

**FROM MESSAGE STICK  
TO MULTI-MEDIA IN THE NEW  
MILLENNIUM**

**INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATIONS  
AUSTRALIA**

**The National Indigenous Media  
Association of Australia**

# Our Vision

**We believe that the dreams and aspirations of Indigenous Australians should be heard, understood, accepted and respected in their own right.**

**NIMAA is the voice of our people.**

# ICA INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATIONS AUSTRALIA

## NEW DIRECTIONS MORE OPTIONS

### CULTURAL DIVERSITY THROUGH QUALITY PROGRAMMING

Since the dawn of time cultural and information exchange between Indigenous Australians has been carried by message stick, smoke signal or simply by face to face.

In the digital age our messages are now delivered via a broad range of new and complex mediums and technologies.

Indigenous peoples are embracing the changing means of communication to ensure that our voices are heard.

This plan reflects the future aims and objectives of media organisations represented by the National Indigenous Media Association of Australia (NIMAA) and introduces new and diverse ways in which the Indigenous community contributes to the cultural diversity, identity and character of Australia.

Our plan has been developed by members of NIMAA, who represent the Indigenous media industry sector including print, community

broadcasting, The Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS), multi media and film and television producers.

## ***Introduction***

*This plan was developed in response to the Productivity Commission's request for an Indigenous contribution to Commission's review of the Broadcasting Act.*

*We acknowledge the scope of the Productivity Commission's public inquiry to identify practical courses of action to improve competition, efficiency and the interests of consumers in broadcasting services.*

*NIMAA would like to thank the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to make this formal submission on behalf of Indigenous members and representatives.*

*NIMAA is pleased to offer the following recommendations to assist the Commission by improving the needs of Indigenous broadcasters, which include:*

- *The proclamation of an Indigenous Communications Australia Act to acknowledge Indigenous broadcasting as the 3<sup>rd</sup> national public broadcaster in Australia;*
- *That the Productivity Commission urge the ABA to develop a proposal to establish a National Communications Service for Indigenous media similar to the SBS and ABC TV;*
- *The establishment of a 'National' broadcasting authority 'Indigenous Communications Australia (ICA) to unite all Indigenous media;*
- *As the peak body representing this industry, NIMAA also seeks the support of the Productivity Commission to review the existing classification and positioning of Indigenous broadcasters under the Broadcasting Services Act.*

*The proposed changes will affect our current classification as 'community broadcasters'. Existing classification standards presently limit our ability to communicate with and reach the broader Australian community.*

*We acknowledge the importance of media within various Indigenous communities and seek to highlight to the Commission the vital role that Indigenous broadcasters play in advancing the public interest in broadcasting, particularly our role in balancing the current social, cultural and economic dimensions.*

*We possess the ability, knowledge and breadth of experience to compete on a national scale with mainstream broadcasters and contribute to the Australian*

*community by providing specific entertainment, education and cultural information about our people and culture, for the Indigenous community and the broader Australian community as well.*

*This submission will provide significant benefits for the media industry and will allow Indigenous broadcasters to compete with mainstream media by attracting advertising and sponsorship support.*

*In addition, we will demonstrate that this can be achieved with little or no additional government funding.*

*NIMAA supports the establishment of a national Indigenous communications body, Indigenous Communications Australia (ICA).*

*We do not believe that the creation of ICA will hinder or be hindered by any recommendations made by the Productivity Commission in relation to Pay Television, competition, cross-media ownership or foreign ownership, assuming that Australian broadcasting is not further regulated.*

*The following proposal details:*

- *The case for Indigenous Communications Australia*
- *The Voice of Our People*
- *Indigenous Broadcasting Today*
- *Why indigenous broadcasting is not community broadcasting*
- *Codes of Practice*
- *ITV – One of the ABC's Multi-Channels*
- *Economic Benefits and Costs*
- *Reconciliation*

## ***Executive Summary***

NIMAA's business plan encompasses three strategic themes. These are,

- The establishment of a national communications authority, 'Indigenous Communications Australia' (ICA) which will unite all Indigenous media;
- The immediate granting of radio broadcasting licenses in Sydney and Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart to give Indigenous Australians a national voice; and
- The proclamation of an Indigenous Communications Australia Act to acknowledge Indigenous broadcasting as the 3<sup>rd</sup> national public broadcaster in Australia;

### **The case for Indigenous Communications Australia**

The broadcasting industry is undergoing enormous change. Technological advances and competition are improving the range and quality of services normally associated with broadcasting.

