

Answers
to questions raised by the
Productivity Commission,
Brisbane 17 December
regarding
THE INDIGENOUS
BROADCASTING SERVICE (IBS)

Prepared for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)
December 1999

Q 1: DO YOU HAVE A MASTER PLAN FOR THE IBS?

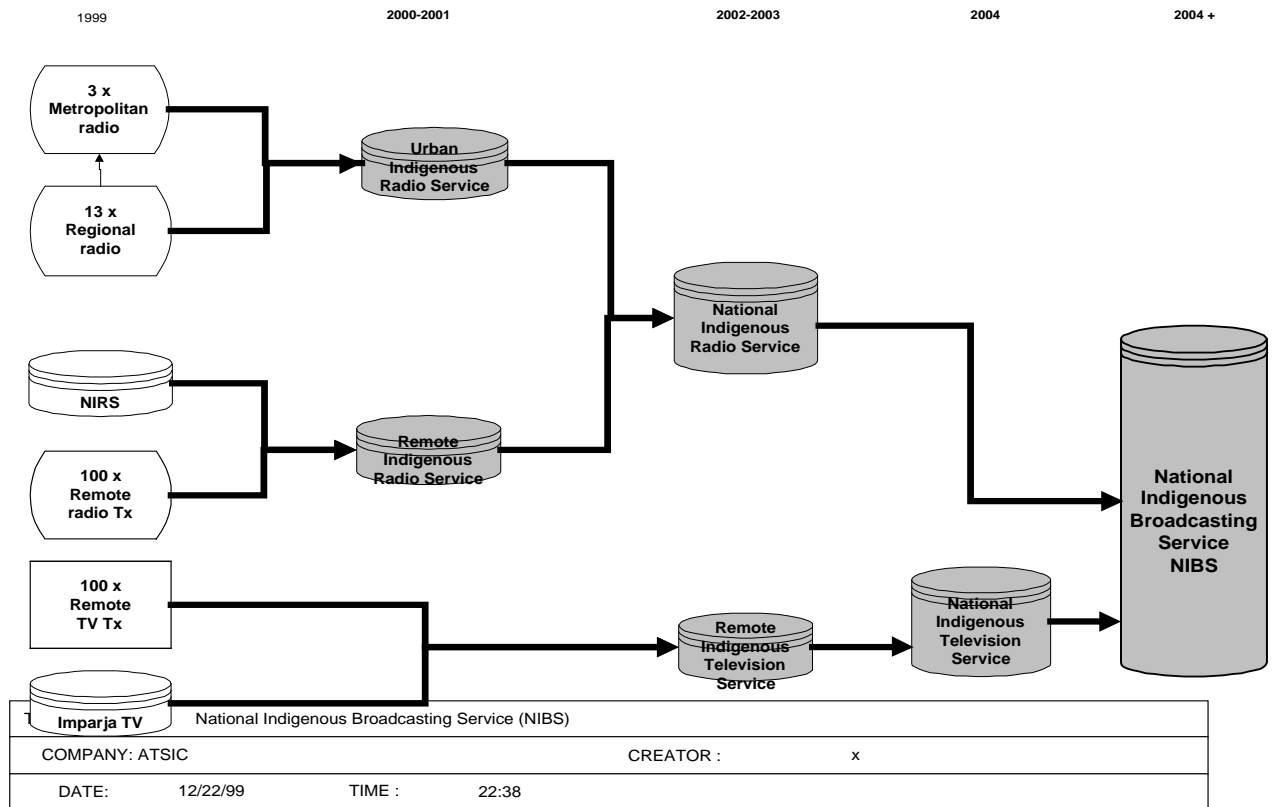
1. It is important to state at the outset that we are not breaking new ground. An Indigenous broadcasting service already exists.
 - there are currently 116 Indigenous radio stations and 101 television stations regularly presenting programs, mostly to Indigenous audiences, but often to mainstream audiences as well; e.g. both 4AAA Brisbane (radio) and Imparja TV Alice Springs (television) report that 70% of their audience are non-Indigenous.
2. These existing Indigenous stations have been partially supported by government (through ATSIC) for more than a decade. We are now attempting to consolidate this achievement.
3. The concept we are presenting is not whether to establish an Indigenous service, but how to develop these existing 'building blocks' into a national service.
4. The national Indigenous Broadcasting Service (IBS) will perform two distinct, but complementary functions:
 - a) to provide a primary (first level) broadcasting service to Indigenous Australians.
 - b) to inform mainstream Australians about our Indigenous peoples and their cultures.
5. Full development of an IBS is necessarily linked to the establishment of digital broadcasting.
 - the television side of the IBS is so integrally dependent upon multichannelling that it cannot come to fruition before a digital environment has been achieved. The digital environment will begin in 2001.
6. Nevertheless, it is possible to consolidate existing developments. The process should begin at once and take place in four main stages:

Stage 1: 2000-2001	Remote Indigenous Radio Service Urban Indigenous Radio Service
Stage 2: 2002-2003	National Indigenous Radio Service Remote Indigenous Television Service

Stage 3: 2004 National Indigenous Television Service

Stage 4: 2005 National Indigenous Broadcasting Service

7. These four stages are presented schematically below.



Q 2: IS RADIO YOUR FIRST PRIORITY?

