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RESEARCH PAPER

Media of the people: broadcasting community media in Australia

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Social Policy

Executive summary

- Australia has one of the highest concentrations of commercial media ownership in the world and it has been argued that this has led to a dearth of sources of opinion from which people can glean information and make informed decisions about politics and social issues.

- The existence of public service broadcasters has helped to counter a lack of media diversity and the rise of new forms of social media has delivered another means through which alternative viewpoints can be aired. A further source of media diversity, one often overlooked, is the community media in all its forms.

- What defines community media is the subject of considerable debate. It has been described in many ways—as participatory or citizen media, radical media or alternative media.

- One thing is agreed—community media contributes significantly to the pool of media voices available. Community broadcasting in particular, as an alternative medium to public service and commercial media, fosters citizen participation and helps to preserve cultural diversity, while promoting an overall 'Australian-ness'.

- Most importantly, since its beginnings community media has been local media—the voices of communities that echo their interests and concerns.

- Survival is difficult for broadcasting community media because they most often operate on small budgets, receiving a fraction of the support which the Federal Government provides to public sector broadcasters and operating largely as a result of support from the communities they service.

- The broadcasting community media in Australia is more a source which fosters participation than radical idealism; it is the voice of ordinary Australians who mostly do not seek to reorient the world, but to ensure everyone gets a 'fair go'. It is alternative in that it provides a form to promote cultural diversity within the framework of an overall national culture and in that it delivers strong local voices in a media environment which is increasingly homogenous.

- It has been suggested that community broadcasting needs to change if it is to continue to deliver its unique services. It needs to become more professional in order to attract a greater share of funding from government and to enhance its main sources of financial support. This is a cause of discontent within the sector, as some consider such changes will betray the principles of community media.

- This paper looks at the arguments about what defines community media. It focusses on community broadcasting in particular, its origins in Australia and its current situation. The paper considers some of the ways in which it has contributed to the Australian media environment and ways in which it can sustain those contributions.

Contents

Introduction

The term community media refers to radio, television and print services. Any or all of those forms of community media tend to emerge when communities are denied a voice for their views. In many countries they have provided a rallying point for protest and demands for rights. In post-apartheid South Africa, for example, community radio stations have emerged in an attempt to promote democracy as well as freedom of expression and diversity of broadcast content and ownership previously been denied in that country.

It would be drawing a long bow to equate the situation which led to the establishment of community radio in South Africa with that of Australia. Nevertheless it is possible to consider that the Australian community broadcasting sector, which emerged in the 1970s, represented the demands of groups who felt that they were denied the opportunity to express their opinions or listen to alternative sources of entertainment. These groups ranged from those who felt marginalised to those who were beginning to feel that traditional media sources were not acting in the interests of the people. They even included groups who just wanted to hear music that was different from that broadcast on commercial stations.

In seeking to deliver such alternatives, broadcast community media has done much to enhance Australian cultural diversity. It does much also to furnish ordinary Australians with an opportunity to contribute to debate on social and political issues. Indeed, researcher Michael Meadows and his colleagues argue that community broadcasting in Australia empowers audiences 'to re-engage in the processes of democracy at the grass roots' level creating social coherence through diversity'.[1]

Community broadcasting can be seen therefore as an alternative medium to public service and commercial media. As such, it occupies 'an important space in citizen participation' and is an important, though neglected, media sector.[2]

This paper provides an overview of the sector, looking at its origins and composition and the problems it faces in light of the tasks it performs and the lack of resources available to it to deliver a media which is 'of the people' in terms of aims, objectives and production.

Definition

In his guide to good practice for community media operators, Steve Buckley defines community media:

> … as independent, civil society based media that operate for social benefit and not for profit. They are present in all regions of the world as social movements and community-based organisations have sought a means to express their issues, concerns, cultures and languages.

> Community media set out to create an alternative both to national public broadcasters, which are often under government control, and to private commercial media.

> They provide communities with access to information and voice, facilitating community-level debate, information and knowledge sharing and input into public decisionmaking.[3]

Similarly, the European Parliament's definition of community media is that of a sector that is non-profit, owned by, or accountable to the community that it seeks to serve. Community media is open to participation in program-making and management by members of the community.[4]

Academic Kevin Howley argues community media are:

> …grassroots or locally oriented media access initiatives predicated on a profound sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream media form and content, dedicated to the principles of free expression and participatory democracy, and committed to enhancing community relations and promoting community solidarity.[5]

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1. M Meadows, S Forde, J Ewart and K Foxwell, 'A catalyst for change? Australian community broadcasting audiences fight back', in J Gordon ed, *Notions of community: a collection of community media debates and dilemmas*, Peter Lang, Oxford, 2008, p. 149.
2. Wijayananda Jayaweera 'Forward' in S Buckely, *Community media: a good practice handbook*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Paris, 2011, p. 5.
3. Ibid., p.7.
4. European Parliament, 2008, pp. 9–14, cited in K Coyer and A Hintz, 'Developing the "third sector": community media policies in Europe', in B Klimiewicz, *Media freedom and pluralism: media policy challenges in the enlarged Europe*, Central European University Press, 2010, accessed 3 February 2014.

Often in defining community media commentators stress its development aspect. This especially applies in descriptions of community radio which point out that despite the advent of recent technologies, radio remains the dominant communications medium across much of the world. This is because community radio stations 'tend to be low-budget, local enterprises that rely heavily on volunteers and are deeply rooted in the regions they serve'.[6] Hence, community radio can not only be a source of information for people at all levels of society, it can also be enormously effective in giving a voice to marginalised groups.

As the views in the box below also indicate, this is one reason that radio tends to be thought of as the most influential and accessible of the various community media sectors, and it applies whether a community radio station is situated in Colombia or in Australia.

Box 1: the inspiration of community radio

– A community radio station is one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community.

– The community can be territorial or geographical - a township, village, district or island. It can also be a group of people with common interests, who are not necessarily living in one defined territory. Consequently, community radio can be managed or controlled by one group, by combined groups, or of people such as women, children, farmers, fisher folk, ethnic groups, or senior citizens.

– What distinguishes community radio from other media is the high level of people's participation, both in management and program production aspects. Furthermore, individual community members and local institutions are the principal sources of support for its operation.[7]

– [C]ommunity radio is not about doing something for the community but about the community doing something for itself, [that is] owning and controlling its own means of communication.[8]

– When radio fosters the participation of citizens and defends their interests; when it reflects the tastes of the majority and makes good humour and hope its main purpose; when it truly informs; when it helps resolve the thousand and one problems of daily life; when all ideas are debated in its programs and all opinions are respected; when cultural diversity is stimulated over commercial homogeneity; when women are main players in communication and not simply a pretty voice or a publicity gimmick; when no type of dictatorship is tolerated, not even the musical dictatorship of the big recording studios; when everyone's words fly without discrimination or censorship, that is community radio.[9]

– Community Radio is characterised by the active participation of the community in the process of creating news, information, entertainment and culturally relevant material, with an emphasis on local issues and concerns.[10]

– Community radio is an element of closeness, a bridge, a step toward the other, not to make the other like us, but to have him become what he is. It is not a question of having more, but of being, that is the real mission of community radio stations in Canada. Isn't the most meaningful definition of culture the act of making people aware of the greatness they possess?[11]

Theoretical musing

As noted above, community media has many labels. It also comes in many guises. It is often referred to as citizen, participatory or grassroots media and many stations primarily stress the participatory aspect. Other community media are more concerned with alternative offerings and activism, and there are some community stations which delight in the label 'radical'.

Various academic commentators have attempted to outline the characteristics of community media. John Downing is one academic who considers any media which are located outside the mainstream radical—defined

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5. K Howley, *Community media: people, places and communication technologies*, Cambridge University Press, London, 2005, p. 2.

6. Center [sic] for International Media Assistance, *Empowering independent media: US efforts to foster free and independent news, around the world*, Washington, 2008, p. 39, accessed 3 February 2014.

7. L Tabing, *How to do community radio*, UNESCO, New Delhi, 2002, p. 11, accessed 3 February 2014.

8. 'What is community radio? A resource guide' AMARC Africa and Panos Southern Africa, 1998, as quoted on 'About community radio', World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters website, accessed 3 February 2014.

