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## Television and other frills : public demands of broadcast services in the satellite age

Lelia Green

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LOCAL PROGRAMMING.  
REGIONAL EQUALISATION.

“TELEVISION  
AND  
OTHER  
FRILLS:”

public demands of  
broadcast services  
in the satellite age

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Lelia Green

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# ABSTRACT

## **"TELEVISION AND OTHER FRILLS:"**

**public demands of broadcast services in the satellite age**

**Lelia Green**

This monograph is the culmination of two years research into public demands of broadcast services in Western Australia. Based on 1,145 completed questionnaires, the study centres upon people in seven communities drawn from the service areas of remote, regional and metropolitan broadcasters. It compares and contrasts the different expectations that these groups of people have of broadcast media.

People living in isolation within the remote commercial television service area have one major broadcasting demand: a clear, reliable radio service. Shortwave broadcasts are notoriously susceptible to interference and, on some occasions, are effectively non-existent. Recommendations are made for the development of direct radio broadcasting by satellite, the modification of the forthcoming Australia-wide two-way voice radio Mobilsat to give news and weather information, and the development of a battery-powered dish antenna for a homestead radio-only service.

Local programming is an important priority for survey respondents, but there is some disagreement as to how "local" local programs should be. While most metropolitan and regional respondents favour statewide coverage, the majority of remote people would choose a geographically smaller area. An argument is advanced for a regional radio service to allow local coverage of important but specialised issues. This would complement television broadcasts, which are likely to have an increasingly large service area.

Regional equalisation is strongly supported by the people concerned. Given the choice between the same television service as Perth or specially made programs at the expense of less choice, the Perth service was preferred by twice as many regional respondents. Nonetheless, local weather and local programs are demonstrably important to these populations. It can be confidently argued that the desired option is a metropolitan service adapted to include information important to regional viewers.

APR  
FOOTK

**RESEARCH MONOGRAPH 1**

# **“TELEVISION AND OTHER FRILLS:”**

**public demands of  
broadcast services  
in the satellite age**

**Lelia Green**

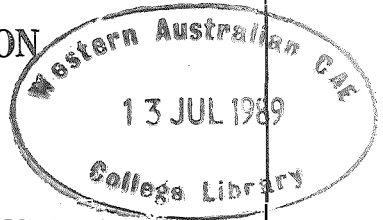
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# PREFACE

AUSSAT Pty Ltd is delighted to be associated with the publication of this monograph on the research conducted by Lelia Green under the auspices of the Western Australian Government's Office of Communications and the Federal Department of Transport and Communications.

The introduction of satellite technology into the Australian telecommunications and broadcasting infrastructure has been the most significant development in these fields in the last 50 years.

The AUSSAT system has been an important catalyst for change. New services have and are continuing to emerge. Telecommunication users and broadcasters have wider options through the availability of choice and diversity of not only supply but also of service.

More importantly, however, the satellite system has brought significant social benefit to all Australians and whilst these are perhaps not readily evident to those Australians who live in our major cities, they are real and tangible to those who live in our vast and often inhospitable outback regions.

For the first time in Australia's 200 year history, the satellite has shown that services taken for granted in the city can be provided no matter where people live.

This research, the first of its kind since AUSSAT commenced operation in late 1985, is extremely important and I would hope that the publication of this monograph will serve to stimulate debate and encourage further research.

The end result will, I am sure, be of benefit to all — users, service providers and policy makers alike.

From AUSSAT's point of view, we are committed to facilitate communications, to provide services that people want. If we can achieve this, then the full potential of satellite communications will be realised and both the individual and the national interest will have been satisfied.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mr Phillip Skelton, Director of the Office of Communications, saw in the proposal for this research the opportunity to measure something of the social benefit of AUSSAT's services, and the continuing broadcasting needs of remote Australians. It was his energy and enthusiasm that ensured the project's existence, and funding for the study came from the State Government's Department of Computing and Information Technology.

Mr Vin Kane, then First Assistant Secretary, Space, Telecommunications and Postal Policy Division, Federal Department of Communications, considered that early results were relevant to national policy issues. Department of Transport and Communications funding made possible the expansion of the survey to include a comparative study of regional and metropolitan audiences.

Professor Henry Mayer, Editor of Media Information Australia, heard the paper on this research, which was delivered to the Australian Communication Association Conference, in July, 1988. It was with his encouragement and vision that the presentation became this monograph.

AUSSAT Pty Ltd, through Mr Leighton Farrell, Manager, Corporate Relations, took an interest in, and then sponsored, this publication. AUSSAT's intervention has meant that these findings reach a much wider audience far sooner than anticipated.

My own tertiary institution, the Western Australian College of Advanced Education, has been most supportive of the research. Mr Brian Shoesmith first suggested the project and encouraged the writing of the research proposal. Ms Robyn Quin, Head of the Department of Media Studies, has read all the drafts and improved them with many helpful comments. Dr Barrett Sheridan, Editor of the Research Monograph Series, enlisted the support of the Research Committee in providing additional fundings for this monograph.

I am grateful, too, to Professor Bob Hodge and Dr Tom O'Regan of Murdoch University for their challenging and incisive comments.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr Wayne Johnson, the Research Assistant, for his hard work and good humour, and Ms Margaret Owens of Hometown Secretarial Service for coaxing coherence from illegible scrawl and for coping wonderfully with the necessarily tight deadlines. Mr Roger Guinery, my co-researcher and sounding board, has told me that I can never thank him enough for all his help. He's right.

# SUMMARY

The research project reported in this monograph tested the six hypotheses below by means of a questionnaire survey of seven Western Australian communities.

1. There remains an unsatisfied demand for basic broadcast services.
2. There is a demand for regional equalisation.
3. Local programming is a priority.
4. Broadcast services are a "right" in Australia today.
5. People have different demands of radio and television.
6. Some program categories are judged to be more important than others.

The first part of the study, in October 1986, was of remote Western Australia alone, and raised a number of interesting issues. There is no doubt that broadcast services are important to this population. Indeed, two-thirds of those without broadcast television watched videotapes and had their own television set and video cassette recorder. One consistent comment from the homestead respondents was that the cost of generating power to run a satellite dish meant that broadcast services were only available for part of the day. This expense may also have persuaded many homesteaders against investing in satellite technology.

The expansion of the second part of the study in October 1987 enabled a comparison of remote, regional and metropolitan populations. This is important for a number of reasons. The Federal policy of regional equalisation is committed to providing regional areas with a choice of commercial television services equivalent to that enjoyed in the appropriate state capital. Comparison of the needs of metropolitan and regional audiences was considered likely to inform policy development. Local programming, too, is of increasing importance. Little work had been done, however, into how "local" local programs should be. This issue is addressed.

Three questions were used in an attempt to differentiate between programming requirements of remote, regional and metropolitan populations. Remote and regional respondents were first asked to choose whether they would prefer "the

same choice of television services as Perth” or “less choice but (with) programs specially made for regional and remote residents.” Regional respondents overwhelmingly chose the “same choice” option. Remote respondents were equally divided between “specially made programs” and “same choice.”

Secondly, a list of 14 program categories was provided. Respondents were asked to place these categories — specifically designed to indicate a demand for local programming — into rank order of importance for television and radio separately. There was a remarkable consistency in the top four program categories of all five communities of significant size with experience of broadcasting. Programs judged to be most important were: Australian news, W.A. news, local weather, foreign news. Respondents were clearly differentiating between importance and their viewing behaviour as recorded in program ratings.

Local programs were the third area of specific inter-community investigation. The majority of metropolitan and regional viewers indicated that local programs should be W.A. statewide. Most remote respondents, however, chose a division smaller than the whole state. Overwhelmingly, the demand was for local programs with a broader scope than a shire or town base.

It is argued in the body of the text that statewide local television programming should be developed to cover issues of interest to regional (and remote) people as well as the metropolitan population. The demand for local programs of smaller-than-statewide interest should be met by a number of regional radio services, one for each of the geographic divisions of Western Australia.

Homestead respondents are particularly important in this respect. With so little in the way of entertainment and information choices, the majority elected to have specially made programs at the expense of choice. They have also been demanding, over a number of years, a reliable radio service that does not suffer from the many disadvantages of

shortwave broadcasts. The proposed regional services would go some way towards compensating for a television service with a statewide focus.