1. Yes, because:
 - substantial radio services already exist
 - radio is a particularly suitable medium for communities with a strong oral tradition
 - remote communities already generate a substantial output of local (community-oriented) radio programming
 - radio is less capital and skill intensive than television; and
 - costs are therefore much lower

2. As illustrated schematically above, development of a national (as opposed to remote area) television service cannot begin before digitisation of terrestrial transmissions.

Q3: WHAT IS YOUR REACTION TO THE NOTION OF GIVING THE SBS PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR INDIGENOUS BROADCASTING?

1. Our main concern would be perceptions in the Indigenous communities. The ABC is widely regarded as the 'First Eleven' and it would be important to ensure that they do not see themselves as once again fobbed off with second best; i.e. bundled in with the foreigners. We must acknowledge that Indigenous people are not migrants – they are the first Australians. To put the same point more positively, the core issue is a sense of ownership by the Indigenous communities.
2. In fact, we have already arranged preliminary talks with the SBS in the New Year. However, nothing has yet been discussed, let alone decided.
3. Although we are aware that it is intended that they eventually replicate the ABC transmission network, the SBS lacks some of the transmission outlets currently available to the ABC,.
4. Allowing this caveat, the SBS has demonstrated its good will towards the Indigenous communities in the past. And it does possess much of the infrastructure needed to support development of an IBS. This applies to production, transmission and technical support as well as the critical area of program sales and purchasing (SBS Independent).
5. If this was the route government eventually chose to take, the best way to meet Indigenous community concerns would not be to bundle IBS in with the SBS, but to establish an independent statutory IBS which could negotiate contractual services with the SBS, leaving the way open for possible future stand alone operations.

Urban Indigenous media audiences in Australia

Associate Professor Michael Meadows, Australian Key centre for Cultural and Media Policy, January 2000.

Introduction

Despite a lack of attention paid to the nature of urban Indigenous audiences in Australia, there is growing international research evidence of Indigenous audience preferences for locally-produced Indigenous programming in remote, rural and urban areas. Australian Indigenous audience research to date has tended to focus on remote areas although the 1996 Census identifies most Indigenous people living in urban centres. Until the mid 1990s, research into urban Indigenous audiences was ignored.

Relevant research

Australia

Ethnographic research in Central and Northern Australia has investigated ways in which Indigenous people produce their own material, and how they watch introduced television and videotapes. But it has also identified strong support and interest by Indigenous audiences in locally-produced programming on radio and television.ⁱ This perception amongst Indigenous media workers in Australia was overwhelmingly expressed to the team of researchers working on the 1998 ATSIC Review of Indigenous Media Policy. This anecdotal evidence was not included in the brief executive summary of the review, *Digital Dreaming*.ⁱⁱ

The first urban-based Indigenous audience survey was of Radio 4AAA's listeners in Brisbane in 1997. The station had amassed some anecdotal evidence of the extent of its coverage and support—from truck and taxi drivers, private car owners, businesses, and private dwellings—but there was no 'hard data'. The research gathered quantitative data through a Roy Morgan telephone survey, and qualitative data through 'key people' interviews and focus group discussions applying a method used successfully with Indigenous communities several times previously.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Roy Morgan telephone survey revealed that 4AAA had around 60 per cent of Brisbane's Indigenous community as regular listeners who identified the station as theirs, and who used it as their primary *media* source of information about Indigenous affairs. Overall, 4AAA had a listenership of 100,000 people a week in the greater Brisbane area, the majority of them non-Indigenous. Follow-up interviews and focus group discussions supported the quantitative results which revealed that 4AAA not only has reached a substantial portion of Brisbane's Indigenous community, but also is perceived (along with newspapers) as the most important information source about Indigenous affairs—after word of mouth. While Indigenous people interviewed identified television as their main source of general news, 'word of mouth' was their major source of information about Indigenous community affairs. Mainstream television and radio were ranked near the bottom of a list of sources of Indigenous information. This suggests that mainstream media continue to fail to satisfy the information needs of the Brisbane Indigenous community. The Indigenous audience identified as important reasons for listening to the station its community information orientation, its use of Murri voices, and its high level of Murri music and culture. The service 4AAA provides to prison inmates in the greater Brisbane area is crucial.^{iv}

Canada

Indigenous radio and television audience research in Canada, like Australia, has tended to favour the remote northern regions regardless of the fact that most Native Canadians live below the 60th parallel. Research in the late 1970s examined ways in which Native Canadians across the North responded to mainstream satellite television.^v Audience surveys in 1993 and 1994 for the Aboriginal television network, Television Northern Canada (TVNC), revealed a large Indigenous audience across the North with up to 86 percent watching ‘some’ of its programs.^{vi} In 1998, before TVNC transformed into the Aboriginal People’s Television Network (APTN), market research in southern Canada by Angus Reid in January revealed around four out of five Canadians claiming they would watch the new channel ‘at some time’. Almost half of the sample across Canada said they would tune in ‘once a week’. Another survey by Pollara in June 1998 confirmed findings of strong general audience support for APTN. But this time, an Aboriginal sample was included—87 percent of Native people questioned across Canada said they would either ‘definitely watch’ or ‘probably watch’ the Aboriginal television channel.^{vii}

