



Value our Voices Strengthen Community Broadcasting

*In essence, community radio **performs an essential service,**
representing **diverse interests and bringing communities together***

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 and thought** – giving voice to ideas, issues and perspectives rarely heard in the mainstream media.

Community broadcasting continues to grow in response to community demand and is one of the great public policy success stories of the last thirty years.

Social Benefits

We make a difference to communities.

International research shows that the “community [media] sector is already making a substantial contribution to social cohesion, community engagement and regeneration”². Building active citizenship and increasing social inclusion is a key mission of community broadcasting which:

- **Engages many thousands of volunteers** in station governance, management and administration – every station has a committee of management and working committees
- **Promotes volunteering and community engagement**; 23,000 volunteers provide an estimated \$212 million worth of labour annually³
- **Develops transferable skills**. Key among these are ICT skills, broadcast technology, management capability and spoken and written communication. Over 7,500 people receive training each year, across all parts of the community. Many vulnerable groups, such as at risk youth or refugees, re-engage with practical learning in the accessible and engaging environment of community broadcasting.
- **Creates a rare opportunity for dialogue** that encourages understanding and assists to break down stereotypes and counter racism
- **Provides unique circumstances for self-representation** in the public sphere (this is particularly pertinent for underrepresented or misrepresented minority groups)
- **Promotes media literacy** and provides many people with their first experience of media production, including school and youth groups. Australia’s media acknowledge the important role community broadcasting plays as an industry training ground⁴.

With the emergence of digital technology the sector is now 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”⁵.

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 Peter Maynard, Promoting Social Cohesion: the role of community media, p.32
- 3 This estimate is based on the model established in Culture, Commitment, Community: The Australian Community Radio Sector. Forde, S., Meadows, M., and Foxwell, K., Griffith University, Brisbane 2002. - www.cbonline.org.au/
- 4 ABC submission to the House of Representatives – House Standing Committee, Department of Communications, Technology and the Arts Inquiry - www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/cita/community_broadcasting/subs/sub7.pdf
- 5 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/