Such a division of "local programs" between television (statewide) and radio (regional) recognises the differences perceived in these media by the populations investigated. For example, there was far less agreement on the rank orderings of radio program categories between communities, although Australian news, W.A. news, local weather and foreign news remained the top four for remote and regional audiences. What support there was for town- and shire-based local programs was greater for the medium of radio than it was for television. Radio, too, is cheaper to produce and is more interactive than television, depending as it does on sound rather than sound and images.

There is, however, a sense in which such discussions of program preferences is, for some, putting the cart before the horse. The respondent who coined the title of the monograph is such a person. "Get comprehensive radio and telephone communications to the bush before TV and other 'frills!'" Three positive responses to this injunction are investigated in the monograph.

A major disadvantage of current satellite broadcasts to remote homesteaders is that the generator has to be in operation. It is possible, using existing (first generation) satellite technology, to develop a radio-only broadcast to a re-chargeable battery-operated, 60 cm satellite dish. This would allow a clear, 24 hour-a-day radio service. Such a service is strongly recommended.

Existing technology is not suited to the delivery direct by satellite of broadcast-quality radio to moving vehicles or people without satellite dishes. The second generation AUSSAT satellites (to begin transmissions in 1991 and 1992) include an Australia-wide, two-way voice radio service. This can be picked up by suitably-equipped vehicles. The Mobilsat service could be utilised for short broadcasts at regular intervals. Such broadcasts would be voice-only but could cover the four most important programming

categories identified by regional and remote respondents - local, national and international news and weather. Hitherto, the service has been conceived as interactive, and design specifications are such that Mobilsat equipment will be able to transmit and receive. A commitment to the additional use of this facility as a news program broadcaster would motivate the development of simple receivers.

These two options are considered by the author to be shorter-term goals. The third generation of AUSSAT satellites, 15 years away, should be designed to include direct radio broadcasting by satellite. This could be picked up by an antenna without the use of a satellite dish. It would be suitable for those people living, working or travelling in the outback. Such a service is already too late for the second generation.

Germane to these issues is the question of whether affordable broadcasting is a right or a luxury. Three-quarters of respondents to the 1987 questionnaire, from all populations, considered that the Western Australian Government should subsidise satellite broadcast-receiving equipment for remote and isolated people. There were a number of different arguments advanced for the necessity of general access to broadcasting. Public safety issues including cyclone, flood, fire and police warnings, are seen as potential life-savers. Furthermore, shortwave radio broadcasts are particularly prone to atmospheric interference, and become least reliable in poor weather conditions.

Children who live in Australian communities without broadcasting are shown in this study to be educationally disadvantaged, particularly with regard to current affairs knowledge. A number of voters indicated that their democratic rights are infringed by their inability to keep up with political debate. The author concludes that, in today's Australia, affordable reception of broadcasting should be viewed as a right, not a luxury.

A significant group who might argue against this are Aboriginal people living their lives according to traditional law. To them, the broadcast media poses a double threat. In a general way, it undermines their culture by using, almost exclusively, one foreign language - English. In a specific way, it threatens their society by broadcasting material about their people that should only be communicated according to law and custom. This research did not attract a response from traditional Aborigines. Instead, Aboriginal respondents argued for a choice of services and for a greater representation of Aboriginal people on mainstream Australian television.

The six hypotheses enumerated at the beginning of this summary have been investigated. The most important program categories were identified as being Australian news, W.A. news, local weather and foreign news. Affordable broadcast services are considered by Australians to be a right rather than a luxury.

The policy of regional equalisation is endorsed by the respondents. Local programming is rated highly but is chosen to be (generally) either statewide or regional in scope. There is little demand for shire- or town-based programming so long as more widely defined local programs cover a cross-section of concerns. People have different demands of radio and television. Radio services are seen as the more appropriate medium for smaller populations and as the minimum service for all, even the most remote, Australians.

Towards the end of the first generation of AUSSAT satellites, there remain people who have no reliable radio broadcasts.

# INTRODUCTION

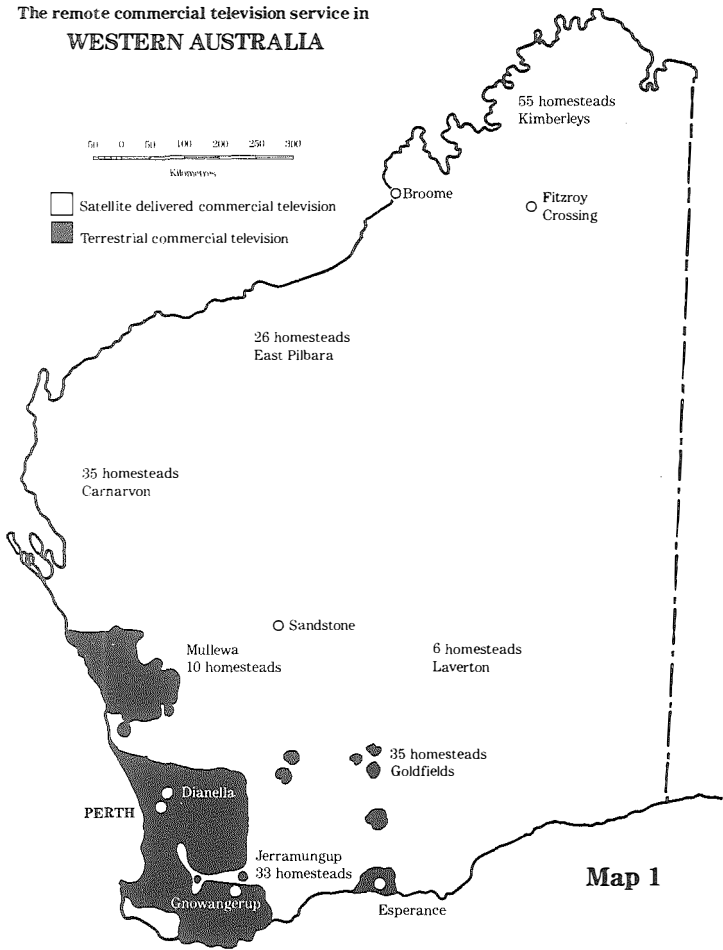
The research upon which this monograph is based sets out to examine a number of areas relevant to current broadcasting policy. Satellite-delivered broadcasting services have revolutionised communications in remote Australia, but little is known about how people in the outback have responded to them and what these people see to be their future needs. Meanwhile, there is a growing demand in all broadcast areas for "local programs," programs made with a specifically local audience in mind; but there is some debate about the definitions of "local" in this context. Finally, State and Federal Governments are pursuing a policy of "regional equalisation" for commercial television services. Under this initiative, people living in the populous regions of Australia will eventually be given a choice in broadcast commercial television equivalent to the choice enjoyed in the appropriate capital city. There is only limited information, however, as to the demands for programming and program choice in these regional areas. These three issues form the major strands of the research reported in this monograph.

Underpinning this study is the assumption that Australians know what they want of their broadcast services. Moreover, as the technological possibilities outstrip the formation of policy, new directions in broadcasting can and should be informed by the people who will benefit from the planned changes to services. The research is based in Western Australia and is primarily funded by the Western Australian Government's Office of Communications with an additional grant from the Federal Department of Transport and Communications.

Questionnaire-based research — such as is reported here — is almost always a blunt instrument. The great advantages it has over more detailed, interview- or observation-based investigation are breadth and speed. The findings of this study draw their validity largely from good sample sizes. There were 424 completed questionnaires in 1986 and 721 in the larger survey conducted in 1987. A breakdown of the sample sizes and populations covered is provided in Tables 1 and 2.


Broadcasting policy divides Australia into three distinct populations: metropolitan, regional and remote.

The remote commercial television service in  
**WESTERN AUSTRALIA**



Communities surveyed.





Metropolitan areas are largely confined to the state capitals. They were the first areas to receive services and generally enjoy a far larger variety of radio and television stations than elsewhere. Regional populations, under this definition, are those relatively populous regions that have enjoyed terrestrially-delivered services over (usually) a number of years. Remote areas, on the other hand, are outside the range of terrestrial transmission of television, and relied upon satellite technology for their first live television broadcasts. The proportion of an individual state covered by terrestrial broadcasting varies according to whether the ABC service or the commercial service is taken as the base line. Map 1, The remote commercial television service in Western Australia (RCTS), shows the boundaries of satellite-delivered commercial television. None of this part of the state received clear commercial television broadcasts prior to October, 1986. Metropolitan, regional and remote people are defined in this monograph according to the commercial television service they are eligible to receive.

A number of assumptions have been made about these populations over the years. One of the aims of the research is to assess whether those assumptions are justified given the data provided by Western Australian people. A second goal is the informing of policy formation relevant to the current and future needs of these citizens in the light of their comments upon broadcast services. Some of the assumptions behind the research are: that broadcasting services are important to all Australians; that people have views about which broadcast services should be provided; and that people's lives will be changed by the introduction of broadcast services.

The research to date comprises two stages. A preliminary study of four remote communities was conducted in October, 1986. The aim of this first research was to collect data before the introduction of the RCTS to the Western Zone. All of remote Western Australia and a small part of the Northern Territory and South Australia fall within this satellite footprint. The initial study assumed that the provision of television services would affect remote

area people and set out to investigate the following hypotheses:

- a) some program categories are judged to be more important than others;
- b) broadcast services are a "right" in Australia today;
- c) there remains an unsatisfied demand for basic broadcast services.

The results of this first survey were found at an early stage to be of considerable interest and relevance to broadcast policy makers. The Western Australian Government's Office of Communications commissioned the second stage of the research (a further investigation of the original four communities) plus an additional study of two southern towns receiving a regional commercial television service and one metropolitan suburb. The expansion of the research was funded by a grant from the Federal Department of Transport and Communications. Data provided allowed a year-on-year comparison between the four remote populations and, additionally, a comparative study of remote, regional and metropolitan opinions on broadcast services.

Three additional hypotheses were investigated and are of particular significance to this monograph, as follows:

- d) there is a demand for regional equalisation;
- e) local programming is a priority;
- f) people have different demands of radio and television.

Other interesting findings emerged from the study, but unsatisfied demand for broadcasting services, regional equalisation, and local programming are all areas where this research has much to contribute to current academic and policy debates. In addressing these topics, recommendations will be made as to future policies to be adopted. Such recommendations are the author's personal view and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of any of the bodies sponsoring the monograph.

# THE STRUCTURE OF THE SURVEY

## **Background to the survey**

The introduction of the Remote Commercial Television Service (RCTS) to Western Australia in October, 1986, provided the impetus for a quantitative study into the expectations for, and uses made of, satellite broadcasting for remote areas. The population expected to benefit from this service is small in commercial terms. Television companies were only persuaded to apply for the RCTS licence when the Western Australian Government guaranteed to pay up to two million dollars per annum towards the cost of the satellite transponder required to deliver the broadcasting. In the event, the successful applicant was a company already operating one of Western Australia's regional services, Golden West Network (GWN).

The grant was conditional upon the programming provided being relevant to the needs of remote Western Australian residents. Mr Phillip Skelton, Director of the Office of Communications, first commissioned the research upon which this monograph is based to assess the community response to satellite-delivered broadcasting and to investigate what constitutes "relevant programming" for this population.

## **The survey of remote communities 1986-1987**

The first survey was carried out in October, 1986, before the advent of the RCTS service. Questionnaires were delivered to people in Broome, Fitzroy Crossing, Sandstone, and 200 remote homesteads. Each of these communities was chosen with a view to revealing specific information. Table 1 summarises the difference in broadcast services that existed between the communities in October 1986, and compares these services with those available in 1987.

**Table 1: Comparison of responses  
from remote populations 1986-87**

Community	October 1986		October 1987	
	No of Respondents	Broadcast Services	No of Respondents	Broadcast Services
Broome	202	ABC TV ABC radio	199	ABC TV GWN TV ABC radio
Fitzroy Crossing	87	variable shortwave radio reception	48	no change (introduction of services delayed)
Sandstone	24	variable shortwave radio reception	16	multiple purchase satellite dishes: ABC TV GWN TV ABC radio
Homesteads	111	various	118	various
Total number of remote respondents	424		381	

In October 1986, Broome already had an ABC television and radio service and was to get RCTS. A coastal town and shire administrative centre, Broome is one of the larger remote Western Australian communities, with a population of 5,788 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1986). The port and the tourist industry mean that Broome has a diverse economic base, although the public service is also an important employer. About one-quarter of Broome's residents are Aboriginal, mainly living non-traditional lives.

Radio and television services are provided to Broome residents through fully-funded community rebroadcast facilities. ABC services were provided by the Federal Government, and the RCTS terrestrial transmitter was installed free by the licensee as a condition of the RCTS licence. Broome had ABC radio and television before the 1986 survey and received the RCTS service soon afterwards, before the 1987 research. Direct flights connect Broome and Perth.

Fitzroy Crossing owes much of its current importance to its location. It marks the bridging point of the River Fitzroy on the Great Northern Highway — the stretch between Broome and Wyndham. This road forms part of Route 1, which is the only bitumen highway to circle Australia. Some of the economic base for the town comes from being a staging point for travellers, and there is, additionally, small-scale tourism resulting from the three national parks within a 150 kilometre radius.

The majority of Fitzroy Crossing's economy, however, depends upon its role as a service centre for the Aboriginal communities and outstations in that part of the Kimberleys. Almost two-thirds of the town is Aboriginal, and many of these people live traditional lives. The non-Aboriginal population comprises predominantly public service workers, often in the town for a limited number of years. The only regular air service links Fitzroy Crossing with its shire centre of Derby. Fitzroy Crossing is periodically cut off from the surrounding region when the River Fitzroy floods. Because of this, the town is strung along a two kilometre main street, with buildings concentrated on higher ground. During the 1981 Census, only one of these scattered population centres was counted, with the result that a total of 428 people were recorded. (In 1986, the figure had risen to 1,028.) Apparently too small to qualify for ABC radio and television under the first phase of the Remote or Underserved Communities Scheme (RUCS), Fitzroy Crossing was only able to get intermittent shortwave radio, while neighbours Derby and Halls Creek first had ABC programs

in 1980. Federal funds were made available for a satellite-delivered, ABC service rebroadcast transmitter at Fitzroy Crossing once the situation of the Census under-representation was appreciated. This service was due to be introduced between October 1986 and October 1987, but the community had to raise its own funds for the building of an RCTS transmitter. Radio and television broadcast services eventually reached Fitzroy Crossing in December, 1987; after the second survey.

Sandstone town is the administrative centre of a shire so sparsely populated that the 1986 Census records only 54 households. Like many other small towns in remote Western Australia, it was unlikely ever to benefit from RUCS because of its size. It was chosen as a survey population to act as a control sample since no change was anticipated in its broadcasting services. A day's drive from Perth and beyond non-satellite terrestrial broadcasts, the small permanent population of 126 is swelled by itinerant mineral prospectors. Towards the end of 1986, the shire residents confounded their role as the control population by bulk-purchasing 31 satellite dishes. It must be assumed, therefore, that over half of the population had radio and television services by the second field trip.

Two hundred remote homesteads beyond the accepted reach of non-satellite broadcasts were identified within the Carnarvon, East Pilbara, Goldfields, Jerramungup, Kimberleys, Laverton and Mullewa areas. This population was included to provide information upon the most remote of remote Western Australians and to add some geographical spread to the data. The same homesteads were re-surveyed in 1987.

#### **Additional communities surveyed in 1987**

The Federal Department of Transport and Communications injected additional funds into the research to allow a comparison of remote, regional and metropolitan responses to the questionnaire. This extra grant recognised the national applicability of the results. Broome, Fitzroy Crossing, Sandstone and the homesteads were re-surveyed,

and a concurrent southern research trip collected data from two regional towns and a metropolitan suburb.

Esperance, like Broome, is a coastal town of sufficient size to be a major provider of goods and services to its hinterland. Both towns have significance as tourist centres. A comparison of demographic and occupational profiles showed a number of similarities. A major difference between the two communities is that 3% of Esperance's population is Aboriginal, compared with 24% of Broome. In part, this reflects the fact that Aboriginal people comprise a greater proportion of the population in the north of Western Australia compared with the south. Esperance has had, for some years, ABC radio and television, the GWN regional television service, and commercial radio.

