

Sub. No. 100
D. No. 501

Queensland Community Broadcasting Assoc. Inc

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Attention: Ms Delwyn Rance
Broadcasting Inquiry
Productivity Commission

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Re: Submission from Queensland Community Broadcasting Association (QCBA)

Date: Tuesday, 11 May 1999

No. of Pages: (including this page)

Free Access to Spectrum

The QCBA, representing 19 licensed community radio stations in Queensland strongly supports the principle of free access to broadcast spectrum for community broadcasting stations.

Community broadcasting stations arise from the needs and aspirations of the community they service. The community broadcasting sector was created to provide all Australians with the opportunity to participate in broadcasting - to provide them with a voice in the media. Community broadcasting was also created to spread the ownership of the broadcast media beyond commercial networks and the government services. The tremendous growth of the sector and continuing interest in community broadcasting licences shows that these goals remain valid more than 25 years after the start of community broadcasting in Australia.

That is why it is important to retain the principle of free access to broadcast spectrum in Australia for community broadcasting services. Community organisations must have the right of free access to one of Australia's great assets - its broadcast spectrum. The imposition of a cost for access to the spectrum would reduce the ability of many community minded groups around the nation to get to air and would be against the public interest. Free access for community broadcasting groups helps to ensure a better chance of promoting the sense of Australian identity, character and cultural diversity that the Act seeks to achieve.

Second Licence

We understand from the ABA that the current legislation prohibits a community radio station from holding a licence for an additional service. This discriminates against the station. An established community radio station will have the expertise required to establish a successful second service and will also be able to provide some efficiencies in terms of shared resources (premises, staff etc). There could also be synergies in areas of sponsorship.

These could be used to establish a service which may be complimentary to the station's first service but which might have difficulty surviving on its own. For example, in the United States, many classical FM stations also run an AM nostalgia station. The audience demographics for the two services have some common elements such as similar age groups. This enables the two services to use one team of sponsorship sales people - more chance of them earning a living, which is difficult with just one of these services.

The establishment of a community radio station requires an enormous amount of time, energy and skill. Related services are much more likely to succeed if they spring from an existing service as an extension of that service and not in opposition to it.

One organisation overseeing two related licences can ensure that the synergies achieved will produce two successful and worthwhile community broadcasting stations.

Broadcasting Power

The ABC operates some services that compete with community radio services that were established before the ABC's. But the community radio stations are limited by their licences issued under the Act to a significantly smaller power than the ABC which comes under a different Act. Examples are community station 4ZZZ-FM which competes with the ABC's JJJ service for the youth audience and 4MBS Classic FM which competes with ABC Classic FM for the fine music audience. The QCBA contends that the ABC's ability to broadcast at a much higher power gives them an advantage which works against fair competition.



GARY THORPE

Queensland Community Broadcasting Association