

***The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications
Information and Technology and the Arts Inquiry into Community
Broadcasting – March 2006***

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Executive Summary

House of Representatives Community Broadcasting Inquiry March 2006

The NEMBC is a national peak organization representing and supporting ethnic community broadcasters. It is a strong advocate for multiculturalism and multilingualism and provides advocacy, support, and representation for its members and ethnic community broadcasting.

In making this submission we note the proposal made recently by the Minister for Communications Industry and the Arts - Senator Coonan, that the ABC 's funding be generated from advertising. Combined with the virtual halt to Government funding in this sector and the ABC suggests that all non commercial broadcasting in Australia may soon be extinct.

The model for broadcasting in Australia, established around 80 years ago has always been regarded as the best balance of commercial and non-commercial interests. It allowed for the full potential of each sector to be realized without compromise. For a young developing country it created a huge diversity of programming that by various means addressed the social and commercial needs of most of Australia. With the addition of the community broadcasting sector in the 1970's the media mix created a diverse democratic and inclusive broadcast community that was the envy of many countries. Only recently have countries in the Western world begun to catch up with the Australian model.

The NEMBC submission has argued that the community broadcasting sector is robust and extremely resourceful. Ethnic broadcasting has contributed hugely to the successful settlement of millions of immigrant Australians and continues to be a great representative of multiculturalism. The sector as a whole has made an immeasurable contribution to community resilience and national identity. Without the ethnic broadcasting sector a lot of damage will be done to ethnic communities,

Volunteers

Volunteerism is an important part of Australia's history and central to community broadcasting

We view with great concern the possibility that funding in the critical areas of infrastructure, training, digital radio and support for multicultural programming will not be revived. As a community driven by volunteer passion, funding is not just about paying bills. It is about honouring volunteer labour. It is a statement that publicly recognizes the significance of the gift that thousands of broadcasters make to their fellow Australians every day.

Volunteers are becoming a limited resource and their contribution of the equivalent of over \$145 million per year in unpaid wages sustains community radio. Without that contribution the sector would not function. Recognition of the importance of volunteer contribution is central to understanding the future of the sector.

Multiculturalism

The NEMBC supports multiculturalism and multilingualism as a core Australian value. It is the voice that underpins opportunity and tolerance at all levels of society. The NEMBC is deeply concerned about the erosion of multiculturalism as social policy. Recently, voices have been raised in opposition to multiculturalism. As a result many communities fear a resurgence of racism. The NEMBC is concerned that failure to support multiculturalism gives comfort to racists and alienates non-Anglo communities.

This is an opportunity here for all levels of government and society to join in building community resilience and a national identity. Multiculturalism is a conversation that cannot afford to be silenced. It needs the support of governments and the community. Ethnic community radio is the most significant and visible voice of multiculturalism.

Technical

Australians have demonstrated that they want community radio, and the sector itself has proved that it has the capacity to deliver. Without full support from government the ethnic broadcasting sector will have only limited access to digital radio. It is critical that the bulk of the sector be migrated to the new technology. The NEMBC has argued that the natural place for a shared multiplex arrangement is with the Special Broadcasting Service and not commercial broadcasters.

Training

Training has always been viewed by the NEMBC as the lifeblood of broadcasting. We view with concern the substantial reduction in training funds that has accompanied the demise of the Australian Ethnic Radio Training Program (AERTP). Despite reports that adequate and timely access to training and airtime improves settlement outcomes, current funding has not kept pace with sector needs. Those needs are particularly strong in refugee and new and emergent communities.

Conclusion

Immigration is a constant theme in Australian history and will remain so indefinitely. Ethnic community broadcasters understand that individually their work is unique and collectively their work, represents the real diversity of Australian culture.

The NEMBC recognizes that ethnic community radio performs many SBS services and some ABC chartered functions to present programming that informs our national identity and cultural diversity. They do this at a fraction of the cost of a fully funded SBS. In addition, they are able to provide ethnic programming to all corners of the continent.

The NEMBC urges the Inquiry to recognize the value of what has been a great and successful social experiment. Ethnic community broadcasting is the most cost effective sector in Australia, retaining its individuality and grassroots connections. It contributes to social harmony, tolerance and community resilience. To see it in any way diminished is to silence the voice of the Australian community.

