING
ASSOCIATION OF
AUSTRALIA

9 March 2018

Director
Industry Policy
Department of Communication and the Arts
GPO Box 2154
Canberra, ACT 2601

Via email: regionalinnovation@communications.gov.au

Dear Director,

Response to the Consultation Paper for the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund.

This kind of support for small publishers in the digital space is welcomed. However it misses one of the largest public interest publishing groups – community broadcasters.

Section 7 of the eligibility criteria states that community broadcasters are ineligible, as are not-for-profits. Community broadcasters can demonstrate they meet all of the criteria. Indeed, public interest journalism is at the very heart of what they do.

This journalism is increasingly being done in a more professional manner, with paid journalists, and large newsrooms. In Sydney, for instance, 2SER 107.3's programs and news service, largely fill the gap left by the rebranding of 2UE. Running local and national current affairs (such as *The Wire*) for more than six hours each day and employing five journalists to reach almost 500,000 Sydney-siders each month.

Community broadcaster content is routinely published to websites and podcast platforms. For example, 2SER's award winning podcast project, *Just Words*, on section 18c of the *Racial Discrimination Act*, was a clear example of public interest journalism, and shows the quality of digital innovation in the sector. Community broadcasters should be able to compete with other publishers.

FBI radio in Sydney has won a Walkley award for its journalism on the national features show, *All the Best* - a sign of the depth of investigation that community broadcasters are capable of. 2NUR in Newcastle and Curtin FM in Perth, run newsrooms 24 hours a day. These, and other community broadcasters, are well placed to innovate, and grow their public interest journalism.

In a regional setting, community broadcasters have regularly diversified to assume responsibility for public interest local media. For example, in Bourke, 2WEB, is now publishing *The Western Herald*, saving that iconic paper from closing. This is a clear example of where the innovation fund could benefit a regional publisher. Changes in the publication landscape often mean that community broadcasters are now the only publishers of local public interest content in rural and regional areas.



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This means that exclusion of community broadcasters from the fund would deny many people in rural and regional Australia from the intended benefits.

Community broadcasters are able to access a small amount of funds for content production from the Community Broadcasting Foundation, however they are not able to access the larger sums that would allow for true technical and digital innovation. This would be especially welcome when it comes to looking at new business models to deliver public interest journalism.

To best ensure the objectives of the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund are delivered, we urge you to reconsider the eligibility criteria for the Fund to allow for the inclusion of the not-for-profit community broadcasting sector.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jon Bisset', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jon Bisset
Chief Executive Officer