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MEDIA RELEASE

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ALP RECOGNISES IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY BROADCASTING

In a major step the ALP National Conference last weekend recognised the importance of community broadcasting and amended its draft platform to commit a future Government to ensure that “adequate public funding must be provided to community and indigenous radio and television or their effective ongoing operation”.

Moved by Shadow Communications Minister Senator Stephen Conroy and seconded by Arts spokesman Peter Garrett, the platform also commits the ALP to improve the capacity of community stations by providing support for content production skills, infrastructure and the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting.

NEMBC president George Zangalis, who also represented the broader community broadcasting sector at the Conference, welcomed the new platform as a significant step forward for the ALP.

“We are delighted that for the first time at an ALP National Conference community broadcasting has had such prominent support and acknowledgement. Senator Conroy took the time to meet with sector representatives prior to the conference and began a dialogue, which has resulted in very positive outcomes through amendments to the platform.

“Further, the sector has been invited to continue the discussion about the specific needs of the sector in the run up to the election later this year. We welcome that opportunity.” Mr Zangalis said. “We look forward to a similarly productive dialogue with the Coalition on the needs of the sector.”

In an accompanying resolution the National Conference said the Howard Government has “failed to adequately support the community broadcasting sector and has overseen a decline in real funding in the sector”.

George Zangalis said the resolution went considerably further than the platform and may give an insight into initiatives a future Labor Government could take to address funding problems in the sector.

“The resolution is positive recognition that community broadcasting, including ethnic and indigenous services, have suffered real funding cuts over the last decade. While the number of services grew by 54% over that time, total funding per radio station dropped by nearly 20%.

“In the 2007 joint budget submission the NEMBC, the Community Broadcasting Association and other sector peak bodies called for significant funding increases from the current \$8 million per year to \$25.4m.

That threefold increase isn't an ambit claim. It is what we actually need to keep many stations afloat and to help make the technology leap from analogue to digital transmission. For the ethnic, indigenous and print disability broadcasters the per hour funding for content production has dropped by 25% over the last decade and content isn't funded at all for other community broadcasters."

Mr Zangalis called on the Coalition to also acknowledge the importance of community broadcasting at the policy level prior to the election. However, he stressed that more needs to be done.

"Acknowledgement is an important first step. The real test will be the funding commitments made during the election campaign. We will be working hard with all parties and mobilising our listeners to ensure that broad policy translates into real help for broadcasters and better services for our communities.

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