Ultimately it is impossible to escape the issue of funding. A reversal of the current trend in Government support for the sector needs to be made. Substantial funding made over the next three to five years has the potential to lay the foundation from which ethnic broadcasting might build a stronger and more self sufficient future.

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The following submission is made by the National Ethnic Multicultural Broadcasters' Council – NEMBC. For the most part this submission confines its comments to ethnic broadcasting, but there are many areas where ethnic broadcasters' interests are congruent with the community broadcasting sector.

Role of the National Ethnic Multicultural Broadcasters' Council - NEMBC

NEMBC

The NEMBC is a not for profit, national peak organization representing and supporting ethnic community broadcasters. It is a strong advocate for multiculturalism and multilingualism and provides advocacy, support, and representation for all ethnic community broadcasters. It advocates on behalf of ethnic programmers broadcasting from around 125 stations in around 95 languages throughout Australia. Collectively they produce over 2000 hours of programming each week– double that of the Special Broadcasting Service.

The NEMBC represents its members and ethnic community broadcasting by:

- promoting and supporting multiculturalism, tolerance, and the need for language and cultural maintenance.
- working with government to ensure that policies for ethnic community broadcasters best represent the needs of the broadcasters.
- working with government to obtain adequate funding for ethnic community broadcasting on a national level.
- working with various ethnic sector bodies including Ethnic Community Councils, Offices of Multicultural Affairs in all states.
- work in partnership with stations to ensure that there is flexible, efficient and affordable training available that meets both the needs and budgets of stations and the special needs of ethnic broadcasters.
- providing regular relevant information to members, the ethnic broadcasters and information about upcoming funding, broadcaster laws, news and changes to the sector.
- Assist in dispute resolution between stations and management.
- The NEMBC represents the interest of all ethnic broadcasters, and currently has a special emphasis on fostering greater involvement in the sector by women, young people and members of refugee and emerging communities.

Members are not stations but individual language groups at each station. A major fulltime station might have 70 members who belong to the NEMBC and an access station like 2XX might have around 20 members.

Ethnic programs are eligible under certain conditions to receive Federal Government assisted funding delivered through the Community Broadcasting Foundation – CBF. The current rate is about \$35 per hour of which stations are entitled to keep a maximum of 75%.

Overall the NEMBC represents about 80% of ethnic programmers who receive Community Broadcasting Funding. The structure of the NEMBC office changes according to needs but generally speaking the secretariat absorbs around 8% of the total amount allocated to the ethnic broadcasting sector. An amount of \$265,000 has been budgeted to run the organization for the current financial year.

Despite the growth of ethnic community broadcasting many communities still do not have access to airtime. This is particularly relevant with some new and emergent communities. Airtime is needed for new broadcasters, but not at the expense of established communities. Aging communities continue to have a need for ethnic radio in order to communicate in their first language when their second language skills start to diminish with age.

More frequencies are needed for ethnic community broadcasting. Digital radio may help but there are serious concerns about the cost of digital radio and the level of access in terms of byte rates that will be offered to the ethnic community. The NEMBC will argue that in order to address the airtime problem, space should be made available to ethnic broadcasters on the Special Broadcasting Service – SBS digital multiplex.

The need for spectrum for the ethnic broadcasting sector has not diminished over time. On the contrary, there are more immigrant groups who regard early access to radio as a positive step toward good settlement prospects for their communities. Young people of non English speaking background are also being encouraged to become part of ethnic broadcasting. They are the future – the source of renewal of the sector and their role as cultural bridge builders is important. This is discussed further below.

The NEMBC is a strong supporter of Indigenous broadcasting. We understand that in terms of multilingualism and cultural maintenance there is common ground between immigrant communities and Indigenous communities.