When viewed collectively, the Indigenous communications sector makes a significant contribution to the Australian media industry, comprising:

- Over 100 permanently licensed community television and radio stations
- 40 broadcasting groups aspiring for permanent community radio licenses
- One commercial television station – Imparja Television, Alice Springs
- One commercial radio station – Yamitji Media, Carnarvon, WA
- Over 50 film, video and multimedia producers, and
- One national and various regional and local newspapers

On behalf of the Indigenous communications sector, NIMAA would like to present a case to support the establishment of a new national broadcaster – **Indigenous Communications Australia (ICA)**.

While the distinction may seem fine, the opportunity it presents to Indigenous broadcasters is substantial.

A national voice will help protect the social and cultural values of Indigenous Australians by promoting a more rounded sense of national identity and character and embracing the cultural diversity of Indigenous Australians.

As the national public broadcaster, ICA will ensure Indigenous broadcasters are a major player in the competitive market through an Australian-wide digital

television and radio network, and be responsive to audience needs and technological developments within the industry.

The establishment of ICA gives Indigenous people an opportunity to successfully fulfil a national role, by complimenting national commercial broadcasters and ensuring Australia's Indigenous culture and identity is preserved and celebrated by all Australians.

## The Voice of Our People

While Indigenous culture has a long history it still remains a mystery to many Australians. Indigenous people would like to share and celebrate their heritage with the rest of Australia.

The time has come for Indigenous people of Australia to have our own national voice to ensure the preservation of Indigenous culture for generations to come.

We want the opportunity to:

- ◆ tell our own stories, in our own languages
- ◆ write, film, edit, produce and broadcast our own stories about issues of importance to Australia and the world.

In the past, broadcasters such as the ABC and SBS have largely performed this role. Indigenous stories have largely been written, filmed, edited, produced, and/or broadcast by non-indigenous people. In many cases, programs are compiled in languages other than the traditional languages spoken by particular communities.

As Indigenous people we need to tell our own stories and have autonomy and control in the production process. This also enables us to educate others and share our diverse cultures, histories and stories the broader community..

True empowerment for Indigenous people of Australia can only occur when we have autonomy and control over the production process.

It is NIMAA's submission that this can only be achieved through the establishment of Indigenous Communications Australia including its vehicles:

- Indigenous Television (ITV)
- National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS).



## **Indigenous Communications Today**

While it is true that Indigenous people have had increased access to media, the majority of Australians still have limited access to Indigenous culture via the vehicles of Indigenous media.

Talking to our own people about issues that affect them fulfils only half of our vision. It is our aim to have a broad appeal, to embrace the whole community by producing programs about our culture for all Australians to enjoy.

We would like all of Australia to learn and come to understand and celebrate our culture with us. To do this we need a national voice.

At the moment Indigenous radio has come close to being national with the introduction of the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS). This satellite service allows individual radio stations to broadcast and receive other station's programs across Australia.

Although NIRS achieves its aim of linking individual radio stations, there are no Indigenous radio licenses in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, or Hobart. In these capital cities, Indigenous media organisations broadcast when they can, but have not been issued with a full time license because they are classified as 'community radio'.

As a result, most of the non-Indigenous population of Australia have had limited contact with Indigenous media and therefore have limited exposure to the culture, issues and views of Indigenous people.

NIMAA believes that for the NIRS to be truly national and representative of Indigenous broadcasters, the Productivity Commission must consider the advantages of granting full time Indigenous radio licenses in every capital city. These radio stations would become an integral part of the ICA.

Television already plays an important role in preserving Indigenous culture in remote Indigenous communities through the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS).

These licensed communities receive a satellite delivered signal from the ABC and at least one remote area commercial broadcaster. Programs are retransmitted to these communities along with locally and regionally produced content. This service is particularly important in remote communities where the predominant language spoken and/or written in languages is not the English language.

However, these services are not linked nationally. A real lack of funding and adequate resources in remote areas has significantly jeopardized high quality networked programming.

For example, Imparja TV in Alice Springs is part of the Nine Network and is owned by the local Indigenous community. Although it has an Indigenous flavour and own locally produced programming content, it is not part of a national Indigenous television network.

In order for all Australians to truly preserve, understand, respect and celebrate Indigenous culture, Indigenous culture must be accessible. The introduction of ICA, through ITV, would effectively bridge this gap and could potentially bring Indigenous culture into the living room of every Australian.

## **Why Indigenous Communications is not just “Community Broadcasting”**

Indigenous broadcasters have operated under the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 since its proclamation in late 1992. Under this Act, Indigenous broadcasters have been classified under Part 6 as a community broadcasting sector.

During this period, Indigenous broadcasters have encountered a number of difficulties resulting from classification restrictions.

### **Real Jobs vs Volunteer Labour**

Part 6 of the BSA defines Community broadcasting as local broadcasting by local communities, in order to provide a voice for the sections of the community that are not catered for by existing media.