New Zealand

Maori, like their Indigenous counterparts in Australia and Canada, are highly urbanised. Around 71 percent of Maori live in 18 population centres across New Zealand.^{viii} Surveys in 1998 by ACNielsen and Brauoda Research revealed significant Maori audiences for Maori radio across New Zealand with 35-69 percent listenership at various times of the day.^{ix} Research into viewing audiences for a 1996 pilot broadcast for the new national Maori Television channel, revealed around half the Maori population of Auckland were viewers.^x This strong audience response confirmed the importance and popularity of Maori television and was significant in encouraging the development and launch of the national Maori television service late in 1999. While the provision of a Maori language service on radio and television is a primary aim of Maori broadcasting, only 8 percent of Maori adults speak the language fluently.^{xi} The brief for Maori radio and television is to ‘promote and protect’ Maori language and culture.^{xii} The studies cited here show that urban Maori audiences for Maori broadcasting are significant.

Conclusion

This body of research suggests that significant urban Indigenous audiences see their own media as offering *a first level of service* in providing information of particular interest to them. The studies cited here suggest that Indigenous media operating in urban areas are filling vital information gaps left by mainstream media. Indigenous media most often provide the only source of information about local Indigenous affairs and in this sense play a crucial supplementary role to mainstream media which aim to attract a more general audience.

Indigenous media is seen by its Indigenous audiences as part of a process of ‘putting the record straight’ on Indigenous issues, widely perceived to be misrepresented in the mainstream media. The research from Australia, Canada and New Zealand, coupled with overwhelming supportive anecdotal evidence from other Indigenous broadcasters, suggests that Indigenous media, built on a strong local or regional

community base, is attracting—and will continue to attract—significant Indigenous audiences in urban areas.

Endnotes

ⁱ See Stephen Harris, *Culture and Learning: Tradition and Education in Northeast Arnhem Land*. Professional Services Branch, Northern Territory Department of Education, 1980; Douglas Thompson, 'Claims of Stardom', *Education News* vol. 18, no. 5, 1983, pp. 10-12; Eric Michaels, *The Aboriginal Invention of Television: Central Australia—1982-1986*, Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986; Michael Meadows, 'The Jewel in the Crown. The coming of television to the Torres Strait could be as significant as the impact of religion there, 117 years ago', *Australian Journalism Review*, vol. 10, nos. 1 & 2, 1988, pp. 162-169.; and Michael Meadows, 'Voice blo mipla all ilan man: Torres Strait Islanders' struggle for television rights', in *Public Voices, Private Interests: Australia's Media*, eds J. Craik, J. James-Bailey, and A. Moran, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1995, pp. 179-198.

ⁱⁱ See *Digital Dreaming: A National Review of Indigenous Media and Communications—Executive Summary*, Canberra, ATSIC, 1999, pp. 68-74.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gregory Lyons, 'Surveying Aboriginal opinion concerning the law: some methodological considerations', in *Research and the Delivery of Legal Services*, ed Peter Cashman, Sydney, Law Foundation of New South Wales, 1981; Gregory Lyons, 'Aboriginal perceptions of courts and the police: a Victorian study', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 2, 1983, pp. 45-59; Roy Morgan Research, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Needs Study: Final report for Departments of Social Security, and Human Services and Health*, August, 1995; Michael Meadows and Kitty van Vuuren, 'Seeking an audience: Indigenous people, the media and cultural resource management' *Southern Review*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1998, pp. 96-107.

^{iv} Meadows and van Vuuren, 1998.

^v Gary O. Coldevin, 'Anik I and Isolation: Television in the lives of Canadian Eskimos', *Journal of Communication*, Autumn, 1977, pp. 145-153.

^{vi} Thomas C. Wilson, *Satellite Television in the Canadian Arctic 1974-1992: Cultural Replacement and Regeneration*, Paper presented at the Post Colonial Formations Conference, Griffith University, Brisbane, July 14-17 1993; Thomas C. Wilson, *Some Demographic Characteristics of the Population of Northern Canada*, Paper prepared for Television Northern Canada, 31 August 1993

^{vii} Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, Licence Application, Ottawa, 5 June, 1998; Jennifer David, 'Seeing Ourselves, Being Ourselves: Broadcasting Aboriginal Television in Canada', *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Summer, 1998, p. 39.

^{viii} Joint Maori/Crown Working Group on Maori Broadcasting Policy, Second Report, Wellington, November 1996.

^{ix} Patricia Berwick, *Audience Issues and Maori Broadcasting: Report to the Board of Te Mangai Paho*, April 1999; Te Mangai Paho, *Post Election Brief*, December 1996, p. 13.

^x Te Mangai Paho, 1996, p. 21.

^{xi} Report of the Establishment Group for a Maori Television Trust, October 1998, p. 7.

^{xii} **Ministry of Commerce, *Maori Television: A Summary of Views, September 1997, p. 8.***