9. José Ignacio Lopez Vigil, Manual urgente para Radialistas Apasionados, 1997, as quoted on World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters community radio information pages, op. cit.

10. Voices, India, as quoted on World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters community radio information pages, op. cit.

11. Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada, ARC, Canada, as quoted on World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters community radio information pages, op. cit.

by a 'subversive relationship with mainstream power and authority'.[12] Fellow scholar Chris Atton takes another view, categorising community media as alternative media which espouse a view of the world not found elsewhere.[13] Clemencia Rodriguez adds yet another academic view which stresses the citizenship aspect of community media. Rodriguez sees community media as a collectivity enacting citizenship 'by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape'. For Rodriguez, community media contest social codes, legitimise identities, institutionalise social relations and empower communities involved.[14]

Other descriptions of community media see it as less confronting than Downing; as more of a transformative force. It is viewed by some as access media, or media that is based on pluralism. That is media, which encourages anyone who wants to participate to do so.[15]

What appears common to these views is that community media offer people 'the opportunity to talk back to the large institutions of public life'.[16] Community media provide communities, that is, those with a common identity, with technical infrastructure and training to use technologies to communicate with larger publics.[17] Community media provide 'a forum for those whose perspectives, opinions and interests are marginalised within the dominant media discourse to participate in the public sphere'.[18]

In Kevin Howley's view:

> The voluntary nature of community media encourages people to gain skills which promote democracy—speaking and listening, cooperation and equanimity. Community media consciously adopt participatory decision-making structures and practices that promote a sense of belonging to and responsibility toward an organisation and its relationship with the wider community. For individuals community media cultivate a more deliberate approach to participation in public life, nurture social networks within and between communities and potentially encourage innovative ways to think about democracy.[19]

It is not the intention of this paper to undertake extensive theoretical analysis of the community media sector. Notwithstanding, however, Michael Meadows and his colleagues discuss three factors in relation to community broadcasting which it can be argued underpin community media's existence and importance in the Australian context. These are well worth considering and are discussed in the sections below.[20]

Empowerment

While they acknowledge Kitty van Vuuren's argument that community broadcasting media is not empowering for everyone in every place and time, Meadows et al argue that financial pressures which limit the broadcast options of commercial media do not hinder community media.[21] Therefore, they are 'free to broadcast the ideas, beliefs and practices—the cultures—of various communities.[22] These academics conclude:

> In a practical sense, community media empowers communities or groups by enabling dissemination of their ideas to a much larger audience. In this role, community media challenges the status quo nature of mainstream media by providing a space where citizens can encounter, debate or experience alternative viewpoints and lifestyles. This is in stark contrast to the mainstream where voices of the elite have the power to set the agenda. Community radio and

12. T Dowmunt (with K Coyer), 'Introduction', in K Coyer, T Dowmunt and A Fountain, *The alternative media handbook*, Routledge, London, 2007, p. 4.

13. C Atton, *Alternative media*, Sage, London, 2002, p. 9, quoted in J Gordon, 'Introduction', in J Gordon, *Notions of community*, op. cit., p. 20.

14. C Rodríguez, *Fissures in the mediascape: an international study of citizens' media*, Hampton Press, Cresskill, New Jersey, 2001, p. 20.

15. J Tebbutt, 'Constructing broadcasting for the public', in H Wilson, ed., *Australian communications and the public sphere: essays in memory of Bill Bonney*, Macmillan, 1989, pp. 138–39.

16. K Howley, 'Notes on a theory of community radio' in K Howley, ed., *Understanding community media*, Sage, Los Angeles, 2010, p. 73.

17. Ibid., p. 73.

18. Ibid., p. 75

19. Ibid., p. 73.

20. M Meadows, S Forde, J Ewart and K Foxwell, 'A catalyst for change? Australian community broadcasting audiences fight back', available online and cited in J Gordon, ed, *Notions of community: an edited collection of community media debates*, n.d. This paper appears, however, to be an earlier version of the chapter published in Gordon and cited in footnote 6.

21. K van Vuuren, 'Community broadcasting and the enclosure of the public sphere', *Media, Culture and Society*, 28, 3, 2006, p. 380 cited in Meadows et al., A catalyst for change? Online version, op. cit.

22. Meadows et al., 'A catalyst for change?' Online version, op. cit.

television have the potential to enable the representation of other ideas and assumptions and this is its strongest contribution to 'communicative democracy'.[23]

Similarly, Nick Couldry from the London School of Economics asserts that community media is a weapon of the weak.[24] Others agree. They see community media as placing power to challenge the dominant ideologies characteristic of mainstream media—despite the fact that that power may be minimal—in the hands of local citizens.

There are a number of stark illustrations of how community media contribute to the empowerment of communities. For women in rural communities in developing countries, for example, community radio is able to provide a variety of health information—about breastfeeding, nutrition and the causes and possible solutions to health problems. It can also inform people about their legal rights and provide programming which fosters self-respect and self-reliance.[25] A similar situation occurs in remote Australia where Indigenous community media 'performs a vital service in not only maintaining social and cultural networks but also in providing critical information on health, community services, etc'.[26]

Culture

Meadows et al argue that complementary to its potential for empowerment, is community media's potential as a means by which various cultures can be maintained. The commercial media appear:

> … increasingly unable to deal with the diversity of cultures that now characterise 21st century Australia. This is largely because of the unprofitability of smaller—particularly regional—cohorts of 'consumers' and the likelihood of offending them (and losing advertisers) through the broadcast of unpalatable political viewpoints, Indigenous and ethnic language programming, specialist music formats and so on.[27]

Numerous examples of offerings that promote aspects of the overall national Australian culture are cited in one Griffith University study.[28] For example, *Writer's Radio* on 5UV radio Adelaide is a weekly program that features Australian poetry, novels, plays and more.[29] The Griffith study concludes:

> Through its representation of—and active engagement with—many cultures, community radio has established itself as an important component in the Australian cultural landscape. As a 'quiet' cultural resource, community radio stations serve a range of cultural tastes and pursuits representative of a heterogeneous Australian public. Their role in local communities is becoming increasingly important. The creation of local content facilitates the maintenance and representation of cultural tastes, pursuits and knowledge not catered for by other media. The creation of Australian content and support for local artists is a key cultural role performed by community radio.[30]

The findings of Meadows et al's research suggested to them that community radio plays a significant role in the settlement process for many cultures. As a Turkish focus group noted to the researchers, community radio helps to integrate people into Australian life:

> It's very important. Our children are growing up Australians anyway, maybe they're having difficulty adapting culturally, but through the radio, they will be able to get some help or adapt anyway. And also we see our differences as richness, in Turkey too, where we come from different backgrounds and things that, backgrounds, [sic] we're living the same thing here too and we're happy about that. Everyone's got their own different folklore, folklore and songs and everything else so we have that here too and we're happy with that.[31]

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23. Ibid.

24. N Couldry, 'Mediation and alternative media, or relocating the center [sic] of media and communication studies', *Media International Australia* 103, 2002, pp. 24–31.

25. A Sharma, 'Role of community radio for women's empowerment', The Communication Initiative Network website, 6 November 2012, accessed 3 February 2014.

26. M Meadows, S Forde, J Ewart and K Foxwell, *Community media matters: an audience study of the Australian community broadcasting sector*, Griffith University, March 2007.

27. Meadows et al., 'A catalyst for change?' Online version, op. cit.

28. S Forde, M Meadows and K Foxwell, *Culture, commitment, community: the Australian community radio sector*, Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, Griffith University, 2002, accessed 31 October 2013.

