



**The National Ethnic and Multicultural
Broadcasters' Council (NEMBC)**

**Submission to
Department of Broadband, Communications and the
Digital Economy, for the**

Terms of Reference for the Convergence Review

28 January 2011

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Dear Sir/Madam

The National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council (NEMBC) thanks the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy for the opportunity to respond to the Convergence Review Terms of Reference.

The NEMBC recommends that the Terms of Reference consider a new policy parameter that includes '*availability, affordability and accessibility of media content and communications services for the whole community*'. The conclusion in this report has the full recommendation. The following report provides the background material and qualifies this inclusive recommendation.

DIGITAL

The NEMBC recognises the distinct and important role that community broadcasting offers society and would like the government to ensure through legislation the same entitlements to digital capacity as the national broadcasters.

The NEMBC recognises that community broadcasting (including streaming audio and video) should not be disadvantaged in the digital environment so that it can continue to play its unique role in community development, education, health information resource, social inclusion and support for cultural and linguistic minority communities.

Website - Presenting Australia to the world

Ethnic Community Broadcasters retain strong links with communities in their country of origin as well as diaspora communities. Community broadcasting has already embraced innovative technology to connect dispersed communities and share local (Australian) information with dispersed communities around the world through increased web capacity including streamed digital content.

The NEMBC is currently developing an innovative and cutting edge website that will use communications technology to connect dispersed communities of culturally and linguistic youth through different localities around Australian and the world. These networks are a great way of transmitting information and knowledge and negotiating culture and identity.

It is important to recognise the diversity of the media sector in Australia, which is globally recognised as unique and impressive, in particular its community broadcasting sector.

Community Broadcasting as the third sector media.

To have a healthy and effective national broadcasting sector you need to have a sustainable and effective community broadcasting sector. These services are distinct and complementary, and must be adequately supported and recognised for their particular roles in serving the communication needs of this diverse country.

The founding principles of community broadcasting is built on community involvement, access and participation and providing a resource of information and entertainment to the community. International research shows that the “community sector is already making a substantial contribution to social cohesion, community engagement and regeneration”¹

Community broadcasting establishes:

- A local workforce of volunteerism
- Empowers people through training and the acquisition of skills
- The rare opportunity for self-representation in the public sphere, (this is particularly pertinent for minority communities who are underrepresented or misrepresented in mainstream media)
- Actively fights racism and counters stereotypes
- Community broadcasting provides educational and social opportunities
- Assists community members to seek employment
- Strengthens local economies.

Community broadcasting’s participatory, non-commercial and collaborative ethos promotes cultural, social and linguistic meeting places and communication spaces, which are unlikely in any other setting. The commutative, independent and creative nature of community broadcasting encourages innovation, diversity and self-representation. In this way, community broadcasting becomes a site of difference, which creates a unique and rare opportunity for dialogue that encourages understanding and social cohesion.

Community broadcasting is also a site of cultural and linguistic negotiation. Members of different ethnic backgrounds can participate in a language program together and through their differences can open up understanding and common ground. This contact between different ethnic groups when operating and producing community radio programs is often taken for granted; As Peter Lewis found, “the contact between different community groups contributing to a community media project as they negotiate the allocation of airtime and/or resources underlines the importance of the co-presence necessitated by community broadcasting of this kind. That different members of the local public sphere come together facilitates social cohesion”.²

Migration and Multiculturalism

Ethnic community broadcasting is a vital service for migrants and refugees as they establish themselves in a new country. This settlement role is exemplified in the following extract from the Griffith University Community Media Matters Report, 2007

“A Sudanese focus group participant reiterated the importance of not just hearing news from the home country, but being able to easily access local and national news from Australia through Sudanese-language programming: Because you don’t have much time here to meet with all your friends... and especially when you’re driving, you turn the station on and it attracts you, . . . its something in your own language and it keeps you occupied and abreast of what’s happening.

