



Community broadcasting holds a special place in Australian media and society – indeed this uniquely Australian democratic and social infrastructure has few counterparts anywhere in the world. For the 4.5 million Australians who listen to community radio and 3.7 million who watch community television each week¹ it is much more than a valuable source of local news, information and entertainment.

These 353 radio and 83 television stations run by 23,000 volunteers and 900 paid staff:

- **Promote community networking and growth**, especially in tough times when many communities struggle due to economic downturns or the challenges of drought, fire and flood (around 70% of licences are in regional, rural and remote areas)
- **Link both new and established migrant communities to their culture** as well as providing information about government services and events, in over 100 languages
- **Assist Indigenous Australians to maintain their culture and language** as well as deliver local information and entertainment in areas that would not be serviced by any other media
- **Meet the daily information needs of Australians with a print disability** through alternate format production and delivery of high-turnover print media
- **Provide special services to communities of interest** such as faith communities, young and older Australians, gay/lesbian/transgender people and others
- **Enhance the diversity of our arts, music, political views and thought** – giving voice to ideas, issues and perspectives rarely heard in the mainstream media.

Each station is a small business (some with incomes in excess of \$1m) run by a committee of management and the skills learned here are invaluable in developing local businesses and economic networks.

Economic Benefits

A key task for government at the moment is to stabilise the economy and create confidence. That confidence and the momentum for economic recovery will depend very much on individuals, families and small communities as they ponder when to borrow and spend. Community broadcasting builds active citizenship and increases social inclusion – and social cohesion is vital to efficient local economies. But community broadcasting can also directly strengthen the economic fabric of the community because it:

- **Assists community members to identify employment pathways**
- **Engages and skills** 23,000 volunteers who provide an estimated \$212 million annually worth of labour²
- **Develops transferable skills increasing employability.** Key among these are ICT skills, broadcast technology, management capability and spoken and written communication. Over 7,500 people receive training in the sector each year and it is a way for many vulnerable groups, such as at risk youth or refugees, to reengage with learning in a practical environment
- **Strengthens economic networks** by giving local people information about local businesses and enables local business to make themselves known through the tens of thousands of sponsorship messages broadcast each week
- **Develops partnerships with business and other not for profit organisations** to deliver projects and services to communities
- **Works with emergency service providers** to provide local and current information to communities facing crisis
- **Provides a communication channel about Commonwealth and State Government services** and initiatives, including training and education, small business and migration programs

A modest injection of additional funds into community broadcasting would have significant multiplier benefits, enabling us to expand and provide new services and resources. With the emergence of digital technology the sector is poised to take the next step in delivering new information, educational, cultural and entertainment services.

A new funding model is needed

The capacity to deliver those services is threatened by inadequate Commonwealth support, which currently totals \$8.7m. per year. Over the last decade:

- Station technology has aged (more than half the stations have equipment older than a decade) and stations face the challenge of implementing digital free-to-air and on-line services
- Support available per station has declined significantly – the average total funding level is now 18% lower in real terms than a decade ago
- Support has not kept pace with sector growth and diversification – since the last major funding review in 1996/7 the sector has established over 200 new services and augmented analogue broadcasting through new digital platforms. While total Commonwealth funding has risen by 25% over the last decade, a 53% increase in the number of licensed services has resulted in an 11% drop in real core annual funding
- The current funding model does not address emerging areas of need – for example, special interest communities like mature age or youth. Community television receives no funding at all

A new funding model providing adequate assistance is urgently needed. Currently over 85% of funds are raised by stations from their communities through donations and sponsorship – but the growing challenges and greater needs threaten our capacity to deliver services. It is time to strengthen community broadcasting and value our many voices by increasing Commonwealth support.

In its 2007 report *Tuning in to Community Broadcasting* the bi-partisan House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communication, Information, Technology and the Arts recommended an additional \$15.4 m in funding, recognising “the immense value that the community broadcasting sector contributes to Australian society”³.

The sector peak organisations seek \$14.014m. in additional funding in the following key areas:

New Funding Sought	\$14.014m
Content Production <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish a Content Development Fund addressing current and emerging areas of need • resource program development including specialist Ethnic, Indigenous, RPH content • create a community television (CTV) Program Production Fund 	\$6.591m
Infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create a Community Radio Infrastructure Renewal and Development Fund 	\$3.268m
Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable the National Training Project (NTP) to fully implement accredited training in broadcast, management and technical skills 	\$2.505m
Sector Coordination & Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve staffing in sector representative organisations • support strategic planning and assist the sector build its capacity and long-term sustainability • facilitate CTV Sector Coordination and Planning. 	\$1.650m

A detailed New Policy Proposal, **Value Our Voices – Strengthen Community Broadcasting**, is available on request or may be downloaded from <http://www.cbonline.org.au/index.cfm?pageId=14,40,3,1075>

Notes

- 1 “Community Radio National Listener Survey”, McNair Ingenuity Research, October 2008 at p. 8; OzTam Community Television cumulative audience reach 8am-12 midnight, August 2006.
- 2 This estimate uses the same method established by Forde, S., Meadows, M., and Foxwell, K (2002). *Culture, Commitment, Community: The Australian Community Radio Sector*. Brisbane: Griffith University. Available on <http://www.cbonline.org.au/>
- 3 Reports of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, February and June 2007. Available from - http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/cita/community_broadcasting/