29. Writer's Radio page, 5UV website, accessed 3 February 2014.

30. Forde, et al., *Culture, commitment, community*, op. cit., p. 46.

31. Meadows et al., 'A catalyst for change?', Online version, op. cit.

Community broadcasting helps people keep in touch with their 'roots'. Radio 2XX FM, which broadcasts in the Canberra region, is one example of the types of stations that deliver programs of interest to a number of groups. In the Canberra case, these include the Korean, Finnish, Chinese, Greek and Spanish communities.[32]

Similarly, community radio is important in reflecting and maintaining Indigenous and other cultures. Umeewarra Radio 89.1 FM in South Australia states its aim clearly—to promote the important role Aboriginal people play in the region and to discuss the issues Indigenous people face in today's society. Umeewarra FM promotes reconciliation through the sharing of cultural information and breaking down barriers.[33]

Localism

Meadows et al's third point is that certain audiences have rejected commercial radio in particular because it is increasingly unwilling to provide 'local news and information, Australian music, the opportunity to "create communities" and programming that is reflective of Australia's cultural diversity'.[34]

Providing local services has been an acknowledged objective of broadcasting regulation in Australia. In 1984 a study undertaken for the federal government argued in fact that from the beginning of Australian broadcasting the aim of serving local interest had been an integral part of planning and licensing decisions. The 1984 study maintained that authorities wanted to see radio and television ownership and programming controlled at the local level and that they wanted programming which catered for the particular needs and interests of communities within the service areas of radio and television stations.[35]

In 1992 there was an expectation embedded in the provisions of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (*BSA*) that radio broadcasting programming should cater for the particular needs and interests of the communities in which stations were situated and that local radio should deal with matters of local significance. Despite this expectation, by 2001 it appeared that this tradition of commitment to localism had begun to diminish in regional areas. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts inquiry into regional radio (the Local Voices inquiry) of 2001 concluded at that time that a combination of technological, economic and regulatory developments in the commercial broadcasting industry had led to a situation where many local radio voices had been replaced by an increasing number of networked, pre-recorded, automated and syndicated programs.[36] At the same time, the Local Voices inquiry highlighted the important contribution community radio made in delivering coverage of news and matters of local significance.[37]

The Government has since imposed local content obligations on commercial radio, but arguably the effect of these has been gradually diminished as successive legislation has reduced those requirements to a minimum. Indeed, some stakeholders have claimed each piece of legislation has worked in favour of operators rather than audiences.[38] Community radio, however, (in combination with ABC local radio) continues to provide people with local news, information and opinion. One community broadcaster even disputes that the ABC truly provides local content:

> Regardless of what commercial radio says and what the ABC say they do, the only broadcasting sector which provides LIVE, LOCAL programs seven days a week in most regional centres is the COMMUNITY BROADCASTING SECTOR … commercial radio and the ABC can use all the fancy language it can think of and twist words to suit, but when it comes to live presenters at ground level – where the storms are, where the action is outside 9 to 5 and at weekends, COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS are there.[39]

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32. Radio 2XX website, accessed 3 February 2014.
33. Umeewarra Radio website, accessed 3 February 2014.
34. Meadows et al., 'A catalyst for change?', Online version, op. cit.
35. J Oswin, *Localism in Australian broadcasting: a review of the policy of localism in Australian broadcasting*, Department of Communications, 1984, p. 5.
36. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts, *Local voices: inquiry in to regional radio*, House of Representatives, Canberra, September 2001, accessed 3 February 2014.
37. Ibid., p. 106.
38. R Jolly, *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Regional Commercial Radio) Bill 2011*, Bills digest, 94, 2011–12, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2012, accessed 3 February 2014.
39. Sunraysia Community Radio Association, Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, *Tuning in to community broadcasting*, June 2007, p. 77, accessed 31 October 2013, (Note: emphasis added in original).

Moreover, as the cartoon below suggests, it is not only academics who see community radio in terms of empowerment and a source of cultural maintenance and local information, community radio consistently sees these aims as integral to its existence.

Figure 1: community radio: self-reflection

Source: 3CR community radio[40]

Beginnings

Print legacy

Print-based community media has been in existence for a long time, and its roles, such as keeping communities informed and contributing to the maintenance of identity among immigrant groups, have long been acknowledged. A study by Janowitz in 1952, for example, concluded that levels of community integration and involvement were related to the attention communities paid to local newspapers.[41] More recently, the Pew Centre for Excellence in Journalism confirmed that despite the emergence of other sources of information, and the perception that community newspapers are less relevant than in the past, people still rely on them as a principal source of local information.[42]

Further, there continue to be examples of community publications which create 'an alternative public sphere for marginalized constituencies', and which publish 'oppositional positions to those present in publications'. One author cites a recent example of this press as the Canadian publication *Street feat: the voice of the poor,* which challenges stereotypical representations of poor and unemployed people.[43] The Association of Alternative Newsmedia in the United States of America defines this type of press as that which delivers:

> … a strong focus on local news, culture and the arts; an informal and sometimes profane style; an emphasis on point-of-view reporting and narrative journalism; a tolerance for individual freedoms and social differences; and an eagerness to report on issues and communities that many mainstream media outlets ignore.[44]

40. Cartoon by Fiona Katauskas, 3CR community radio website, accessed 3 February 2014.

41. N Jankowski, 'Creating community with media: history, theories and scientific investigations', in L Lievrouw and S Livingstone, eds, *Handbook of new media: social shaping and social consequences of ICTs*, SAGE, London, 2006, p. 36, accessed 31 October 2013.

42. T Rosenstiel, A Mitchell, K Purcell and L Rainie, *How people learn about their local community*, Pew Research Centre, September 2011, accessed 3 February 2014.

43. Howley, *Community media,* op. cit., p. 185.

44. Association of Alternative Newsmedia website, accessed 3 February 2014.

There has not been much attention paid in Australia to press which functions outside the mainstream. At the same time, there are studies which identify various publications from the 1880s onwards that undoubtedly can be labelled 'alternative'. These publications have included the *Radical,* established in 1887, Australia's first regular socialist newspaper, and the Industrial Workers of the World publication, *Direct Action,* which opposed working class involvement in World War I.

A study by academic Susan Forde in 1998 identified 28 alternative press publications in Australia. Forde included in this list *Eureka Street,* which she labelled a soft left coverage of current affairs and social issues, and *Quadrant*, 'a conservative comment magazine'.[45] Forde argued that the range of alternative and independent publications in Australia was diverse, and that overall, these publications provided 'a true alternative to the mainstream version of current events'.[46]

Broadcasting

Broadcast community media began tentatively in the 1940s—community radio stations were set up in Bolivia's tin mining communities, the Catholic Church began educational broadcasting in Colombia and non-commercial radio commenced operation in the United States.[47] Indeed, in an analysis which argues that community media acts in the public interest, Steve Buckley and his colleagues posit that community broadcasting:

> … developed in response to the needs of grassroots social movements and community-based organizations to find an accessible and affordable means to express their own issues, concerns, cultures, and languages, and to create an alternative to the national broadcaster and the growth of commercial media.[48]

Commercial and public service, or national radio broadcasting began in Australia in the 1920s.[49] It was not until the 1960s, however, that advocacy for a 'third tier' of broadcasting commenced as:

> … Australia's social, political and cultural landscape began to change and people wanted the Australian media, in turn, to reflect these changes. Many specialist groups, including ethnic and Indigenous communities, political activists, students, academics and classical music consumers, began to lobby for their own radio broadcasting licences.[50]

An Australian Broadcasting Control Board inquiry into broadcasting services generally, which commenced in 1967, and which was later expanded to include consideration of proposals to introduce FM radio, addressed the issue of public broadcasting, as it was then labelled.[51] The report of the review in 1972 recommended the introduction of FM radio and supported the idea of non-government, non-profit community broadcasting.[52] Public broadcasting was later retitled under the *BSA* as community broadcasting. The reason cited in the Explanatory Memorandum to the *BSA* for this change was that the name better reflected the community based nature of the services.[53]

It is interesting to note Phoebe Thornley's comment to a media conference in 2001 that contrary to popular belief:

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45. S Forde, 'Monitoring the establishment; the development of the alternative press in Australia', *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, 87, May 1998, accessed 3 February 2014.

46. Ibid.

47. Buckely, *Community media: a good practice handbook*, op. cit.

48. S Buckley, K Duer, T Mendel and S Ó Siochrú (with ME Price and Mc Raboy), *Broadcasting, voice, and accountability: a public interest approach to policy, law and regulation*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2008, accessed 3 February 2014.

49. Public Service Broadcasting was initially delivered under a two-class regulatory system of licences. Category A licences, which were financed mainly by revenue collected from listener licences, and Category B licences, which were allowed to solicit advertising. When this system proved to be flawed, the federal government nationalised Category A licences, and in 1932, set up a public corporation to operate a national radio service—the Australian Broadcasting Commission. The Commission was required to be self-supporting financially through licence fees. This requirement was unchanged until 1949 when the *Parliamentary Proceedings Broadcasting Act 1946* established a funding system under which the Commission was funded by appropriations from consolidated revenue. Licensing fees were not, however, abolished until 1974.