This is an opportunity for government to demonstrate their support for volunteerism and the notion of community service. Funding is not just about keeping a technical resource running. It is about recognizing the collective strength and purpose that communities derive from shared activities that contribute to the common good.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across radio, television, the Internet and other technologies

Background

From its beginnings in the 1970s the ethnic community radio sector has given a voice to marginalized groups in the Australian community. For ethnic radio, this meant a large and diverse European community that had arrived after World War II. It also included the beginnings of large scale Asian migration in aftermath of the Vietnam War. In doing that ethnic community radio became the public manifestation of the social policy of multiculturalism. It demonstrated that recognizing a diversity of cultures is not necessarily synonymous with ghettoization. Inclusiveness and tolerance allowed all members of society access to opportunity.

The ethnic radio sector now broadcasts over 95 languages from 125 stations throughout Australia. There are around 4000 broadcasters involved in the delivery of settlement information, news, entertainment, music, language and cultural maintenance to their audiences. They continue to be one of the largest language workshops in Australia.

Currently there are seven major fulltime stations broadcasting exclusively in languages other than English, in each capital city. Another 88 stations carry a diverse mix of ethnic language as well as English language programming.

Stations carrying ethnic language programming receive Federal Government funding at the current rate of \$35 per hour. Over the last 10-12 years this figure has been reduced by more than half. To supplement their income stations rely on listener and organizational memberships, radiothons, donations and some level of advertising.

Physical conditions at stations vary considerably. Fulltime ethnic stations are generally better equipped than access stations. 3ZZZ as the biggest ethnic station in the sector is well equipped with current programming technology including digital scheduling software, which permits them to schedule and provide reports to advertisers. Stations that do not have equipment of that sophistication are less likely to get revenue from either government or commercial sources since they invariably require proof of play.

Most community stations grew from humble origins, operating out of premises that were borrowed, shared or leased at low rental. Twenty five years on, many are in need of renovation and updating. In some cases there are safety issues which are unable to be resolved because of insufficient funds.

Most stations still do not have access facilities for people with a disability. Except for the print handicapped stations almost none would have studio equipment designed for people with a disability. This is a discrimination issue, in that it denies a section of the community a role in community broadcasting. In most cases the problem could be

overcome with upgrades to buildings and equipment. There is some funding available from disability support organizations but it is generally not sufficient to meet the costs of substantial renovations.

Demographic and social factors

The NEMBC submits that profound demographic change has taken place in the last 10 years. It has created an urgent need for training and airtime in the ethnic broadcasting sector.

New Waves

For over 25 years ethnic community broadcasting has successfully accommodated every new wave of migration to this country. In the last ten years refugee and new and emergent communities have brought rapid demographic and cultural change.

With many of these groups came an expansion of Islamic culture in Australia at a level not experienced before. It is extremely regrettable that the events of 9/11 in 2001 made the initial settlement of these groups extremely difficult. Many of them faced levels of public abuse and hostility from politicians and people in the street. In some cases even getting to studios to present programs was difficult, particularly where public transport was involved. This was exacerbated where the presenter was a woman who had had to travel at night. One access station paid for taxis for a limited period for a Sudanese women's program. Ultimately the group had to temporarily suspend their programming as the travel became an insurmountable hurdle to broadcasting.

Young people from these communities are especially at risk. The Cronulla riots demonstrated how ignorance and intolerance can lead to large scale violence. This area of ethnic broadcasting has been the focus of special NEMBC support and targeted CBF funding for the last five years.

Generational Change

As ethnic communities age the importance of an active and well trained ethnic youth contingent is being revealed. Young people are the agents of renewal. The major hurdles to increasing youth involvement in ethnic community broadcasting are:

- Older ethnic programmers acting as cultural gatekeepers
- Lack of training funds
- Insufficient airtime
- Funding support for some of these activities

Several studies indicate that in most ethnic radio stations older people have become the cultural gatekeepers and are reluctant to entrust cultural maintenance to younger people. The question of "correct language" is of major concern to them. As the transmitters of "pure" language and culture from their homelands they fear that younger generations will not be able to maintain their cultural heritage.

Second generation youth, are caught between two cultures and often report a feeling of alienation and confusion about identity. The Community Relations Commission of NSW published a White Paper in 2002 which raised concerns about, "...a

*disproportionate number of young people from certain cultural groups ... becoming involved in risk-taking or anti-social behaviour.”*¹ The White Paper recommended that these young people be supported by a number of agencies including the media and the broader community. The NEMBC believes that this is a role ideally suited to ethnic community broadcasting where the infrastructure is already in place to train young people and get them on air. Cronulla has now made this a priority and multilingual broadcasting is an appropriate response to this.

Young people of ethnic backgrounds often have language skills that are regarded by their parents' generation as inadequate for broadcasting. There is a certain tension that exists since one of the major strands of ethnic broadcasting concerns cultural and language maintenance. Young people, often regarded as having indifferent language skills, are not readily admitted to the airtime they seek. Whilst the NEMBC argues for continued support for aging ethnic populations we believe that it is critical that young people of non English speaking background are heard.

Young people are the key to building racial tolerance and understanding . Multilingual broadcasters have the capacity to reach more diverse audiences and to take up the role of cultural bridge builders.

A recent NEMBC study concluded that more outreach work was needed, and that appropriate training would attract and retain more young people at stations. Working with schools was seen as an ideal way of building a culture of aspiring community broadcasters. Young people will also use the newer technologies more easily and will undoubtedly create different ways of programming and listening. This is already happening with the internet – podcasting and 3G phone technology for example.

Summary

The change in demographic profile, as described, demonstrates more than ever the need for increased air time for young people and refugee and new and emergent communities.

It is unlikely that any new analogue licences will become available and with limited access to digital broadcasting these pressing needs go unmet. Some technologies such as internet will be of use to youth programmers but may be less readily taken up by other groups.

¹ Community Relations Commission, NSW. White Paper, *Cultural Harmony – The Next Decade 2002* – 2012 p.26

Economic factors

The political and economic conditions in which community radio currently operates, have undergone significant change over the last 20 years. Based originally on a democratic access model, community radio placed participation and diversity at the centre of its aims. Today the sector is heavily influenced by an economic rationalist, market driven philosophy. With diminishing Government support the community radio sector has been driven to look to commercial sources of income. That has had varying degrees of success.

Stations in metropolitan areas have generally been more successful in generating income than regional stations. Income is derived from two main sources, listener sponsorship, commercial sponsorship and limited advertising. A number of stations are of the view that funds available from listener support are beginning to 'bottom out'. Many ethnic programs have been supported by small businesses whose clients are members of the same ethnic community. They might be local businesses such as estate agents, car dealers or banks. Both these sources of income have a finite limit, which ethnic stations like 3ZZZ believe are close to being reached.

Commercial and philanthropic sources of income are not a viable long-term option for the ethnic broadcasting sector. Advertising time would need to increase which would then eat into programming time. Most media and finance commentators reject any suggestion that organizations such as community radio or the ABC could rely on advertising as a substantial source of revenue. They cite strong resistance from the commercial sector and the meagreness of the national advertising budget as limiting factors.

A major concern with commercialization has been expressed in a study conducted by Tacchi and Price-Davis in 2001. In looking at the Canadian community radio experience of funding through commercial advertising the Price Davis study showed that: "... stations that attract large amounts of advertising revenue did so by imitating commercial services and thus lose the sense of what community stations should be."²

Some regional community stations have resorted to taking networked talk programs such as the John Laws Show from capital city franchises. The NEMBC is of the opinion that this kind of programming whilst providing income, belies to any claims of localism and the expression of grassroots voices. Recently, regional listeners relying on networked programs for up-to-date information on cyclone Larry were lulled into dangerous false security by reports coming from another state that were 24 hours out of date.

For ethnic radio, the capital city full-time ethnic stations have generally been successful in servicing large diverse audiences and creating solid financial and administrative infrastructures. Unfortunately, ethnic programming at some access stations has been seen by their managements as an impediment to generating income by sponsorship. As a result, new ethnic programming does not get introduced and existing shows are either moved to less favourable time slots or removed altogether.

² Price-Davis, E., and Tacchi, Jo. *A Comparative Study of Community Radio – Designing a Model for 'Access' Radio in the UK*. Australian Broadcast Series ISSN 1445-971X Vol.1 No3 September 2001 p.8

The NEMBC has strong concerns about any move to force community broadcasters to take on more advertising. We believe that it tends to reduce access for ethnic broadcasters and will undermine the communalism of the sector. Proposals to expand cross media ownership, recently announced by Senator Coonan, do not assist community broadcasters. The competition for advertising revenue is already strong and further penetration of capital city networks into regional areas will have a negative impact on community stations who be forced to compete with franchises for advertising dollars. The National Party and regional small business and have already aired their concerns about this since the release of the Coonan proposal.

SUMMARY

The ethnic radio sector is diverse and robust. In thirty years it has reflected the cultural diversity of the Australian community. It has done that with limited funds and a huge volunteer contribution. The NEMBC believes that we are close to a point where non-Government funding is close to exhaustion.

The change in demographic profile demonstrates more than ever the need for increased air time for young people, refugees and new and emergent communities. Without the issuing of new analogue licences and with limited access to digital broadcasting these pressing needs go unmet. Some new technologies such as internet will be of limited value to youth broadcasting.

Advertising revenue or commercial sponsorship is not an option since this radically changes the nature of community radio.

The NEMBC does not support commercialization of the sector beyond the current arrangements. Our major concern is that diversity and localism be undermined.

#2 Content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity.

The NEMBC submission will comment on the key elements that we understand contribute to Australian life and identity. Diversity is a central theme that, coupled with democracy, represents the broad aspirational values of the community. Together they signify equality and access to opportunity for all Australians. Colloquially they represent the popular expression of “a fair go”.

The NEMBC will also comment on multiculturalism, localism and democracy as an expression of Australian identity.

Multiculturalism

The doctrine of multiculturalism has been a defining element that has informed Australian life for the last 30 years. As a social policy it relies on the fact that

Australia is a democratic society that guarantees our freedom and human rights. It has been a progressive and stable social philosophy that promotes diversity as a virtue and in so doing encourages tolerance and understanding of other cultures.

Multiculturalism calls on all Australians to exercise tolerance and respect for other cultures. Relying on the principle of inclusivity or “unity in diversity” it finds its tangible and public expression in ethnic community radio.

Multiculturalism also has international ramifications. The National Multicultural Advisory Council’s report of 1997³ makes a strong case for the value of cultural diversity as an asset to the nation. The study points to our improved image in Asia since old assimilationist policies were abandoned in the seventies. It also highlights its value to overseas trade where business, government and the community work together in loose partnerships known as “public diplomacy”. A multicultural nation fosters diversity which encourages a better understanding and greater sensitivity to the customs, languages and social networks of other countries.

Volunteers

The history of community radio is a history of volunteers. It is their contribution to building and maintaining stations that is the strength of ethnic community broadcasting today. Volunteering is an activity that has been a central part of the Australian identity since white settlement. From fighting bushfires and emergency services to working in hospitals and schools, volunteer labour has been an important part of the sustainability of many public institutions. It is no less true for community broadcasting. Research by Griffith University⁴ estimates that volunteers contribute around \$145 million each year in unpaid work (more than \$4 billion over 25 years). Many of them are unwaged or on pensions.

The Griffith University study noted that a majority of volunteers in the sector were of the ‘baby boomer’ generation with numbers falling off after that. The community broadcasting sector has gained strength over 30 years and understands what it means to have to fight hard for its place in Australian media. It has proved itself to be robust and it values its political and creative independence.

Community radio is a highly inclusive and democratic entity. It provides an opportunity for a high level of volunteer involvement devoted to programming and generally supporting the governance and administrative functions of stations. Community radio represents the passions and aspirations of grassroots Australian culture.

The involvement of volunteers in community radio brings with it a central feature of the character of Australian life - its diversity and love of democracy. The community broadcasting sector was conceived as a democratic expression of grassroots empowerment. All stations have elected committees of management. Regulations overseen by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) oblige

³ National Advisory Council. *Australian multiculturalism for a new century Towards Inclusiveness*. April 19 99. pp.63 -65

⁴ Forde, S. Foxwell K and Meadows M. *Culture, Commitment Community- the Australian Community Radio Sector* Griffith University 2002 p28

stations to abide by a broadcasting code of practice and must have in place dispute resolution processes.

The democratic structure of community radio imposes few restrictions on involvement in community broadcasting. Training is a must however, and over the last 20 years the sector has trained thousands of people. In the last ten years the Australian Ethnic Radio Training Project (AERTP) was the focus of ethnic training. That project ended in 2004 after funding was withdrawn.

It is perhaps worth remembering that many ethnic program presenters are community leaders who have considerable influence in their communities. They are deeply committed to providing a cultural resource to their communities and taking up the challenge of multiculturalism.

Localism -Community radio as a local resource

Community radio contributes two major services to the community. The first of these is its on-air role as a broadcaster of news, entertainment and information. Its other role is that of a community centre that people can visit to exchange local news, seek advice about government or private services, housing, jobs, or other legal and health services. Some stations are able to provide more structured facilities such as meeting rooms and notice boards where people seek information and support. Limited child care for trainees and broadcasters is sometimes available.

News

For ethnic groups associated with itinerant and factory labour, community stations have proved important source of information for workers and employers. That information might also include government notices about work visas and citizenship status. The extent to which they act as a meeting place contributes to building community strength and resilience. Their localism gives them credibility and immediate access to the air.

This is a service that is not duplicated by SBS, the ABC or commercial broadcasters.

News services provided by ethnic community broadcasters mediate against the sometimes undesirable influence of foreign news services. The latter are generally produced to serve the national interests of the country from which they emanate. As such they are often hostile to the tenets of multiculturalism. Locally generated ethnic news services are broadcast in an Australian context giving the immediacy and localism that is implied.

SUMMARY

Multiculturalism is progressive and stable social philosophy that promotes diversity as a virtue and in so doing encourages tolerance and understanding of other cultures.

Volunteers are the life blood of the community broadcasting sector.

Community broadcasting is built on democracy, inclusiveness and the empowerment of communities.

Localism builds community resilience and shapes the national character.

#3 Technology Opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks

Australians have demonstrated that they want community radio. The sector itself has proved that it has the capacity to deliver. The move to digital broadcasting threatens to leave many stations that have ethnic programming behind. The ethnic community radio sector as a whole does not have the resources to take part in digital radio even if sufficient spectrum was made available. There is some suggestion that in the long term more space might be found on other bandwidths. At present the community sector has been offered a total of 512 Kb. Without full support from government the ethnic broadcasting sector will have only limited access to digital radio. It is critical that the bulk of the sector be migrated to the new technology. The NEMBC believes that the natural place for a shared multiplex arrangement is with the Special Broadcasting Service and not commercial broadcasters.

Other technical developments in program delivery may offer possibilities for different forms of program delivery. The internet revolution has opened up the possibility of MP3 broadcasting (podcasting). It is likely that these forms will be highly attractive to younger broadcasters who value the ability to deliver and receive program material independently of location.

Most of the larger ethnic stations have also moved in to web streaming where programs can be heard 'live' or as an archive. Many ethnic communities place a high value on that as it allows them to hear programs they would have otherwise missed by being at work.

The internet and associated technologies offer the possible to prepare and present programs off-site. While this greatly increases programming options it threatens to erode some of the ethos of community broadcasting where people actually attend the station and meet and interact with other members of the community.

The critical issue in the development of new technology is the need for total government support. The initial cost will be high but it is a step that would contribute to the long term sustainability of the ethnic community broadcasting sector.

#4 Opportunities and Threats to Achieving a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters

Multiculturalism

The NEMBC believes that this is an opportunity for the government to provide political and moral leadership by publicly endorsing multiculturalism as a way of building national identity.

Multiculturalism has been a social philosophy that has paved the way for successful settlement for more than one hundred different ethnic groups over the last thirty years. It has proved to be a robust and resilient doctrine and is the foundation of ethnic broadcasting. The NEMBC continues to be a strong proponent of multiculturalism. We have been dismayed by the utterances recently of a number of people who have publicly misrepresented both its rationale and its success.

The NEMBC is concerned that there appears to be antagonism to multiculturalism in some quarters. We are of the view that multiculturalism has been of great benefit to the Australian community as a whole. It has begun to be portrayed as the vehicle by which core Australian values are undermined by immigrant groups. The NEMBC is concerned that failure to support multiculturalism gives comfort to racists and alienates non-Anglo communities. There is an opportunity here for all levels of government and society to engage in building community resilience. Multiculturalism has allowed all Australians to participate in Australian life. It is a philosophy of tolerance and inclusiveness.

The riots in Cronulla last December have been described by most commentators as racist. This has been publicly disputed by others. One thing that remains clear is that there is a lot of work to be done to ease the tensions between Middle Eastern youth and mainstream Australia.

Reports coming after those riots suggest three significant features. A deep offence felt by many Muslims about insults to the Prophet and the fear of attacks on their families. The third was a deep sense of hurt that many young people born in Australia of Middle Eastern origin felt at being made to feel that they were not Australians.

For some so-called Australians there seems to be a confusion about what exactly an Australian is when it is not them. There is clearly a need for some expression or restatement or re-education of what multiculturalism means. That is best done by example through the media and by government support.

Ethnic community broadcasting is a living example of multiculturalism in action. Whilst it lives the message, it is to some extent invisible to the wider Anglophone audience. Multilingual/multicultural programs presented by young people are a powerful and non-confrontational way of informing people as to the benefits of social policy. Since parts of the program are in English it makes possible dialogues that lead to cross-cultural exploration and the possibility of better understanding. The ethnic sector has a number of multilingual shows including an Arabic youth program broadcast from 3CR. With talkback and short dramatic pieces, that program

demonstrates powerfully the possibility of spontaneous mutual understanding. Shared experiences are powerful allies.

The NEMBC sees ethnic community radio as an excellent opportunity to reinvigorate the policy of multiculturalism. It needs bipartisan support from government. The National Multicultural Advisory Council⁵ argues that the maintenance of cultural diversity needs to be actively managed in order to maximise the best aspects of the policy. That includes education and training campaigns across schools, business and government.

Training

The possibility of reduced funding for training is a real threat to the ethnic community sector. Training has always been viewed by the NEMBC as the only way in which renewal can take place. We view with concern the substantial reduction in training funds that has accompanied the demise of the Australian Ethnic Radio Training Program (AERTP). Ethnic community broadcasting calls for specific training skills that are unique to the sector. For ethnic broadcasting to progress, a long term commitment by government to maintain funding is needed. Despite reports that adequate and timely access to training and airtime improves settlement outcomes, current funding has not kept pace with sector needs. The NEMBC urges the Inquiry to recommend that training for the whole community sector be reinvigorated along the lines of the AETRP project.

Community radio and the role of the ABC

A recent survey through McNair Ingenuity has demonstrated that the community broadcasting sector is becoming more popular among Australians. It is a sector that has gained strength over 30 years and understands what it means to have to fight for its place in the Australian media. It has shown itself to be robust and innovative and it values its independence politically and creatively. Each day it demonstrates its ability to give expression to the cultural diversity of Australian society. That diversity is a central part of the Australian identity.

In terms of expressing the Australian identity and cultural diversity the community radio sector, has to some extent, inherited the mantle that once belonged to the ABC. The ABC Charter, among other things, ordains the broadcast of programs that:

- (i) “.... that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community.

The NEMBC submits that the community broadcasting sector plays a large part in achieving this aim. We also note that regular cuts to their funding has reduced the ABC’s capacity to engage with the cultural diversity of Australian life. Local ABC radio and television sees itself as a rival to commercial operators and has developed a concern for ratings that distract it from its Chartered obligations.

In terms of value for money the community broadcasting sector, has improved its productivity by increasing audience reach and service.

⁵ National Advisory Council. *op.cit.* p.67

The NEMBC believes that this is an opportunity for the Government to recognize the real contribution that community broadcasting makes to Australian life. We believe that it should be reflected in funding support for infrastructure development.

Expansion of non- community sector broadcasters.

It is anticipated that the changes recently announced by the Minister (14/3/06) to media ownership will have a big impact on the community broadcasting sector. In particular, an anticipated growth in regional broadcasting is expected where relaxation of cross media and foreign ownership rules require only four media groups in a region for a merger to go ahead. It is anticipated that the change to cross ownership laws will encourage greater penetration in regional areas.