Whereas parallels could be drawn between Broome and Esperance, there were no similar pointers to determine the selection of an interior regional community. Sandstone, the original control, was too small to dictate a regional counterpart. The most recent data on Fitzroy Crossing was the discredited under-representation of the 1981 Census. To use that data in selecting a regional counterpart would have been unsound. No parallels could be drawn between the artificially targeted community of homesteaders drawn from all over the state and other households within the regional service area.

Gnowangerup was eventually chosen as the second regional town. It has a history of bitter divisions, which have undoubtedly affected the way that people living there view their community. The deciding factor in the selection of Gnowangerup, however, was the comparatively large proportion (almost one-quarter) of Aboriginal residents. It was hoped that there would be a significant regional Aboriginal response, which would allow the collection of cross-cultural data from both halves of the survey. In the event, only two of the 71 Gnowangerup respondents categorised themselves as Aboriginal. Services available to Gnowangerup at the time of the survey were ABC radio and television, GWN regional television, and commercial radio.

Gnowangerup is at the edge of the terrestrially-broadcast GWN service area, and many respondents rely upon boosters and tall antennae to receive clear signals. There is a campaign for a satellite-linked community rebroadcast facility to improve television reception.

No suburb of Perth is generally considered to be representative of the state capital as a whole. Dianella was selected as the metropolitan community to be studied because 1981 Census data showed it to be unexceptional according to the following criteria: population density, population increase, age distribution, ethnicity, fluency in English, income, occupation, participation in the workforce and home ownership. Other options that might have permitted the collection of a sample more "representative" of the metropolis were rejected because the survey methodology would have differed too greatly from that employed in the remote and regional areas.

Table 2 summarises the services available to each of the seven populations in 1987.



**Table 2: Comparison of responses  
from all populations October 1987**

Community	Commercial Television Service	No of Respondents	Broadcast Services
Broome	Remote	199	ABC TV GWN TV ABC radio
Fitzroy Crossing	Remote	48	Variable shortwave radio reception
Sandstone	Remote	16	Majority had satellite dishes: ABC TV GWN TV ABC radio
Homestead	Remote	118	Various
Esperance	Regional	122	ABC TV GWN TV ABC radio Commercial radio
Gnowangerup	Regional	71	ABC TV GWN TV ABC radio Commercial radio
Dianella	Metropolitan	147	ABC TV STW 9 TVW 7 SBS ABC radio Commercial radio Public radio
Total Number of Respondents	Remote	381	Various
	Regional	193	Various
	Metropolitan	147	Various
All 1987 Respondents		721	

## **Survey methodology**

The survey questionnaire elicited a voluntary response, with the result that all respondents were essentially self-selecting. Apart from the homesteads (where questionnaires were posted), questionnaires were distributed through community groups, service organisations, government agencies and business premises. This method was chosen as the best way of attracting a wide cross-section of respondents, given the time and resources available to the study. A research officer visited each community, meeting key people in the social, financial and service sectors. The aim of the survey was explained in some depth to these individuals, and the contacts were asked to help disseminate the questionnaire throughout the community.

Each year, the same questionnaire was distributed to every community, but many of the questions were altered between 1986 and 1987. This reflects the development of the research, and helped to elicit responses relevant to local programming and regional equalisation. An open "comments" section permitted respondents to record their views on these — and other — issues. In all, 424 questionnaires were completed and returned in 1986; 721 in 1987.

## **The current affairs questionnaire**

A separate questionnaire was designed in 1986 to assess the current affairs knowledge of Year Ten students in Broome and Fitzroy Crossing. The results were of sufficient interest to extend this study in 1987 to Year Ten classes servicing Esperance, Gnowangerup and Dianella in addition to Broome and Fitzroy Crossing.

# THE FINDINGS

## 1986 - The survey of remote communities

An early finding of the first stage of the research was that two-thirds of the respondents from Fitzroy Crossing and Sandstone (without broadcast services) already had television sets. This was not necessarily in anticipation of the advent of broadcast services but because they also had video cassette recorders. The two in tandem provide access to home video entertainment. The research also revealed that one of the casualties of a lack of broadcast services is general knowledge — the cultural capital of the wider Australian society of which these populations are a part. The separate survey of Year Ten students showed that, in October 1986, as Australia limbered up to defend the America's Cup, 44% of Fitzroy Crossing students (sample of 25) believed that Sydney, Darwin or Hobart was to host the competition. In Broome, where there were both radio and television broadcasts, only 16% answered incorrectly (sample of 31).

The picture that emerged was one that reflects the differences between the communities. Broome residents, who already had an ABC television and radio service were suggesting changes to broadcasting schedules, and demanding more and better services on the grounds of equity - "short-changed because we live so far from the variety of the south."

Residents of both Fitzroy Crossing and Sandstone responded to the survey in angry tenor, with one Sandstone correspondent writing, "What's bloody TV, mate?" and a Fitzroy Crossing resident describing "the forgotten town no one wants to know about." The demand here was for broadcast services immediately, the major arguments being public safety (particularly flood and cyclone warnings), access to the news, and educational opportunity for children.

The homestead respondents reported a 28% ownership of satellite dishes. The recurring theme in these comments, however, was that the need to generate the power to run the satellite dish made broadcast services far from accessible,

even after spending the capital outlay required to purchase the dish. Generators are rarely run for more than a few hours a day, and those few hours were consequently the only ones when radio and television could be used.

One of the benefits of clear radio and television to the homestead group is that it reduces the perception of isolation, and is linked in questionnaire responses to a feeling that the respondent is "getting a fair deal in life."

Homesteaders without radio and television were more likely to feel very isolated, to feel "badly treated," and to consider that the Western Australian Government and Federal Government were "very ignorant" about their community.

### **1987 - The survey of remote, regional and metropolitan populations**

A first report on the 1986 research (unpublished) was finished by March, 1987, and a paper summarising the study to that point was presented to the Australian Communication Association conference later that year. (Green, forthcoming.) As a result of the report, the research was expanded. This enabled the comparison of viewing priorities between metropolitan, regional and remote populations within Western Australia, and between communities within these populations.

One focus of the research was to inform policy progress towards "regional equalisation" of television services. This was defined by the Hon. M.J. Duffy, Federal Minister for Communications, as follows: "In the decade 1986-1996, the Government wants to provide services in most regional areas comparable to those in the capital cities — this is what we call equalisation" (Duffy, 1986:3511). Since Perth had two (shortly to be three) commercial television services, the implication of the regional equalisation policy is that a second, and possibly third, television service should be licensed to broadcast to regional Western Australia. Since that time, GWN has taken over the remaining independent regional commercial television service to

become the sole commercial station broadcasting to regional Western Australia.

### **Television service choice**

The policy of regional equalisation is one of commitment to providing a choice of commercial television services to regional Australia. Hitherto, each regional area has been served by only one commercial television station. Single operators have been able to pick the programs that they believe their audience would prefer from the schedules of the three metropolitan stations — Channels 7, 9 and 10. This system is known as “cherry picking.” One consequence of regional equalisation, where each region will be served by three stations, may be that each regional station will relay one metropolitan channel to the viewing audience. The proportion of specially-made programming is seen as a likely casualty of such relaying. The price of offering regional viewers an equal choice of commercial television services may be that none of the programming available to them is tailored to their needs.

In order to gauge the importance of this possibility to the viewing audience, respondents were asked to choose either

“Exactly the same choice of television services as Perth residents have”; or

“A television service that offers less choice but which has programs specially made for regional and remote residents.”

The responses of remote respondents and of regional respondents are analysed separately.

The overall response from remote area residents was divided evenly. 50% of the respondents wanted the same services as Perth, while 46% opted for special programs even if this meant less choice. This generalised overview disguises the preferences of two significant populations.

Aboriginal people form a small proportion of the remote area respondents. Of the sample of 35 Aborigines

responding in 1987, 27 came from Broome and are likely to be living less traditional lifestyles than Aboriginal respondents from Fitzroy Crossing and other less populous areas of the north west. For every Aboriginal respondent who preferred to have specially made programs at the expense of less choice, two Aboriginal respondents chose the "same as Perth" option. On the other hand, in the non-Aboriginal response, the balance of preference tips slightly away from "the same as Perth" with a minimally larger proportion choosing "specially made programs." The preferences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents in the 1987 remote-area survey thus differ substantially.