50. Community radio page, australia.gov.au, accessed 3 February 2014.

51. Australian Broadcasting Control Board (ABCB), *Annual report*, 1968, pp16–17 cited in P Thornley, 'Australian government broadcasting policy: continuity and change leading to the development of public/community broadcasting', paper presented to Australian Media Traditions Conference 2001, accessed 3 February 2014.

52. ABCB, *Report on frequency modulation broadcasting*, ABCB, Melbourne, 1972 (also cited in publications as the Maclean Review).

53. Explanatory Memorandum, Broadcasting Services Bill 1992, p. 23.

… it was not the reformist Whitlam Labor Government that accepted the concept of FM and [community] broadcasting. Rather it was the previous conservative McMahon Coalition government and Postmaster-General Alan Hulme that embraced the idea, and they did so largely because introducing public broadcasting was cheaper than expanding the ABC. It fell to the Whitlam government to develop the concept and licence the first stations since it won power before its political opponents could put the idea into practice.[54]

The Whitlam Government introduced the first experimental community broadcasting licences in Australia in September 1974. These went to classical music groups in Sydney and Melbourne and to the first community station to commence broadcasting, station 5UV (now known as Radio Adelaide) at the University of Adelaide.[55] The first stations were self-funded, self-managed, independent, non-profit organisations, and at the time of its dismissal, the Whitlam Government had issued nine more similar experimental licences. In 1974 these community broadcasters formed the Public Broadcasting Association of Australia (PBAA), a body through which they could more formally approach government. (The body later became known as the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia—CBAA).[56]

Community broadcasting expanded further under the Fraser Government and in 1976 a government report considered that its continued development would 'encourage diversity' and 'allow for greater participation in broadcasting by individual special interest and minority groups'.[57] As a result, the *Broadcasting and Television Act* was amended to allow the permanent licensing of stations, and guidelines were issued which referred to three types of licences—educational, special interest and community.[58] In 1979 the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT) agreed that community broadcasters could air four 'sponsor messages' per hour in acknowledgement of support provided.[59]

There was considerable opposition to the establishment of the community broadcasting sector, particularly from commercial radio interests. One argument used by the commercial sector was that there was insufficient broadcasting spectrum available to accommodate more radio stations.[60] A number of commercial operators sought to limit what programming community broadcasters could offer; some demanding that no material which had, or could be aired on commercial stations or the national broadcaster should be allowed to be broadcast. The ABT was 'disappointed' that commercial operators had adopted this view, but at the same time it required that community broadcasters transmit 'complementary and supplementary' programming to that which was offered elsewhere.[61]

Community broadcaster John Tebbutt concludes that this ABT requirement limited the ability of community broadcasting in Australia to contribute to social change and compromised its 'oppositional and alternative nature'.[62] Equally it could be argued that the requirement represented an opportunity for groups to venture into the world of different programming, and that it encouraged many groups to establish community broadcasting radio stations in the 1980s.

It was a different story for community television, which, while its origins can be traced to the establishment of video production equipment and training centres in the 1970s, still took some time to begin operation. In 1980 the PBAA called for the grant of pilot community television licences for Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, and there was some discussion of a proposal that community television could be allocated programming 'windows', on the

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54. Thornley, 'Australian government broadcasting policy', op. cit.

55. Note: the University station had been operating under restricted licence to deliver adult education programs since 1972.

56. While the Community Broadcasters Association of Australia (CBAA) continues to represent community broadcasters in general, particular interests within the sector are represented by other bodies—the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council (NEMBC) represents ethnic community broadcasters, the Australian Indigenous Communications Association (AICA) represents Indigenous community broadcasters and RPH Australia represents Radio for the Print Handicapped (RPH) broadcasters.

57. F Green, *Australian broadcasting : a report on the structure of the Australian broadcasting system with particular regard to the control, planning, licensing, regulation, funding and administration of the system*, Australian Government Publishing Service (AGPS), Canberra, 1976, p. 35.

58. Thornley, op. cit.

59. Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT), *Public Broadcasting Licence Inquiries 1978*, AGPS, Canberra, 1979, p. 16 (note: the ABT was established 1 January 1977. Its functions were set out in section 16 of the *Broadcasting Act 1942.* One of these functions was to determine the standards which needed to be observed by broadcasting licensees in respect of programs to be broadcast, ABT, *Annual report*, 1988–89, p.15).

60. Ibid., p. 10.

61. Ibid.

62. Tebbutt, 'Constructing broadcasting for the public', op. cit., p. 135.

public services broadcasters, but this idea did not come to fruition.[63] While the Fraser Government promised to grant community licences by 1981, the only television that went to air was that produced by 'pirate' (unlicensed) stations in some Indigenous communities before test transmissions were finally authorised in 1987.

Other test broadcasts followed the 1987 transmissions and the first community television began broadcasting in Melbourne. Stations later opened in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Lismore and Perth. In 1992 a Parliamentary inquiry (sixth channel inquiry) into what should be done with broadcasting spectrum that had been notionally reserved for educational television—the so-called sixth channel—recommended that the spectrum should be allocated temporarily to community television until a decision was made following a further review in 1997.[64] The Government responded further to recommendations by the Australian Broadcasting Authority from the 1997 review to allow community broadcasters to continue using the spectrum.[65]

In May 1999 the Government withdrew the permission to allow community broadcasters to use the sixth channel (that was for all new services—existing services were allowed to continue) while it contemplated how the channel would be used in conjunction with the introduction of digital television.[66]

Conversion to digital operation

The development of digital technology has delivered a new world of possibilities for broadcasters. Digital radio and television provides audiences with better sound, better pictures and innovative new features. Importantly, digital technology more efficiently uses broadcasting spectrum, thereby freeing up large portions for other uses, such as mobile telecommunications and mobile television.

The process of conversion to digital operation has been expensive, however. Governments and commercial and public service national broadcasters have long acknowledged this, but accepted that direct and indirect advantages to be gained from the conversion from analogue broadcasting would eventually outweigh the costs. This has not been the case for 'cash strapped' community broadcasters, for whom the idea of conversion to digital has been particularly daunting. At least one community station has labelled the road to digital as 'horrific' for the simple reason that in general community stations have not had the money to purchase digital equipment or to train staff for digital operations.[67]

Radio

Box 2: digital radio

> Digital radio technologies turn sound into digital signals which are then compressed, transmitted and recoded back into sound by digital radio receivers. Digital radio is seen as an improvement over AM and FM radio delivering better sound and reception. Digital radio offers more listening choice, easy tuning, and rewind and record features which are accompanied by data displays.[68]

In March 1998, the Minister for Communications, Richard Alston, promised digital radio would be available to Australians by 2001, but it was not until March 2007 that legislation was passed to implement a framework for digital radio services.[69] These were to operate alongside, rather than replace existing analogue services.[70]

The first digital radio services were introduced in areas where they were most likely to be commercially viable— Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. Switch-on for the services occurred in May and June 2009.[71]

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63. T Flew and C Spurgeon, 'Television after broadcasting ', in G Turner and S Cunningham, eds, *The Australian TV book*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2000, p. 77.

64. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport, Communications and Infrastructure, *Inquiry into possible uses of the sixth high power television channel*, House of Representatives, Canberra, September 1992 (note: the sixth channel was so called because in the major metropolitan areas, television services consisted of three commercial channels and the two public broadcaster channels—whatever service commenced in these markets would be the sixth channel).

65. Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA), *Inquiry into the future use of the sixth television channel*, report to the Minister for Communications and the Arts, Sydney, February 1997, accessed 28 October 2013.

66. The existing services at that time were those noted above and licences which had been issued for Hobart and Bendigo.

67. Upper Goulburn FM, Submission to *Tuning in to community broadcasting*, op. cit.

68. R Jolly, *Going digital—digital terrestrial radio for Australia*, Research paper, 18, 2008–09, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2008, accessed 21 January 2014**.**

69. R. Alston (Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts), *Digital broadcasting a step closer*, media release, March 1998.

70. The legislation passed, was the *Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Radio) Act 2007*, accessed 3 February 2014.

71. M Lallo, '*Commercial networks unite for digital radio launch*', *theage.com.au*, 6 August 2009, accessed 22 January 2014.

From 2006 the advocacy body, the CBAA, began to lobby the Government for funding to assist the community radio sector to weather the digital transition process. In that year it argued for approximately $15 million to assist with installing new digital infrastructure and the Howard Government responded to the CBAA's request by allocating $10.5 million in the 2007 Budget.[72] This funding was to be distributed over a four-year period.[73]

In a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Information Technology and the Arts (Environment, Information Technology and the Arts Committee) inquiry into the 2007 digital radio legislation, the CBAA raised a number of concerns about how the legislative framework for transition to digital would affect community broadcasting.[74] These included that the 2007 legislation did not provide capacity for community radio broadcasting services on all available multiplexes (see explanation below), despite this outcome having been guaranteed in a framework agreed upon in 2005.[75] Similarly, the CBAA was concerned that management structures to be imposed on wide-coverage community radio broadcasters would be overly onerous.[76]

The Environment, Information Technology and the Arts Committee inquiry was not overly sympathetic to the community sector's concerns believing them to be unduly pessimistic and remarking that all participants in the new broadcasting regime needed to recognise that the transition involved the pursuit of a complicated set of policy objectives under difficult technical constraints.[77] This view did not appear to take into consideration that the objectives were more easily achieved and technical constraints more quickly overcome, if broadcasters had access to the funds to install required equipment and train operational and administrative staff.

Some compensation was promised to alleviate the costs the community media sector may incur in complying with company provisions deadlines, and following the 2007 election, the CBAA petitioned the new Rudd Government to bring forward the amount of $2.4 million. However, the Government did not respond to this petition before a deadline which required the community stations to enter into the new management arrangements.

The 2008–09 Budget provided some assistance for digital conversion, however. Funding of $11.2 million over three years from 2009 to 2012 was allocated for Community Broadcasting Fund (CBF) grants to be used for planning and design as well as implementation and operation infrastructure. Grants assisted in establishing the Digital Radio Project in 2009 and digital radio services for metropolitan-wide community radio stations in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.[78] The 2009–10 Budget assisted with infrastructure funding of $5.3 million over four years allocated for digital transition. Community digital radio services were launched nationally by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, in May 2011.

This funding was welcomed by the CBAA, which enthused that it would help community radio stations to 'extend their unique and diverse services to their various communities'.[79] But funding in the 2012 Budget was less well received. The CBAA considered a further $2.2 million per annum for four years from 2012 to 2016 was $1.4 million less than the minimum the sector required each year to maintain its 37 digital services. It argued that unless the Government committed additional funding, the sector would be forced to reduce services.[80]

The CBAA launched a 'Commit to community radio' campaign in February 2013. The campaign encouraged supporters to 'call on Canberra to lock in [community radio's] digital future'.[81] It appeared that the campaign was unsuccessful in swaying the Government, for while the 2013–14 Budget provided $5.4 million over five

72. CBAA, *Adding digital value*, submission to government, January 2006 (not available online).

73. H Coonan, (Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts), *$10.5 million for community and national digital radio broadcasting*, media release, 8 May 2007, accessed 22 January 2014.

74. CBAA, Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Information Technology and the Arts, *Inquiry into the provisions of the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Radio) Bill 2007 and the Radio Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2007,* May 2007, accessed 22 January 2014.

75. A multiplex consists of a stream of digital information containing, among other things, a mixture of the sound and pictures from a number of services.

76. These required the stations to set up digital representative companies which were then required to become shareholders with commercial radio licensees in joint ventures that were to own and operate transmission multiplexes.

77. Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Information Technology and the Arts, *Inquiry into the provisions of the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Radio) Bill 2007 and the Radio Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2007*, May 2007, accessed 22 January 2014.

78. CBF, Annual report 2009–10, accessed 22 January 2014.

79. CBAA, C*ommunity radio set to go digital*, media release, CBAA, 13 May 2009.

80. Commit to community radio information section, CBAA website, accessed 22 January 2014.

81. CBAA, *Why we love our Commit to Community Radio supporters*, media release, 22 March 2013, accessed 22 January 2014.

years 'to assist the production and transmission of community radio' as part of the Creative Australia initiative, none of the funding was earmarked for digital services.[82]

The online news source *Crikey* considered that governments are not sympathetic to community radio's argument for digital funding because they consider that the sector should be able to find monies from other sources to make up funding shortfalls.[83] There is some justification in the Government adopting this approach given that the majority of funding for community radio is derived from sponsorship.[84] On the other hand, as the Australian Greens (Greens) communications spokesperson, Scott Ludlam, pointed out following the 2013–14 Budget, $1.4 million was a relatively small amount of money to ensure that all community broadcasters remained on the air.[85]

Television

Box 3: digital television

Digital television converts video and audio into an on/off code which is then transmitted by radio frequency signals and decoded by a specifically designed television set, or a standard television set which is connected to a set-top conversion box. Because digital television signals are transmitted as a stream of on/off bits they are not affected by disturbances which may occur in the transmission path.[86] Digital television has been assessed as superior to analogue television for a number of reasons, including that it presents better picture resolution. Digital television also allows for a more efficient use of broadcasting spectrum and for broadcasters to offer multi channelling.[87]

Initial legislation for conversion of television services in Australia to digital transmission was introduced by the Howard Government in 1998 and a period of simulcast of analogue and digital telecasts began in the five major mainland capitals on 1 January 2001.[88]

From the outset, the Government provided significant funding to the national broadcasters, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), to assist them to convert to digital. Transition funding was also provided to regional commercial television broadcasters, largely in the form of licence fee rebates.[89] No funding was given to community television, however. This was in spite of the Howard Government's 2001 election promise that it would allocate free spectrum to the sector.[90] It was not surprising therefore that a government report in 2002 concluded that transition to digital was going to be

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82. Australian Government, 'Part 2: Expense measures' *Budget measures: budget paper no. 2: 2013–14*, p. 101, accessed 22 January 2014. This includes $2.7 million over four years to help communities in regional and remote Australia to upgrade satellite reception equipment to enable them to access more radio services on the Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST) service. There is also $2.7 million to continue operation of the Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (AMRAP) and CBAA, *Community digital radio services face the axe following budget failure*, media release, 14 May 2013, accessed 15 May 2013

83. A Crook, 'Community broadcasting: no cash for digital radio stations', *Crikey*, 15 May 2013, accessed 3 February 2014.

84. The most recently available information from the Community Broadcasting Database survey of community radio stations (for the 2009–10 financial year) estimated that Australian Government funding to permanently licensed community radio stations was 8.5 per cent of total revenue. Total grant income from all government formed 25.0 per cent of total revenue. By comparison, local sponsorship and subscriptions and donations provided 45.6 per cent of revenue, CBAA submission to the 2010–11 Budget, not available online.

85. S Ludlam (Greens spokesperson on communications), *Budget win for public broadcaster, communication breakdown for community radio*, media release, 16 May 2013, accessed 3 February 2014.

86. R Jolly, *Going digital: tracing the transition to digital terrestrial television in Australia*, Research paper, 7, 2010–11, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 19 November 2010, accessed 22 January 2014.

87. Multi channelling makes use of digital spectrum for the broadcast of several different channels simultaneously. Spectrum refers to the range of frequencies available for over the air transmission.

88. Jolly, '*Going digital: tracing the transition to digital terrestrial television in Australia'*, op. cit.

89. For example, in 1998, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) received an additional $20.8 million over five years and the Special Broadcasting s Service (SBS) an additional $17.7 million over five years to assist in the upgrade of their equipment and facilities from analogue to digital, Australian Government, 'Part 2: expense measures': Budget measures, budget paper no. 2: 1998–99, accessed 23 January 2014. (Note: both the national broadcasters are required under their charters 'to provide within Australia innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard' (ABC Charter) and 'to provide multilingual and multicultural radio and television services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians and, in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society' (SBS charter). Hence, this funding was necessary to ensure that the requirements of the charters were fulfilled). Regional commercial broadcasters' financial assistance of up to $260 million which was payable over 13 years commencing in 2000–01, Australian Government, 'Part 2: expense measures': Budget measures, budget paper no. 2: 2000–01, accessed 23 January 2014.

90. The Howard Government, *Putting Australia's interests first: election 2001: broadcasting for the 21st century,* Liberal/National election policy document, 2001.

difficult, if not impossible for the community sector.[91] And while commitments to include community television in the digital environment continued in the 2004 election campaign and in a 2006 Digital Action Plan, there was no assistance offered and no detail provided as to how the Government intended to make good on its promises.[92] The CBAA labelled the situation in which funding could be found to assist other broadcasters, but not the community sector, as inequitable.[93]

A House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts investigation into community television in 2007 concluded that delaying the opportunity for community television to access digital broadcasting would be 'irresponsible'.[94] A wider inquiry into community broadcasting conducted in the same year concluded that the sector needed to be given the opportunity to simulcast digital services and noted that some community television stations were surviving only with the support of state governments. It added that this could be withdrawn unless access to digital spectrum was confirmed for the future. In the Committee's view, the situation was 'bleak' for community television unless funding and spectrum certainty were assured by the Federal Government.[95]

But no certainty about the future for community television had been realised when the Howard Government lost office in in 2007.

By March 2009, the Rudd Government had promised that community television would not be overlooked in the migration to digital, but like its predecessor, the Labor Government was reluctant to provide funding. Following the 2009–10 Budget, the Coalition joined with operators to demand that Labor provide certainty about funding for the sector.[96] As a result, by November 2009, the Government agreed to allocate vacant spectrum previously known as Channel A to community broadcasting—albeit that this was to be on a temporary basis. Spectrum allocation allowed community stations C31 in Melbourne, TVS in Sydney, QCTV in Brisbane and Channel 31 Adelaide to simulcast their services until the switch to digital-only television was completed in capital cities in 2013. The Government also allocated funding of $2.6 million to enable the sector to meet the costs associated with commencing digital simulcasts.[97]

The funding was considerably less than the $6 million in initial funding, (and $1.7 million annually until the end of the simulcast period) recommended by the House of Representative inquiry in 2007.[98] It could be argued that the level of funding was consistent with a view that community media was most successful when it was truly independent of government—a view it appeared the Minister for Communications, Stephen Conroy, held. The Minister noted in a speech to a community television forum that relying on government handouts and chasing government funding was not the way to achieve sustainability for the sector; it had to find that from within the community it served.[99] The Minister's comments touched on an ongoing dilemma for community media, and one which appears to be re-surfacing more regularly in recent times. That is, to what extent does any government support compromise its independence and what amount of government support is acceptable? Further, what is more important—to opt for compromise to ensure survival—or is independence paramount?

In November 2012, Minister Conroy announced that the Labor Government remained committed to ensuring community television had a permanent spectrum allocation for digital broadcasting. But it was likely that this commitment sounded hollow to community television operators, as it was accompanied by the condition that while they would have access to the sixth channel of spectrum until 'at least' 31 December 2014, in the longer

91. ABA, *Investigation into the community television trial: report to the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts*, July 2001, as reported in House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, *Community television: options for digital broadcasting*, House of Representatives, Canberra, February 2007, accessed 3 February 2014.

92. S Barber, 'Future looking clearer for community television', *Communications Law Bulletin*, 25(3–4), 2007, accessed 22 January 2014.

93. CBAA, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, *Community television: options for digital broadcasting*, op. cit.

94. Ibid.

95. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, *Tuning in to community broadcasting*, op. cit., p 159.

96. S Jackson, 'Community TV for digital program guide', *The Australian*, 13 April 2009, accessed 3 February 2014.

97. S Conroy (Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy), *Digital pathway for community TV*, media release, 4 November 2009, accessed 22 January 2014.

98. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, *Community television: options for digital broadcasting,* op. cit.

99. S Conroy (Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy), *C31 digital community TV forum*, speech, 9 November 2009, accessed 3 February 2014.

term use of the channel would be assessed 'in the light of the Australian Communication and Media Authority's (ACMA) assessment of future broadcasting technologies'.[100] In effect, the certainty the sector craved remained elusive.

Box 4: the fall and rise of community television in Perth

Access 31, Perth's first community television service commenced broadcasting on 18 June 1999 on a temporary licence. Like other community broadcasters it survived principally on donations and sponsorship support.

In 2004, it received financial support from the Government of Western Australia and Lotterywest of over $2.0 million. In 2008 further state government funding was promised which it was hoped would keep the station solvent until it could gain digital capability. Despite the promise of this funding the station was in significant financial difficulty with claims being made that it was over $600,000 in debt—a significant amount for a community broadcaster.[101]

In launching a campaign urging supporters to write to Minister Conroy seeking the grant of a digital licence, Access 31 board member, Gerry Gannon, blamed the Howard Government for the station's problems. According to Gannon, despite lobbying that government for four years it had not granted the digital licence which Gannon believed was needed to counter the loss of audience and sponsors since digital broadcasting had commenced on national and commercial television.

Gannon urged the Rudd Government to act quickly to develop the framework for the transition of community television in Australia to the digital platform to give the sector 'the same level playing field [as commercial and national stations]'.[102]

Minister Conroy replied by urging the Government of Western Australia to continue support for Access 31. He added that the Rudd Government was not only committed to ensuring the transition to digital for community television, but was also 'actively pursuing a solution'.[103]

Despite this assurance, the state government funding offer and a further funding promise from a Perth businessman were withdrawn, and on 6 August 2008 Access 31 closed.[104]

On 27 September 2008, ACMA called for expressions of interest in providing a trial community-based television service in Perth for two years. ACMA received four applications, all of high quality according to the regulator. The temporary licence was awarded to West TV Ltd, however, to provide an analogue service on a temporary license for two years.[105]

In 2009 when the Government agreed to provide funding for community stations to simulcast their services Minister Conroy also approved the grant of a digital licence to West TV. The station commenced digital-only broadcasting in April 2010.[106]

At the beginning of 2013 General Manager of West TV, Tibor Meszaros, was optimistic that the station would continue to improve its audience of over 500,000 and that it was set for a 'growth year'.[107]

Overview of the community broadcasting sector

Size and location

Currently, the community broadcasting sector in Australia has more media outlets than either the commercial or public service broadcast media sectors.[108] The sector consists of over 360 long-term community radio stations

100. S Conroy (Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy), *Government moves to ensure quality Australian content stays on Australian television*, media release, 30 November 2012, accessed 3 February 2014.

101. S Jackson, 'Access 31's final cry for help', *The Australian,* 12 June 2008, p. 32 and N Minchin (Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy), *Budget must end the uncertainty for community television*, media release, 10 May 2009, accessed 3 February 2014.

102. 'Access 31 closure disappointing', ABC News, 11 June 2008, accessed 3 February 2014.

103. S Jackson, 'Access 31's final cry for help', op. cit.

104. D Pepper, 'Plug pulled on Access 31', WAtoday.com.au, 6 August 2008, accessed 3 February 2014.

105. 'Community TV trial licence issued to West TV', Film and Television Institute WA website, 8 January 2009, accessed 3 February 2014.

106. D Knox, 'New vision for Perth community TV', TVtonight weblog, 19 December 2008, accessed 8 November 2013.

107. 'TV the way 500,000 Perth locals like it', Campaign Brief weblog, 15 January 2013, accessed 8 November 2013.

108. Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) listing for commercial radio broadcasting licences as at 1 August 2013 was 273 and commercial television licences for the same date was 69.

broadcasting analogue free-to-air and 38 long-term digital free-to-air services. Nearly 100 stations also operate under temporary community broadcasting licences (see information on licensing in the relevant section below).[109]

There are three long-term licensed community television stations broadcasting to Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne/Geelong (although there are approximately 80 community television licences).[110] Two television stations operate in Perth and Adelaide under temporary licences.

Most licenced community radio stations service regional, rural and remote areas (see diagram below).

