

Senator Stephen Conroy
Shadow Minister for Communications
PO Box 1067
Epping MDC VIC 3076

23 July 2007

Dear Senator,

I write as a community organisation member concerned about the continued viability of community broadcasting at a time of changing technology and new demands.

I urge you and your party to commit to substantially increase funding to community broadcasting and ethnic community broadcasting in particular. Ethnic community broadcasting plays a key role in settling new migrants, supporting established communities and helping descendants to maintain their culture. It also provides a professional and cost-effective means of providing information about government services to ethnic communities.

I urge you to support the joint funding submission of the peak bodies in the community broadcasting sector (including the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council and the Community Broadcasting Association), which seeks an extra \$16.8m per year, on top of the \$8.1m currently provided by the Commonwealth. The funding submission can be found at www.valueourvoices.org.

The democratic structure of community broadcasting has ensured strong community participation, with more than 3000 volunteers producing 2400 hours of programs each week in 97 languages. These volunteers and the community fund more than 80% of the operational costs of broadcasting every year.

Community broadcasting has a weekly audience of over 4 million a week (McNair Ingenuity Audience Survey, August 2006). Around 23% or 608,000 of 2.65m regular metro community radio listeners are Language Other Than English (LOTE) speakers at home.

Needs of Ethnic Community Broadcasters

I support the general submission of the sector as outlined above. However, there are two priorities in particular for ethnic broadcasters:

1. **Program Content Funding:** This funding (currently only received by ethnic, indigenous and print handicapped programmers) allows stations to provide extra facilities to improve program quality. Since 1996/7 there has been an actual decline in the per hour rate for content production from \$48 per hour to \$35.35 this year. The joint submission seeks an additional amount of \$1.893 million for ethnic broadcasters to bring funding back to 1996 levels. Limiting this funding restricts the participation of women, young people and new and emerging communities in particular.
2. **Training:** Training is crucial, so the National Training Project should be funded beyond 2008 when the pilot ends. The submission seeks \$2.8m per year for the sector as a whole. With the demise of the Australian Ethnic Radio Training Project (AERTP) in 2004, which provided over \$200,000 per year, the NEMBC

seeks a similar amount for the development and delivery of dedicated training for ethnic community broadcasters.

General Funding Claim

The increase sought is reasonable because of a 54% growth in the number of licences/stations (to over 480) since 1996. Federal funding levels have only risen by 27% since targeted funding was introduced in 1996/97. The rapid expansion of the sector has led to a real decline (42% in targeted funding and 40% in core funding) in the support available per station.

The recent comprehensive inquiry into community broadcasting by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts supports my assertion that community broadcasting is highly valued and grossly under-funded. *Tuning in to Community Broadcasting* (tabled 20 June 2007) recommends \$15.4m in additional funds.

Community broadcasters continue to achieve great things with declining real funding but their future sustainability depends on additional money for both operating costs and capital investment.

Ethnic community broadcasting...an essential service

A Griffith University report entitled *Community Media Matters* (March 2007) analyses why community broadcasting is a growing sector and why people value it (see www.cbonline.org.au). The report concludes (chapter 6) that:

Our results indicate that it is providing an essential service for new migrants. But it is doing far more than this – when a community becomes more established in Australia, ethnic language programs act as an important link to other members of the same community in their local area through maintenance of languages, and links to home which other information and media sources cannot provide. (p72)

The Commonwealth proposes to spend around \$107m on a new Australian Citizenship Test over five years. For a fraction of that cost community broadcasting could improve its capacity to assist migrants to better understand Australian society and institutions. Please make that investment.

For these reasons, I urge you to support our call for improved funding for community broadcasting.

Yours sincerely,

Name:
Organisation:
Address:
Phone: