



RDJ-FM COMMUNITY RADIO CO-OP LTD.

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Broadcasting Inquiry
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2
Collins Street East,
MELBOURNE VIC. 8003

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SUBMISSION TO BROADCASTING INQUIRY

Dear Sirs,

As a community broadcaster who has been on air for over fifteen years, we feel that we are in a position to comment on the current situation regarding community radio in general and of course, ourselves in particular.

In the beginning, community radio was designed to be all things to all people in a community - giving access to anybody who had something to say, for the benefit of the local area. To this end it has been successful, particularly in rural areas where the choices available to listeners are restricted to possibly one or two commercial stations plus the inevitable ABC. The advent of networking, both commercial and National, has actually reduced these choices and local input.

Funding of community radio has always been a problem, whilst personnel are usually volunteers there are considerable obligatory expenses, which cannot be avoided. In the early days, government funding was available to defray a lot of these costs but reality has set in and community stations now have to virtually stand on their own feet to continue to exist. The relaxation of sponsorship rules was a necessary evolution to enable this.

To allow us to continue in our role as the local community station in an inner Sydney suburb, the ever increasing economic pressures persuaded us to spend considerable time and money to take a close look at the five municipalities which form our core broadcast area. This included the subscription to a national based research organisation and the employment of a full time Marketing Co-Ordinator to conduct further investigation into demographics and listener potential in these areas.

This was undertaken with the view to advise the station's Programming Committee and Board of Directors of the direction the station should take to maximise the listeners and indirectly of course, sponsor potential, whilst still retaining our "Community Radio" concept - a difficult balancing act no matter how you put the argument.

It is our opinion that community radio while not competing with the "Big Boys", should sound as professional as possible, and indeed, must, to retain listeners. To do this, they have to be able to earn sufficient income to at least purchase and maintain professional quality equipment and suitable premises. Paid staff can be a luxury for smaller stations but eventually become a necessity for most.

We are concerned that the recent arrival of the "Narrowcasters" are creating problems for community stations in some areas - whilst supposedly only designed to cover specific needs of select segments of the community, this appears to be open to a very liberal interpretation and open to abuse. The growth of the "Information" stations is a bad joke and does little more than take potential sponsorship from a struggling community broadcaster. The fact that many of the narrowcast licences are been bought by one organisation should be open to investigation and perhaps subject to similar restrictions as community broadcasters. Narrowcasters apparently are not limited in advertising time, run purely as a business venture and therefore have an unfair advantage over the local community stations.

If we must have these, it follows that suitable frequency allocation is required - we have a local problem in that our frequency is .1 MHz away from some narrowcasters within receivable range which has presented problems for both of us (a technical glitch?).

We think that a close look should be taken at what efforts individual stations are taking to achieve the goals and objectives set out in the existing Broadcasting Services Act. This can only be of long term benefit to the community - i.e. the current listening audience, and the potential to improve the services offered.

We thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Yours Faithfully,



Colin Richardson,
Secretary.