Figure 2: location of community broadcasters 2010
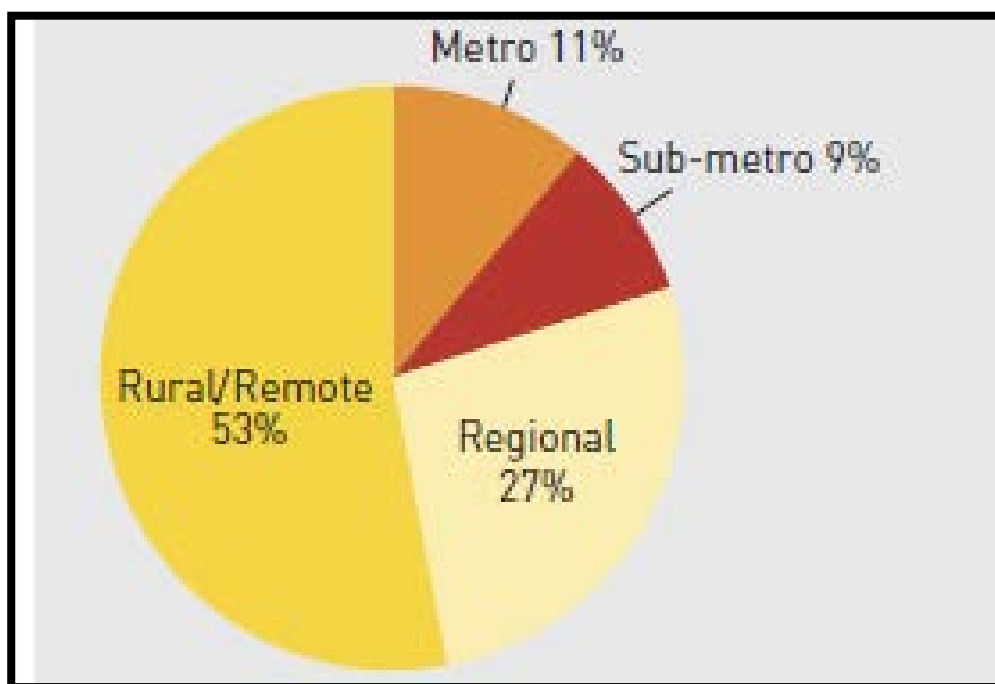
Source: CBAA[111]

Audience

Audience figures for community television are imprecise. The Melbourne and Queensland stations cite audiences of 450,000 and 500,000 plus respectively. Perth cites an OzTam audited audience of 80,000 per day and Sydney claims a cumulative audience of 1.6 million each month. In 2009, the *Australian* reported a cumulative monthly reach of approximately 3.5 million viewers in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide.[112]

The community radio sector has an estimated monthly national radio audience reach of more than nine million. Over 15.5 million Australians listen to radio each week, and 25 per cent of those listen to community radio.[113]

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109. ACMA is empowered under the *BSA* to regulate community, commercial and national radio and television services which operate in the broadcasting services bands. Community and commercial radio and television services must have a broadcasting services licence from ACMA before beginning transmission, regardless of the bands in which they intend to operate, even if they use cable or satellite as a means of delivery. Note ACMA figures as at 15 August 2013 list 355 long term community radio licences and 92 temporary broadcasting licences accessed 14 October 2013.

110. McNair Ingenuity Research, *Survey of the community radio sector: community broadcasting station census*, CBOnline, 2011 and Australian Community Television Alliance website, accessed 23 January 2014.
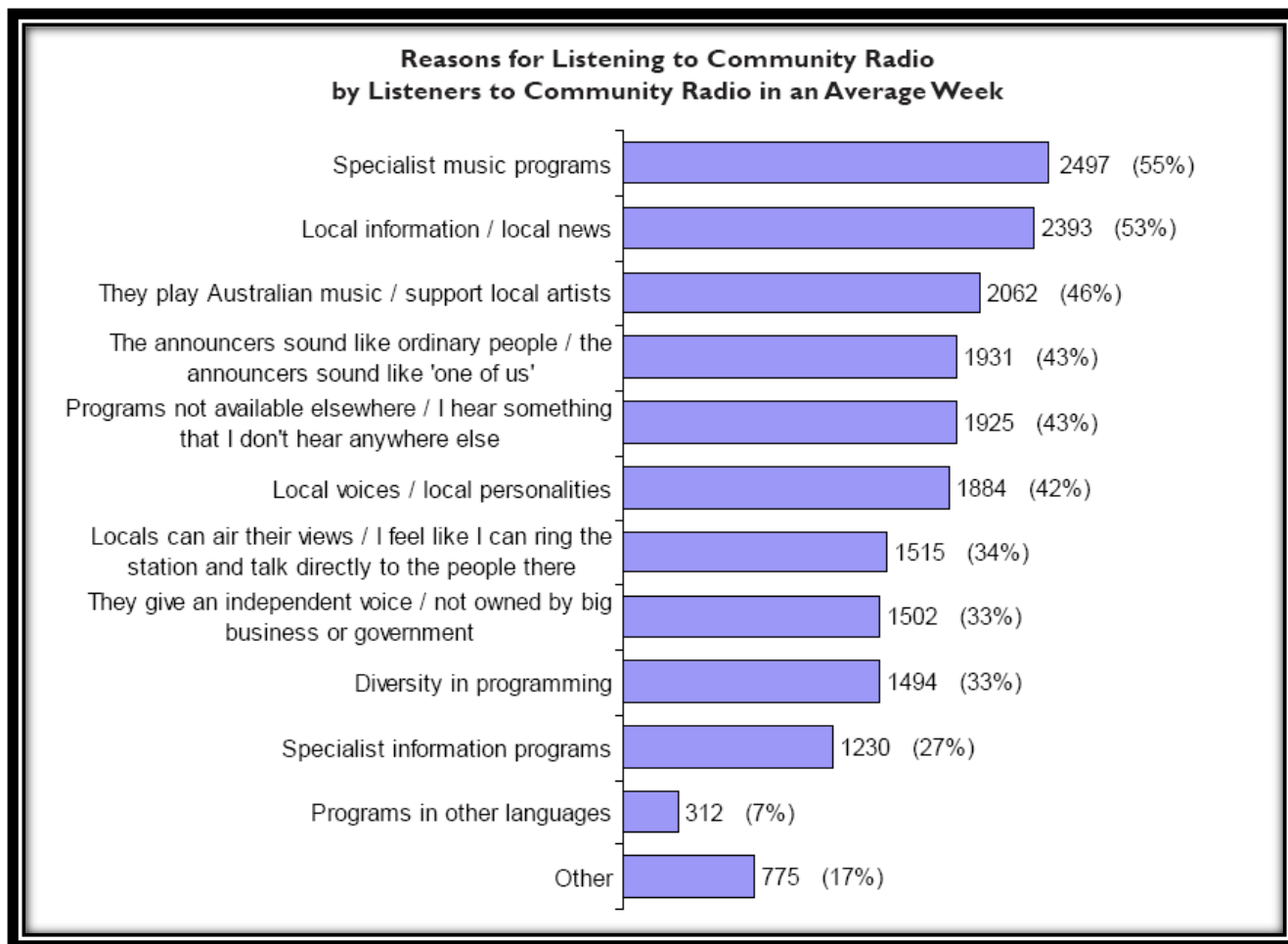
111. *CBX, (*CBAA), March 2009, accessed 10 October 2013 and CBAA, National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council, Australian Indigenous Communications Association, RPH Australia, and Australian Community Television Alliance and Christian Media Australia, *Voices and vision: community broadcasting in Australia*, July 2010, accessed 22 January 2014.

112. S Jackson, 'Community TV for digital program guide'*,* op. cit.

113. In an average week 15,648,000 Australians listen to radio. Of those who listen to radio, 4,441,000 (25 per cent) listen to community radio each week and 10,611,000 (59 per cent) listen to community radio occasionally, McNair Ingenuity Research, *Community Radio National Listener Survey*, 2012, accessed 3 February 2014.

Audiences cite many reasons for listening to community radio, but most of these are punctuated by the word 'local'. People like to hear local news and local information and music from local artists; they like to hear local personalities and local opinions. See the figure below which provides more information.

Figure 3: reasons for listening to community radio

Reasons for Listening to Community Radio
by Listeners to Community Radio in an Average Week

Reason	Value
Specialist music programs	2497 (55%)
Local information / local news	2393 (53%)
They play Australian music / support local artists	2062 (46%)
The announcers sound like ordinary people / the announcers sound like 'one of us'	1931 (43%)
Programs not available elsewhere / I hear something that I don't hear anywhere else	1925 (43%)
Local voices / local personalities	1884 (42%)
Locals can air their views / I feel like I can ring the station and talk directly to the people there	1515 (34%)
They give an independent voice / not owned by big business or government	1502 (33%)
Diversity in programming	1494 (33%)
Specialist information programs	1230 (27%)
Programs in other languages	312 (7%)
Other	775 (17%)

Source: CBAA[114]

Owned and operated

Volunteers and paid staff

A large percentage of community stations are operated entirely by volunteers.[115] In 2010–11 over 22,000 volunteer broadcasters and over 900 support staff contributed to the sector (see diagram below).[116] Some stations employ specialised staff, while others occasionally employ contractors, still others employ a station manager and/or other ongoing staff.