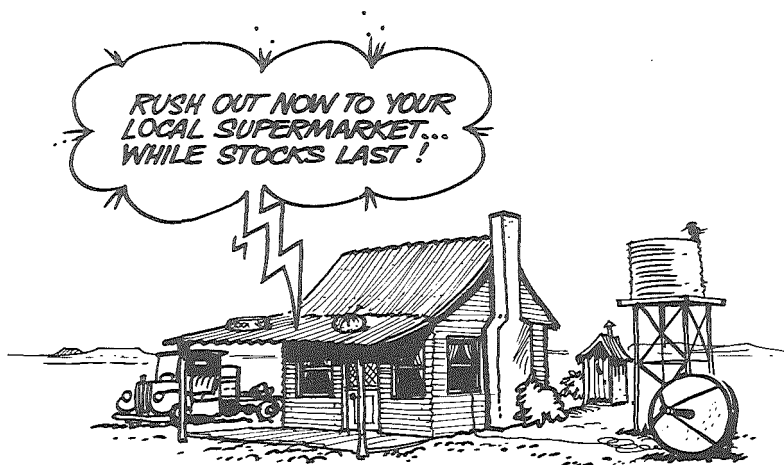
A comparison of Broome and the homesteads (Sandstone is excluded because of small sample size, Fitzroy Crossing because it had no experience of television and this may alter demand) shows a further difference. A majority of homesteaders, 57%, would choose to have programs specially made for them - even at the expense of choice - while only 40% of Broome respondents selected this option. This is particularly significant given that homestead respondents generally have far fewer leisure choices than people living in Broome or other remote towns.

Whilst these differences are important, they are differences within the context of a small population scattered over an area approximately one-quarter the size of Australia. GWN, in the application that won the licence for the Western Zone RCTS, estimated that 100,000 people marked the likely extent of the service. Of the six additional staff required to run the RCTS broadcasts, only two were to be allocated to work on program production, which means that very little in the way of special programs can be made for remote viewers (Golden West Network, 1984:10-16). Some comments from remote area residents indicate that the programs they see retain a southern regional, rather than remote, perspective. Thus, a Broome correspondent writes, "Our local news for country areas is Albany, Esperance and Kalgoorlie."

In these circumstances, it is to be expected that the two regional communities surveyed, Esperance and Gnowangerup, would have responded more positively to the service provided by GWN. Such an expectation was confounded. 63% of regional respondents wanted exactly the same choice of television services as Perth; 31% opted for the specially made programs option. There are, however, few indications in the comments to suggest that GWN is failing to meet expectations.

The problem appears not to be with the programming provided but rather with what Perth has that other Western Australian residents do not — a wider choice.

This issue of wider choice is addressed in the policy of regional equalisation. There are already indications, however, that as remote area residents begin to take their television broadcasts more for granted, there will be pressure for policy changes to move towards “remote equalisation,” paralleling the historical pressure for regional equalisation. This may be some way off, but the strong remote support for “the same choice...as Perth” is notable.



## Program category rankings

Another way in which the broadcast needs of different communities were examined was by asking all respondents to place program categories for radio and television in rank order of importance. The categories offered were designed to identify a demand for local content. To establish whether different demands were made upon the two media of radio and television, each was ranked separately. The rank orders provided by five of the populations were then analysed to investigate whether different communities exhibited different expectations and different priorities. (Sandstone and Fitzroy Crossing data was again excluded from this.)

A first comparison of this information showed that there was remarkable consistency in the order placed upon the 14 program categories offered; and that this order, over a total of 657 respondents (remote, regional and metropolitan), is a very different order from that which might be anticipated from program ratings. People were asked to "list these programs in order of their importance to you," and respondents were clearly distinguishing between program importance and their viewing behaviour. Across the board, with one exception, the order of the top four programs for television was — Australian news, W.A. news, local weather, foreign news. The one exception is in Dianella, where W.A. news pipped Australian news as the highest priority. Dianella respondents, with (then) two commercial channels plus the ABC and SBS, were best placed to have a choice of news services and to be able to value W.A. news. It is also possible that W.A. news is perceived to be of greater relevance to the state capital's population. Overall, however, the demands placed by respondents upon television services are shown to be remarkably consistent between communities.

On the basis of program category rankings, regional and remote areas differ very little from Dianella, the sample metropolitan population. On the other hand, regional and remote communities also differ very little from each other, and this creates a problem. There is, for example, no



difference evident between the choices of Broome and the homesteads, which would indicate the difference known to exist with homestead respondents choosing "specially made" programs and with Broome respondents preferring the "same as Perth" option. One possible reading of this is that different communities expect different things of the same program categories.

### Local programs

Different expectations of one specific program category were investigated in the third approach to the question of broadcast needs of diverse communities. "Local programs" were variously ranked fifth and sixth in Broome, the homesteads, Esperance, Gnowangerup and Dianella. In an era of networking and the aggregation of smaller regional service areas, local programming is a key issue to the community and to government bodies responsible for communications. A number of definitions were offered to respondents as to how local they wanted "local programs" to be.

From the five definitions offered, two emerged as the favourites - "W.A. statewide" and "Regions of W.A." "Regions of W.A." here means a service to all the accepted geographic regions within Western Australia; such as the Kimberleys, the Pilbara, and the Goldfields. (It does not use regional in the sense of receiving the GWN terrestrially-broadcast regional services.) Similar percentages chose "W.A. statewide" and "Regions of W.A." in both radio and television, showing little differentiation between the two broadcast media for these larger divisions. Only a very few people chose local programming to be either town or shire based. The highest percentage came from Broome, where (joining two categories together) 8% wanted town/shire local programs on television and 16% wanted such programs on radio.

Analysis of remote population preferences indicates that television programs dealing with issues relevant to the whole of Western Australia would satisfy the need for local programming of a large minority of respondents, while

leaving a majority potentially dissatisfied. In this context, "W.A. statewide" as a definition for local programs is unlikely to mean "made for Perth but broadcast throughout the state." Local programs of relevance to a statewide audience would be expected to include, on a regular basis, remote and regional material as well as metropolitan concerns. A quote from Broome underlines this point.

"There's a deep need for programs that make people feel good about their region; and no need at all for programs (or a program philosophy) that makes people feel like country bumpkins, second-class citizens, or idiots..."

One attraction for country people, of local programming broadcast to a statewide audience, may well be that city audiences will come to understand better the challenges faced by country areas. Television programs that integrate country and city concerns would also go some way towards mollifying the majority of remote respondents who indicated that local television programs should be broadcast to an area smaller than "W.A. statewide." Table 3 summarises the responses of the four remote populations on this issue.

It might be expected that the regional and metropolitan data would indicate a desire for local programs on a much smaller scale than "W.A. statewide." In fact, the opposite is the case. A majority of respondents from each of Esperance (57%), Gnowangerup (69%), and Dianella (81%) wanted "local programs" for television to be "W.A. statewide." Those who wanted local programs to be shire or town/city (two categories combined) ranged from 12% (Esperance) to 8% (Dianella).

The percentage of regional and metropolitan respondents choosing the "W.A. statewide" definition was substantially less in radio than was the case for television. Even so, it was the favourite in all cases: Esperance (36%), Gnowangerup (59%), Dianella (68%). The "Regions of W.A." option was the second choice in Gnowangerup and Dianella (combining "Regions of W.A." with "Your town/city" in the latter case, since Dianella's town/city/region is perceived as

## Table 3: Local program choices of remote populations

“Question 8 (1987): If you want local programs, how local do you want the programs to be?”

	% of respondents							
	On television				On radio			
	<i>Broome</i>	<i>Fitzroy Crossing</i>	<i>Sandstone</i>	<i>Homesteads</i>	<i>Broome</i>	<i>Fitzroy Crossing</i>	<i>Sandstone</i>	<i>Homesteads</i>
W.A. statewide	41	43	43	44	37	41	46	46
North of 26th Parallel/ south of 26th Parallel	16	14	7	15	10	14	—	14
Regions of W.A., e.g., Kimberleys, Goldfields	29	35	43	31	31	35	46	31
Your shire	4	—	7	6	6	5	8	4
Your town/city	4	—	—	—	10	—	—	1
Not interested in local programs	6	8	—	4	7	5	—	5
Sample size (No.)	199	48	16	118	199	48	16	118

the metropolis), while opinion was fairly divided between "Regions of W.A.," "Your shire," and "Your town/city" in the case of Esperance. One unambiguous distinction between the radio and television choices of regional and metropolitan respondents, however, is that radio is seen as more suited to the delivery of smaller-scale local programs than television. The regional and metropolitan data is summarised in Table 4.

Taking the three indicators together — the question of a metropolitan or specially-tailored service, comparative program category preferences, and the definition of local — few differences exist between metropolitan and regional respondents in terms of expectations for television services. The equalisation of commercial television services is clearly endorsed by regional respondents, who would prefer to have the same variety of programs that Perth residents have rather than specially made programs at the expense of less choice. In this context, the relaying of Perth metropolitan stations to regional audiences would appear to satisfy majority opinion so long as the importance given by this population to "local weather" and "local programs" is reflected in the programming content. Remote respondents are evenly divided on the issue of which kind of commercial television service they would prefer. A majority, however, would prefer local programming on a scale smaller than statewide, and half would prefer specially made programs even at the expense of choice.

This is particularly true in the case of homestead respondents. With so little in the way of entertainment options compared with other sample groups, they were the only population clearly to prefer "less choice (with) programs specially made for regional and remote residents." Since they are a small subsection of the approximately 100,000 potential viewers in remote Western Australia, homesteaders' views on television services are unlikely to prevail in the long term against possible pressure from other residents for "remote equalisation." On the other hand, homesteaders are particularly vocal in their call for improved radio services, with this issue the one most

## Table 4: Local program choices of regional and metropolitan populations

“Question 8 (1987): If you want local programs, how local do you want the programs to be?”

	% of respondents					
	<i>Esperance</i>	On television <i>Gnowangerup</i>	<i>Dianella</i>	<i>Esperance</i>	On radio <i>Gnowangerup</i>	<i>Dianella</i>
W.A. statewide	57	68	81	36	59	68
North of 26th Parallel/ south of 26th Parallel	2	4	—	1	2	1
Regions of W.A., e.g., Kimberleys, Goldfields	19	15	3 <sup>(1)</sup>	16	24	2 <sup>(1)</sup>
Your shire	9	6	1	18	11	4
Your town/city	3	6	8 <sup>(1)</sup>	19	4	19 <sup>(1)</sup>
Not interested in local programs	10	2	8	9	—	7
Sample size	122	71	147	122	71	147

<sup>(1)</sup> For Dianella respondents, “Regions of W.A.” and “Your town/city” can be assumed to be the same unit; i.e., the Perth metropolitan region.

frequently raised by them in the open comments section of the questionnaire in 1987. One homestead respondent remarks,

"I value the radio communications a lot more than I do the TV."

Another comments: "Priority No. 1 - decent radio transmission throughout remote areas."

An improved radio service, then, would be a consolation to homestead respondents for a television service that did not tailor its programming exclusively to the needs of regional and remote residents. This would require the recognition of the regional area as an appropriate denominator for a radio service.

### **Different perceptions of television and radio**

There is evidence that television and radio are valued differently for different broadcast circumstances. The data on program category preferences shows that priorities for radio programs diverge more than is the case with television. In Dianella, this is demonstrated particularly strongly in that the normal "Top Four" of Australian news, W.A. news, local weather and foreign news is broken up by music in second place (after W.A. news).

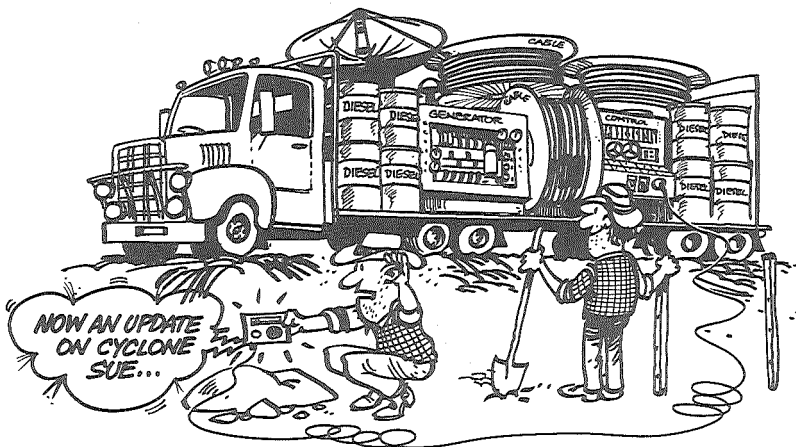
The production of programs for small audiences is much cheaper for radio than it is for television. Radio has the added advantages of being more interactive in terms of talk-back programs and 'phone-ins, and of allowing air time for interests which are important but too parochial to attract statewide television coverage. With geographically spread audiences, "local" cannot afford to be too narrowly defined. One person's local program is another's raised blood pressure; thus a Broome correspondent writes,

"Why should [we] have an hour program (radio) on the price of red-eyed mullet in Albany..."

So a preference for radio broadcasts to cover local issues in a regional context makes sense. The specific needs of outback and regional people could be met by radio programming, while television serves a statewide audience.

This solution would appear to satisfy most of the people for much of the time. Apart from Esperance, where over one-third want local radio programs to be either shire or town/city, the overwhelming majority of all respondents in all populations chose local programming to be W.A. statewide, north/south of 26th Parallel, or regions of W.A.

While a comprehensive coverage of the state using regional radio stations may appear to be the service preferred by a significant proportion of respondents, it begs the question of service delivery. The next generation of AUSSAT satellites will be off the drawing board and into production within the year. The current satellites, and the satellites that will replace AUSSAT1 and AUSSAT2 in 1991 and 1992, incorporate transponders that are suited to the satellite delivery of regional radio. What is needed is a comprehensive network of rebroadcast transmitters. At the moment, in non-rebroadcast remote areas, radio and television equipment has to be physically linked to a satellite dish, with a generator on. Rebroadcasting would allow those without satellite dishes, those on the move, and those whose generators were off, to benefit from live information and entertainment.



A quote from a 1986 Western Australian Government consultancy report makes this point:

“...there has been a continued and oft-frustrated call by the remote community for radio services. [It is recommended] that the planning for the Second Generation AUSSATs places a high priority on provision of stand-alone radio services to remote areas.”  
(Department of Computing and Information Technology, 1986:45.)

The alternative to the satellite delivery of a regional radio service would require the injection of more funds into land lines servicing terrestrial radio transmitters. This is not a welcome option, since one of the justifications for satellite broadcasting was that it would eliminate costly land lines. These land lines would have to be reinstated and extended and new broadcasting transmitters built for a comprehensive radio coverage of remote Australia on a geographically regional basis. Nonetheless, there is a strong demand for either satellite-delivered or terrestrially-transmitted regional radio broadcasts throughout remote areas. This demand should be addressed urgently.

### **Direct radio broadcasting by satellite**

Remote Australia is so vast and sparsely populated that it is unrealistic to believe that sufficient funds will ever be made available to permit total coverage by rebroadcast transmitters. For the most isolated of remote area respondents, intermittent shortwave radio is the only music radio service, (which does not require a satellite dish), available for at least the next decade. This situation represents a missed opportunity.

The second generation of satellites could have included a variant of direct radio broadcasting by satellite whereby a single radio service could have been delivered to the whole of Australia without the necessity for satellite dishes. In pioneering such a system, Australian technology would have been harnessed to the specific needs of its citizens — some of the most isolated people in the world. Although it was first requested by the Western Australian Government in



1986, it is too late for the development of a full broadcast-quality direct radio service in time for the second generation of AUSSAT satellites. Nonetheless, a third generation will begin transmitting soon after the beginning of the 21st century. The opportunity should not be missed again.

At the moment, signals to the domestic audience are encoded according to the B-MAC format. This necessitates the use of a sizeable, non-portable satellite dish to receive them. There is the potential, however, for a powerful signal, delivered in a non B-MAC format, to be picked up by a receiver as inefficient as a car antenna — or a portable radio. For the user, it would be a simple matter of turning a dial to pick up the signal; there would be no need to power a generator. Unfortunately, there is a catch. At the moment, no other satellites are broadcasting directly in this manner, so the service would have to be developed from scratch. Signals would be delivered on a “satellite wavelength” and would only be received by radios with an additional waveband — a specialised piece of equipment not unlike the current shortwave radios. Even with these technical problems, the development of direct radio broadcasting by satellite would revolutionise communications for isolated people in remote areas.

If this proposed service represents an ideal that is unattainable before the turn of the century, there are two possible consolations. The first is the L band. The L band is a new facility, which was not included on the existing satellites. It is an Australia-wide two-way radio service that allows voice and data contact with mobile vehicles. It has been designed for around 10,000 users, with approximately 450 channels available at any one time. One of these channels could be “hi-jacked” to provide a voice-only radio service. Given that “Australian news, W.A. news, local weather and foreign news” are all voice-only programmes as well as the top radio program priorities for remote respondents, an L band service would satisfy the immediate information needs of people on the move who have the required L band Mobilsat two-way radio equipment. (5,000

of these are about to be manufactured). Regular travellers in remote areas could keep up with news, weather and market reports and be alerted to any emergency conditions in their vicinity.

The full Mobilsat equipment is very expensive in domestic terms, but this is because it needs to be able to transmit information as well as receive it. A Mobilsat variant is theoretically possible, which would be capable of receiving the radio service without being able to transmit back to the satellite. This receiver may be very much cheaper. There are three major limitations to this possible development on the L band. Firstly, AUSSAT's L band wavelengths are currently unable to be used for broadcast-standard music. To date, broadcasters have refused to use voice-only bandwidths for radio. The second challenge would be one of service scheduling. The L band service is designed to handle a large number of short conversations. It is not designed for 24 hour broadcasting of even a voice-only radio service. This disadvantage could be overcome with, say, hourly broadcasts lasting for five minutes at a time. The final limitation is that a receiver-only Mobilsat has yet to be developed.

The L band service nonetheless offers a promising opportunity. It has been developed by AUSSAT in response to customer demands and will become available in 1991 or 1992. This allows a number of years for the manufacture of Mobilsat receiver-only radios and the development of a nationwide radio service for regular travellers in the outback. A government policy commitment would see the ABC able to take advantage of this opportunity. Alternatively, a commercial broadcaster might find that such a service could be profitable, with or without a government subsidy.

If the L bandwidth provides a partial solution for those people in vehicles in remote Australia, there is also the possibility of a round-the-clock radio service for homesteaders that does not require a generator.

Communications with the first generation AUSSAT satellites are limited to the Ku band. This is an extremely short wavelength and requires the use of a dish antenna to concentrate the signal. Dishes are highly directional - they have to be pointed at the satellite - and are vulnerable to knocks and rough treatment. Consequently, they are not generally transportable. Dishes capable of receiving complex television signals usually require a diameter of 1.5 metres and a generator to power them, but a stand-alone radio service could be received much more simply. Using a powerful transponder, a radio service including both voice and music could be picked up by a battery-powered satellite dish of no more than 60 cm diameter. The batteries could be recharged when the household generator was in use. If such a radio service were transmitted in a non B-MAC format, these dishes are likely to be priced in the hundreds of dollars rather than the thousands charged for a conventional satellite dish.

Both of these services are possible and desirable, while falling short of the long-term ideal of a full broadcast-quality radio service that is not dependent upon a satellite dish. The first steps are commitment in principle to non B-MAC direct radio broadcasting by satellite on the Ku waveband and to a radio service on the L bandwidth. Such policy decisions would go some way to appeasing the remote correspondent who wrote,

“Stop fiddling while Rome burns! Get comprehensive radio and telephone communications to the bush before TV and other ‘frills’”

### **Broadcasting as a luxury**

Relevant to the issue of the nature and choice of broadcast services desired by remote area residents is the question of cost. Is the Western Australian Government, for example, justified in effectively subsidising every potential viewer of the RCTS to the tune of \$20 per annum? Should isolated Australians have a “right” to broadcast programming or is it, as some claim, a “luxury”?

Satellite-delivered broadcasts are seen by some as a luxury because they are not a necessity. Given that radio reception is sometimes available on shortwave, the satellite dish is not the only way to gain current broadcast information. Further, the technology is expensive (a feature of "luxury" items), and the benefit is most likely to be appreciated during leisure time when station work is over and the generator is in use. Some respondents went on to suggest that those who want modern conveniences in communications should perhaps reconsider the isolated life and live in Western Australia's towns or cities. Otherwise, luxuries - such as broadcast services - should be afforded only by those who can pay for them. The general taxpayer should not be expected, through State or Federal Governments, to foot the bill for the expansion of television and radio to the outback. Surprisingly, however, this hip-pocket argument was advanced by very few people.

### **Broadcasting as a right**

Most people responded as though broadcast services were a right rather than a luxury. One survey question asked,

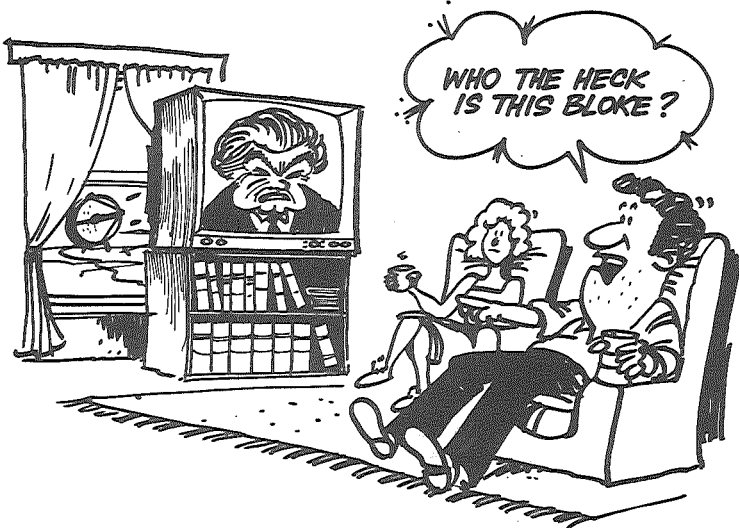
"Do you think the W.A. Government should subsidise satellite-receiving equipment for remote or isolated W.A. residents?"

A majority (74%) of all respondents thought that such a subsidy would be appropriate. In Dianella, 72% replied "yes." The figures rose to 75% in Esperance and 82% in Gnowangerup (both within terrestrial transmission boundaries). In fact, there was considerable agreement on the issue of a subsidy regardless of the respondent's broadcast circumstances. The main arguments for broadcasting as a right stemmed from one of fairness - most Australians have radio and television for "free" - the only direct costs being those of the equipment itself and the electricity used to run it. Further, these services have been provided in many places for decades. It seems inequitable to many respondents that some remote residents are required to buy a satellite dish and generate expensive power for a

service inferior, in terms of the number of channels available, to that on offer in state capitals where other information services and entertainment opportunities abound.

Public safety is also raised as a major issue. Cyclone, fire, flood and police warnings are all potential life-savers in Australia's remote outback.

Politically, broadcast services are seen as serving a special role. Given that democracy is predicated upon an informed electorate, respondents claim that it is a democratic right of the public to have access to minimum levels of current affairs coverage, regardless of voters' place of residence. As one correspondent from Fitzroy Crossing (then without radio or television) put his/her case, "Bob Hawke said he campaigned on the Australia Card — well, we never heard about it here. Are we being denied our rights because Government departments can't get their act together and give us at least the NEWS?"



This view is reinforced by the findings of the current affairs survey of Year Ten students in the sample populations. A comparison of Broome and Fitzroy Crossing Year Tens in 1986 showed the Broome students more than twice as likely to select the correct answer to a multiple choice current affairs question than their peers in Fitzroy Crossing. The survey was repeated in 1987 (with updated questions), revealing considerable similarity between Year Ten students in Broome, Esperance, Gnowangerup and Dianella (the right answer was offered by an average of between 57% and 66% of the students in these communities), while the Fitzroy Crossing students again scored significantly lower. Fitzroy Crossing students gave the correct answer only 34% of the time. While this difference may reflect cultural priorities as well as the lack of access to broadcast services in Fitzroy Crossing, these findings concur with those advanced by Noble and Elsegood (1984) regarding Northern Territory Aboriginal people. "Scores (for political knowledge) in broadcast TV communities are significantly higher than in non-TV communities" (Noble, G. and Elsegood, P., 1984).

If broadcasting is seen as a "right," then it is likely that in the longer term there will be pressure from remote residents — as there has been hitherto from regional residents — for an equalisation of services.