¹ Peter Maynard, *Promoting Social Cohesion: the role of community media*, p.32

² Peter Maynard, *Promoting Social Cohesion: the role of community media*,p.38

And again it talks about issues that are also happening in the country itself, not just overseas.”³

A member of the Turkish focus group further clarified the importance of ethnic-language programming in providing essential Centrelink and government information:

“As we’re living here, we’re able to hear what our responsibilities are and also our rights are here, like for example, when you hear information about Centrelink, or about taxation office, traffic infringement notices to be aware of those and what to do and what not to do. Legal, family matters, divorces, domestic violence, those kinds of things, to get those information in Turkish. To understand these matters wrongly or understand them a little bit does not, will not help you.”⁴

Moreover, ethnic and multicultural community broadcasting not only connects migrant and refugee communities with their local communities it also assists with the integration and inclusion into Australian society. Several participants in the Turkish focus group of the Community Media Matters report, felt this is one of the key roles of the program, which at the time broadcast only one hour per week:

“The radio, this radio station is not separating us from Australia, as our friend said before, it’s integrating us to Australia, It’s very important. Our children are growing up Australians anyway, maybe they’re having difficulty adapting culturally, but through the radio, they will be able to get some help or adapt anyway. And also we see our differences as richness, in Turkey too, where we come from different backgrounds and things that, backgrounds, we’re living the same thing here too and we’re happy about that. Everyone’s got their own different folklore, folklore and songs and everything else so we have that here too and we’re happy with that.”⁵

Such testimony underscores the value of ethnic and multicultural community broadcasting for social inclusion and engaged citizenship.

Localism

Community broadcasting is community driven at all levels of media production, which distinguishes it from national public broadcasting. Community broadcasting is a true example of civil participation and should be supported by the government for this role.

- Community broadcasting, given its commitment to access and participation in all aspects of broadcasting including, production, announcing, governance, and administration, is therefore in a much better position to connect with its constituents. If the government is committed to, ‘allowing people with similar interests to communicate and participate in local communities’, this commitment should be reflected in greater recognition and support of community broadcasting to sustain this service of localism.
- Localism plays a vital role for the social inclusion of minority voices.

³ Michael Meadows, Susan Ford, Jacqui Ewart, Kerrie Foxwell, *Community Media Matters: An audience study of the Australian community broadcasting sector*, p.79

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Michael Meadows, Susan Ford, Jacqui Ewart, Kerrie Foxwell, *Community Media Matters: An audience study of the Australian community broadcasting sector*, p.79

Diversity in Communication

Pluralistic communication, involves dialogue through a number of alternative public spheres. In Georgina Born's investigation of public broadcasting in the UK she asserted that a variety of communication fora is required to adequately address the needs of a diverse population. Communication involves, the majority (public broadcaster) hosting divergent and contesting minority perspectives, minorities speaking to both majority and to other minorities: intercultural communication. (This is well served by both public and community broadcasting) and a third form is when minority speaks to minority (or to itself): intracultural communication. This particular aspect of communication is unique to community broadcasting and is vital to representing, understanding and acknowledging minority voices.⁶

Conclusion

The NEMBC requests that when considering national broadcasting and similar forms of communication (including podcasting, vodcasting, streaming audio and streaming video) the government acknowledgements and considers the complementary, mutual and unique role of community media in terms of fulfilling the objectives of national media policy, including: universality, localism, Australian content, comprehensive and diverse programming, diversity of news and information, education, innovation and quality. To effectively address the needs of a national broadcasting system NEMBC recommends the following:

That the Terms of Reference be amended by inserting a new Term of Reference 5(f) with Terms of Reference 5(f) and 5(g) renumbered as 5(g) and 5(h).

5(f) appropriate regulatory settings and legislative amendments to ensure the availability, affordability and accessibility of media content and communications services for the whole community, with particular attention to people with disabilities, Indigenous and ethnic Australians, migrants and other potentially marginalised groups.

Yours sincerely



Tangi Steen
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NEMBC

⁶ Georgina Born, 'Digitising democracy', in (eds.) J. Lloyd and J. Seaton, *What Can Be Done? Making the Media and Politics Better*, pp. 102-23. Special book issue of *Political Quarterly*. Oxford: Blackwell. ISBN: 1 4051 3693 6. p.11