That comes on top of the introduction of mainstream commercial and Government metro services being networked to regional areas. That has been damaging to particularly Indigenous and ethnic broadcasters in remote areas where community radio is a centre for communal activity not directly related to broadcasting.

New Cross Media Laws/ Media Concentration

Under the new media laws TV networks will be able acquire capital city talk radio stations' news services. In seeking cost savings it is anticipated that fewer journalists will be employed and news bulletins become more homogenized. They will be written for a "one size fits all" generic audience that will see them removed even further from the lives and work of most Australians.

There is an opportunity for community radio to fill the growing vacuum of content driven radio. In order to realize the potential in this area community radio must have the infrastructure and personnel to provide those services.

The most compelling statistic that comes through from the McNair and Griffith University surveys and research is the ever widening gap between the two resources of people and money. Volunteers contribute more time to this sector than any other volunteer activity in Australia. Conversely the Federal Government funding available to the sector for real developmental work has shrunk dramatically. Now only 7% of stations' operating costs are met by government funding.

The results of a recently released survey of the ABC has made clear that the sector is also being dried up. One might be excused for thinking that the government is driving all non-commercial broadcasting (community and Government) to a place where they have no option but to take on advertising in order to maintain their services. This runs counter to all the principles of both the ABC and community broadcasting.

The ethos of community broadcasting is that it was intended to become a place for marginalized voices. Among other things it was intended to be a place where the real diversity of Australian life could be expressed.

Financial instability

The greatest threat to ethnic community broadcasting is the possible withdrawal of government funding support. Australia does not have the population to support a sector fully funded by public donations. Community radio is growing in popularity as more and more mainstream radio and television becomes blander and less relevant in

pursuit of the advertising dollar. The McNair Ingenuity survey 2004 shows that Australians are turning to community radio more and more in search of content in programming delivered by “real” people.

Commercial and philanthropic sources of income are not a viable long-term option for the whole sector. Advertising time would need to increase and then would eat into time that could otherwise be used for programming. Most media and finance commentators reject any suggestion that organizations such as community radio or the ABC could rely on advertising as a substantial source of revenue. They cite strong resistance from the commercial sector and the meagreness of the national advertising budget as limiting factors.

Since the introduction of the GST in the year 2000, operating costs have risen dramatically. The introduction of GST contributed 10% to the CPI in that year alone and the crisis in the insurance industry pushed up the cost of insurance for stations. They are obliged to carry a number of insurances – general, Workcover, volunteer, travel, public liability and defamation. In metro access stations with an annual expenditure of \$500,000 this can amount to \$25,000. With the addition of royalties, sector membership, audit and accounting fees, cost can amount to over \$50,000 per year – more than 10% of annual budget.

Running a community radio station has become a business with high compliance costs. The fact that most stations rely on Government funding for only 7% of their running costs is remarkable. It is all the more remarkable given that most supporters of community radio are on low or no income other than pensions.

As funding for ethnic programming shrinks so stations are forced to rely more on the community and supporting organizations. A number of stations charge studio fees to cover the costs of broadcasting - \$60 is not uncommon. Many ethnic community organizations that support a program on a community radio are now finding it difficult to maintain their involvement in the program. The difficulty is always money.

SUMMARY

The NEMBC believes that this is an opportunity for the government to provide political and moral leadership by publicly endorsing multiculturalism as a way of building national identity.

Ethnic community broadcasting is a living example of multiculturalism in action. The NEMBC sees ethnic community radio as an excellent opportunity to reinvigorate the policy of multiculturalism.

The NEMBC urges the Inquiry to recommend that training for the whole community sector be renewed along the lines of the former AERTP project.

The NEMBC submits that the ethnic broadcasting sector performs many chartered functions of the ABC and SBS – at much less cost and with greater reach. This is an opportunity for the government to fund the sector as a major broadcaster of government social service information.

A significant threat to regional community radio are the newly proposed laws that relax cross media ownership and allow for greater penetration of mainstream media in to rural and regional areas. They threaten localism, community resilience and the creation of revenue from the region.

The greatest threat to the ethnic community broadcasting sector is the withdrawal of government funding. Australia does not have the population to support a sector fully funded by public donations or advertising revenue.