Community broadcasting is based on a non-profit, low budget principle. Its objective is to encourage maximum participation in the operation and management of services by local communities. It relies on volunteer labour to provide local communities with a media outlet that they, as individuals, or as community groups can use to put their views across.

Community broadcasting within this context, has tended to focus on local programming issues made by, and for, local people.

These aims and objectives are vastly different to the aims and objectives of the Indigenous broadcasting industry.

Indigenous broadcasters already make a significant contribution to the media industry and NIMAA believes that Indigenous broadcasting should not be confused with community broadcasting.

Indigenous broadcasting plays an extremely important role in the preservation and maintenance of Indigenous culture and language/s. It also plays an essential role in promoting self-determination for Indigenous people.

In order to ensure these objectives, Indigenous people must be engaged at all levels of the production process as well as highly trained and well informed about cultural, linguistic and other issues.

NIMAA supports the development of an Indigenous media labour force. Indigenous people need to be highly trained in a range of technical as well as other areas such as journalism, management, industrial relations and so on.

NIMAA also supports the development of a permanent Indigenous media labour force since the quite specialist needs of Indigenous broadcasting service providers cannot be effectively met whilst many operators are forced to rely on a volunteer labour force.

An Industry Award, the Indigenous Media Organizations Award, was established to ensure that the special needs of this sector's employees are properly catered for.

Indigenous broadcasters are now the only sector to operate under the Community banner within the Act with their own Industrial award.

### **Local Coverage Vs National Coverage**

It is essential that the legislation give Indigenous broadcasters the ability to cover all areas of Australia. In many cases, Indigenous broadcasters are the only groups which provide regular broadcasting services to remote Indigenous communities.

The Indigenous broadcasting sector plays an important role in the education of mainstream Australian society about Indigenous culture. In this regard, Indigenous broadcasters need to reach a broader non-Indigenous audience.

Indigenous people are not a market sector. We have complete cultures of our own. Within Indigenous cultures, there are many sub-cultures including young people, women, religious groups and others.

Indigenous media organisations often compete alongside many other organisations representing these sub-cultures aspiring for community broadcasting licenses in key areas such as Melbourne and Sydney.

In these two centers alone there are already many general community broadcasters catering for a wide range of specialist needs within these sub-cultures. There is no service which provides an Indigenous voice.

The Federal Government recognises the following specialist interest groups that exist within the community broadcasting framework:

- General mainstream community broadcasters
- Ethnic Broadcasters
- Radio for the Print Handicapped, and
- Indigenous Broadcasters.

Although these specialist groups provide valuable services to the community, there is no full time indigenous voice in key areas such as Melbourne and Sydney.

## **Codes of Practice**

Under the Act, each category of broadcaster is required to register its own Codes of Practice with the Australian Broadcasting Authority. The Commercial sector, the ABC, the SBS, the Open Narrow casters all have their own self authored Codes of Practice that are designed especially for their individual needs.

As Indigenous broadcasters operating under the community broadcasting umbrella, we are bound by the community broadcasting sector's Codes of Practice.

Indigenous broadcasters have essentially had limited opportunities to contribute to the development of these Codes. There is little mention of the special needs, sensitivities and considerations that Indigenous broadcasters face on a day to day basis within these Codes.

The Codes were designed with a strong emphasis on volunteers, sponsorship and matters that related more directly to community broadcasters in the traditional sense, and have very little relevance to Indigenous media.

The Indigenous broadcasting industry should be able to develop its own Codes of Practice as SBS, Australia's Ethnic Communities' national broadcaster has done. SBS has been allowed to develop and implement its own Codes of Practice - codes that it alone has the responsibility to develop and maintain.

These are but a few of the significant anomalies that confront the Indigenous Broadcasting Sector because it is classified under Part 6 of the Broadcasting Services Act 1992.

## **ITV – One of the ABC’s Multi-Channels**

Recent advances in multimedia technology and the development of digital television provide an ideal vehicle to bring Indigenous culture into the living room of every Australian.

Digital television allows a broadcaster to “multi-channel” or telecast more than one channel simultaneously.

If ICA were granted the lease to one of the ABC’s four digital channels, ITV could be shown wherever the ABC is televised. The ABC expects to begin broadcasting via digital television from 1 January 2001 and no extra infrastructure would be required to accommodate the Indigenous television network.

ITV would also have the advantage of being able to broadcast 24 hours a day by switching to the ABC’s programming, should ICA not have sufficient content at the beginning of its broadcasting life.

## **Economic Benefits**

Indigenous people are one of the poorest sections of the Australian population. This is due to a number of complicated and historical factors.