### **The Aboriginal population**

There are likely to be casualties as a result of extended television coverage. Before the first AUSSAT-delivered television broadcasts, Eric Michaels identified one major area of concern. This is the traditional Aboriginal people living in remote areas who may be subjected to a potent mix of audio-visual entertainment delivered in English and likely to carry messages contrary to their cultural values. "Aboriginal societies are about to be included in the Government's plans to assure every Australian the 'right' to watch ABC television. Many people fear that this curious 'right' may jeopardise the maintenance of Aboriginal values, language and law in remote communities" (Michaels, 1984).

Michaels' argument was later refined in "The Aboriginal Invention of Television in Central Australia 1982-86" (Michaels, 1986), where a model of cultural maintenance advocates television broadcasts controlled by the Aboriginal communities themselves and an Aboriginal veto over broadcast material about their culture that may break traditional law.

Michaels' views are part of a continuing debate in which the Federal Government has played an active part. The Task Force recommended in 1984 that [Recommendation 9.11] "Provision should be made through legislation if necessary for the interruption of services and for the associated development of community stations." (Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1984: viii.)

This, together with academic concern about "the culturcidal threat that national broadcasting of unvetted Aboriginal material may pose to traditional people" (Michaels, 1987) has resulted in new policy. The Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) "will bring ABC radio and television services to [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people] living in traditional communities, and provide opportunities for community-based production of radio and television programs" (Venner, 1988). Effectively, this policy allows the development of public television stations operating in remote communities and responding to the programming needs of local people.

Such initiatives are already taking place with radio broadcasts. In 1986, a Fitzroy Crossing respondent reported an attempt

"To get a community radio station going that will use the five local Aboriginal languages...as a way of retaining the languages when the English barrage occurs."

This differs from the BRACS model in that there is no attempt to vet the incoming signal for possible culturally subversive messages. Instead, the aim is to reinforce Aboriginal culture and values by using local Aboriginal

languages in relevant program making. According to the Principal of the Karrayili Adult Education Centre, Fitzroy Crossing, test transmissions have been successful and the group is currently negotiating with the ABC to broadcast locally for a few hours every day.

Broome Aboriginals responding in 1987 put forward arguments for greater representation of Aboriginal people in the mainstream media. This more closely conforms to a model of assimilation than cultural maintenance. One such respondent noted on the survey form,

“Neighbours, Flying Doctors, A Country Practice. Only very rarely do they have Aboriginal actors participating. When they do, it brings great joy to our community.”

Aboriginal respondents in the remote sample (1987) are drawn overwhelmingly from the Broome population and, as discussed earlier, did not demand a separate service tailored specially to the needs of regional and remote residents. 65% stated that they wanted the same television programming as Perth, with only 32% indicating specially made programs, even if this means less choice. This is not representative of all Aboriginal viewpoints. Traditional Aboriginal people are unlikely to have responded to a six-page questionnaire in English. It would appear, therefore, that the advantages and disadvantages of satellite-delivered broadcasting vary according to the cultural context of the Aboriginal viewer. Nonetheless, 51% of Aboriginal respondents in 1986 believed that a new television service would improve life; in 1987, 62% said that television had made life better.



# CONCLUSIONS

Six hypotheses were advanced in the introduction. The research that has been documented has provided important information in examining each of them.

Respondents to the survey make value judgements about programming available to them. When asked to do so, they rank-order given categories of radio and television programming in a sequence of importance. The subjective judgement of importance differs from observed viewing behaviour as recorded in ratings data but need not be discredited because of this. In fact, remarkable consistency was observed in the most important program category preferences across all the populations of significant sample size with experience of broadcasting. Australian news, W.A. news, local weather and foreign news were judged to be the four most important program categories. Local programs were judged either fifth or sixth by these communities.

Although broadcasting is a relatively modern development, it has not taken long for it to reach the status of a civil "right" in the eyes of the public. So effective is it as a means of communicating messages - be they safety-oriented, educational or political - that those people deprived of access to reliable broadcasting can justifiably claim to be disadvantaged. Three-quarters of the survey respondents indicated that the State Government should subsidise satellite-receiving equipment for remote or isolated Western Australian residents. The conclusion that broadcasting is a right is underlined by the current affairs survey, which showed that young adults without broadcast services were twice as likely to give wrong answers to a current affairs survey than peers with radio and television.

An unsatisfied demand for broadcast services remains. Satellite dishes and the power to run them are expensive. In remote areas, beyond rebroadcasting schemes, reception is limited to equipment physically connected to the satellite dish when the power is on. It is, consequently, not available to people working away from the home base, travelling, to people whose generator is off, or to people who cannot afford the high costs of the technology. One possible

response to those currently without broadcast services is to subsidise the equipment required to receive it. This is supported in principle by the respondents to this survey. Another option strongly recommended here is the development of direct broadcasting of stand-alone radio by satellite. These two are not mutually exclusive.

The lifestyles of people in metropolitan and regional areas appear to be very different. It would not be unexpected for this difference to be reflected in their priorities for programs. Where one possible consequence of regional equalisation may be a reduction in programs specifically aimed at the regional audience, regional equalisation could be seen as a double-edged sword. This was not the impression given by the regional respondents to the survey. They indicated that the "same as Perth" option was twice as popular as "less choice but...programs specially made." The policy of regional equalisation - even if it results in the relaying of metropolitan stations - is roundly endorsed by the people affected.

Local programming is rated highly by survey respondents. There is some measure of agreement that Western Australians view their state as their "locality." Programs made for a statewide audience are likely to satisfy the need for local programming expressed by a majority of respondents. This should not be taken to mean that programs made for a local Perth-based audience should be broadcast statewide. Instead, programming should - over time - cover a wide cross-section of local issues from all areas of Western Australia, placing this material within a statewide context. Even so, statewide local broadcasting would leave a large minority of respondents unsatisfied; and this minority is a majority when remote respondents are considered in isolation. The recommended policy path is for statewide local programming on television, and for regional local programming on radio. Important but parochial issues would thus receive an airing on the cheaper, more interactive medium.

There are some pointers from respondents as to the different demands made of television and radio. People are less consistent in their judgements of radio programs, and are more likely to see radio as appropriate for "local" broadcasting in the sub-regional context. If television assumes the role of statewide communicator, radio has an equally important part to play in regional broadcasting. For metropolitan respondents, music on radio has an importance quite unlike music on television, while for remote Australians without clear, reliable services, radio becomes "the No. 1 priority." Up-to-date broadcast information has a special relevance to the communications-deprived.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that broadcast services are extremely important to the people surveyed in this research. Many of the State and Federal Governments' policies and priorities are endorsed by the public response. It is probably in the nature of television and radio that people will always want "more" whether it be variety or specialisation. It is legitimate that policy should be developed to facilitate the spread of programming and service choice. Unfortunately, it is not the case that everybody wants "more." There are a significant number of people who only want "some." At a time when the fiscal purse has rarely been tighter, it may seem a luxury to advocate a fully inclusive policy of broadcast services - to advocate, in fact, direct radio broadcasting by satellite for remote and isolated Australians. This is one instance where a luxury is also a right.

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# BIOGRAPHY

Lelia Green studied Psychology and Anthropology at Cambridge University. In 1978 she conducted a research project which surveyed 4,000 students in two universities. The Student Welfare Officer, she collected data on specific groups of students most at risk of psychological trauma. Research findings were used to support a campaign for more counselling facilities and self-help networks, and attracted national and international media interest.

Following her graduation, Lelia was a researcher, and later a director/producer, with BBC Television. Her seven years in production included items as diverse as the biggest chocolate Easter egg in the world and the Stillbirth and Perinatal Death Association. She became a Senior Member of King's College, Cambridge in 1982, upon the award of her M.A.

A family reunion visit to Melbourne-based relations brought Lelia into contact with the Australian outback. During her holiday she signed up for an overland journey from Alice Springs to Sydney. Torrential rains and flooding marooned the bus for three days at the building site which was to become the Yulara resort. Cold, wet and whingeing the tourist decided to invest in a long-distance call to her relatives - but the closest phone was 270 kilometres away . . .

Lelia Green is now a lecturer in Media Studies at the Western Australian College of Advanced Education. The Department of Media Studies integrates a range of theoretical and applied perspectives from Communication Policy Studies to Graphic Design. Within this context Lelia has been able to pursue both her research interests and her love of television production. She is currently enrolled as a part-time Doctoral student at Murdoch University and is also completing the research reported in this monograph as a consultant to the Western Australian Government's Office of Communications.



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