However, the most significant disadvantage that has precluded Indigenous communities from deriving direct economic benefits, is that more traditional skills such as hunting, gathering, arts, crafts, music, theatre, and dancing are not easily exported to generate income from outside individual communities.

Yet, tourism and the sale of Indigenous artworks has been a substantial source of export income for Indigenous communities over the last 20 years. While some communities and individuals have profited from these ventures, the market for these goods and services is limited.

**The future for the Indigenous peoples of Australia, and indeed all Australians, lies in our human resources, the knowledge and skills of our people in the information age.**

Innovations like Internet technology have the potential for remote communities to overcome the disadvantage of distance and provide a vehicle for economic growth. If suitable training is provided for remote communities, access to employment, information and the wonders of this new medium could be only a click of a "mouse" away.

Technological convergence based on digital technologies means that services can be delivered through a variety of platforms. Indigenous people can capitalise on the information age and generate much needed international income through the development of other technologies that compliment broadcasting, including the Internet.

The Internet is becoming an increasingly valuable commodity in the information age. The potential use of the Internet to empower Indigenous communities and provide people around the world with an insight to our culture/s has largely been unexplored.

The marketing of Indigenous skills and representations of Indigenous cultures fit perfectly with the concept of ICA.

Digital television uses the latest information technology. To be part of the industry means that one has to be proficient in the use of this technology. This immediately makes one's skills valuable in the global market. ICA and ITV will make this a reality for Australian Indigenous media workers, as their skills will be valuable and sought after everywhere in the world.

The existence of ICA, and especially ITV will require Indigenous content. This will immediately create a demand for the production of documentaries, news and current affairs programs, children's stories, dramas, comedies, and so forth.

A large number of these programs can be produced in remote areas, where the need for income is greatest. The ABC in its Productivity Commission submission supports this claim:

*“Compact, relatively low cost digital production technology – including cameras, graphics and editing equipment – may be deployed more readily outside capital city locations”.*

The economic ramifications of the ICA are quite significant. It will be a focus of and conduit for Indigenous people throughout Australia to enter and profit from the information age. Indigenous broadcasters can become more financially independent, compete effectively in the mainstream market, attract advertisers and sponsor activities, all of which will sustain and preserve Indigenous culture.

At present, Indigenous media is funded through a wide number of government and quasi-government bodies such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF), Australian Film Commission (AFC), ABC and SBS.

Non-government revenue is produced through the sale of product. This includes films such as “Radiance”, featuring the Australian actress of the year - Debra Mailman, other visual productions, radio airtime, CD's and merchandise of indigenous artists such as Yothu Yindi and Christine Anu.

Indigenous media therefore already contributes millions of dollars to the Australian economy and employs hundreds of Indigenous and Indigenous non-workers.

The ICA and ITV will undoubtedly be a further catalyst and contributor towards sustained growth and development of Indigenous communities and the Australian economy overall.



## **Economic costs**

NIMAA believes that there would be little if any additional government funding required to launch ICA and ITV.

NIMAA believes that current funding in the Indigenous media sector and other Commonwealth communication infrastructure initiatives, such as Networking the Nation, are sufficient to make the venture viable.

The ABC has already received Federal Government funding to become digitally compliant. There will be no need to duplicate satellite infrastructure and therefore no additional cost to broadcast ITV.

NIMAA proposes that ITV would be able to raise additional advertising revenue along the same lines as the SBS.

Existing funding, coupled with the lease of the ABC's infrastructure and the ability to raise revenue to produce Australian content, would allow ICA and ITV to be economically viable from day one. We do not anticipate that additional government funding would be required.

A change in legislation and the ability to lease a multi-channel, rather than additional funding, are what NIMAA needs to make ICA and ITV a reality.

## **Reconciliation**

The introduction of a national television service for ethnic communities through SBS has played an extremely important role in breaking down racial differences and has led to a much better understanding of overseas culture within mainstream Australia. This service has aided the development of a multi cultural Australia.

We strongly believe that ICA would contribute enormously to the process of reconciliation in Australia and would help bring about a harmonious, prosperous and purposeful Australian society.

NIMAA believes that Indigenous Communications Australia has an essential role to play in the maintenance and awareness of:

- the ongoing reconciliation process, and
- profiling Australia's Indigenous remote and urban communities to mainstream society and providing additional information, education and content to these communities.

Indigenous media can provide a unique and quite specialist service to the entire Australian community and in contributing to the ongoing development of Australian society.

It is NIMAA's strong belief that these responsibilities cannot be properly met in the present environment while classified for a different purpose as Community Broadcasters within the existing classification.

We, the Indigenous peoples of Australia, support the establishment of ICA so that the dreams and aspirations of 1967 become the reality of the new millennium.