From the perspective that community media are media of the people, the fact that volunteers comprise the majority of staff, implies that they are also of the people. This can be problematic, however. The CBAA reported in 2O07 that the lack of paid staff made it difficult for 45 per cent of community stations to concentrate on

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114. Community Radio National Listener Survey, McNair Ingenuity Research, July 2008 cited in CBAA, National Ethnic & Multicultural Broadcasters' Council, Australian Indigenous Communications Association, RPH Australia, Christian Media Australia, Australian Community Television Alliance and Community Broadcasting Foundation, *Community broadcasting and media: year 2015*, October 2009, accessed 3 February 2014.

115. For example, 4BAY, operated by Bayside Community Radio Association based at Thornlands south of Brisbane has no paid staff members. All operational tasks are carried out by a Broadcast Team of volunteers who accept annual contracts to perform jobs of greater responsibility.

116. At long-term licensed community radio stations 19,323 volunteers and an estimated 3,000 temporary community radio station and community television volunteers , Community Broadcasting station census survey 2009–10, p. 32 as cited in Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF), *Annual report 2011–12*, accessed 3 February 2014.

fundraising and development.[117] Several stations agreed. They considered that having a paid station manager at least to control day-to-day operations gave their unpaid committee members time to concentrate on ensuring that an overall community focus is maintained.[118]

Additionally, while station boards and committees are integral to community broadcasting, and some operators see them as 'a key piece of governance' that assists stations in remaining accountable to the community, the dynamics of these committees can be a source of disputes.[119] There are mechanisms in place to deal with conflict resolution within the sector. CBAA administers a dispute resolution process which attempts to mediate various problems and ACMA addresses dispute and other governance problems through its licence renewal process.[120]

Figure 4: community radio volunteers—2002 to 2010
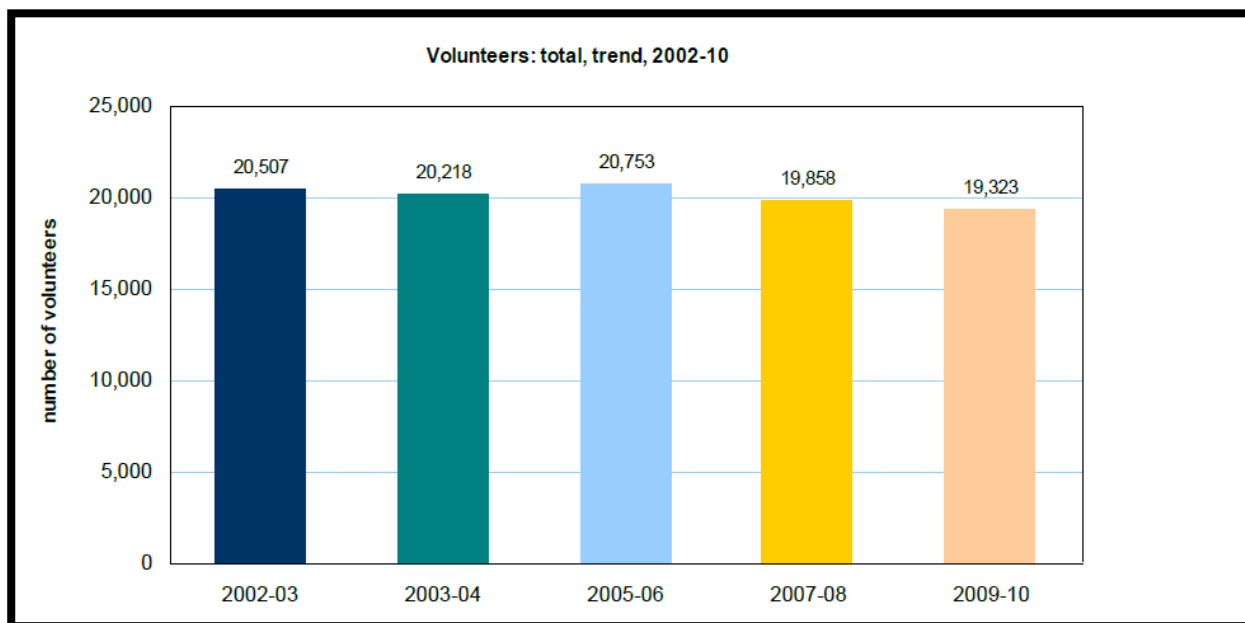
Source: McNair Ingenuity Research Census 2011[121]

Training

Community broadcasting consistently claims that it is a training ground for media professionals, and a list provided in the CBAA's submission to the inquiry into community broadcasting in 2006 of some of the people who had begun their career in the community sector, illustrated that there is a substantial evidence base to the sector's argument (see Figure 5 below).

117. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, *Tuning in to community broadcasting*, op. cit., p. 12.

118. Ibid., p. 18.

119. Ibid., p. 20.

120. CBAA, 'Community broadcasting dispute resolution initiative', accessed 3 February 2014.

121. McNair Ingenuity Research, *Survey of the community radio sector: community broadcasting station census*, CBF, 2011, accessed 15 October 2013.

Figure 5: training ground

Sector	Name	Position	Started on:
Journalism			
	Andrew Denton	Host, *Enough Rope*	2MCE Bathhurst
	Liz Jackson	Host, *Four Corners*	2MCE Bathhurst, 2SER Sydney
	Jessica Rowe	Host, *Today Show*, Nine	2MCE Bathhurst
	Natasha Belling	Newsreader, Ten	2MCE Bathhurst
	Fran Kelly	Foreign correspondent, ABC	2XX Canberra
	Ramona Koval	ABC Radio	3RRR Melbourne
	Sian Prior	ABC Radio	3RRR Melbourne
	Marian Wilkinson	Fairfax	4ZZZ Brisbane
Comedy			
	James O'Loghlin	Presenter, *Evenings*, ABC Radio, NSW	FBi Sydney
	Brian Dawe	Humourist, 7.30 Report	3RRR Melbourne
	Grieg Pickhaver aka HG Nelson	Presenter, *The Dream*	3RRR Melbourne
	Coodabeen Champions	ABC Radio	3RRR Melbourne
	Merrick & Rosso	Nova breakfast, *Unplanned with Merrick & Rosso*, Channel 9	3RRR Melbourne
	Santo Cilauro	Working Dog	3RRR Melbourne
	Richard Fidler	Ex-DAAS, ABC Head of Comedy	3WAY Warrnambool
	Hamish & Andy	Fox FM	SYN FM Melbourne
	Rove McManus	Host, *Rove*	6RTR Perth
Television			
	Catriona Rowntree	Presenter, *Getaway*, Channel 9	2NSB Northern Suburbs Sydney
	Fenella Kernebone	Presenter, *The Movie Show*, SBS	2SER Sydney
	Jamie Leonarder	Presenter, *The Movie Show*, SBS	FBi Sydney
	Kate Langbroek	Host, *The Panel*	3RRR Melbourne
Other radio			
	Robbie Buck	Presenter, *Home & Hosed*, Triple J	2NCR Lismore, 2SER Sydney
	Julie McCrossen	Presenter, *Life Matters*, Radio National	2SER Sydney
	Richard Kingsmill	Presenter / Music Director, Triple J	2NUR Newcastle, 2SER Sydney
	Caroline Tran	Presenter, Triple J	2RES Eastern Suburbs Sydney
	Mick O'Regan	Presenter, *Media Report*, Radio National	2SER Sydney
Writers			
	Helen Razer	Freelance journalist	2XX Canberra, 2SER Sydney
	Sarah McDonald	Author, *Holy Cow*	2SER Sydney

Source: CBAA[122]

122. CBAA, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, *Inquiry into community broadcasting*, 17 March 2006, accessed 17 January 2014.

However, the cost of training has been difficult to meet for stations on tight budgets. Hence, in 2004 the sector sought extra funding to help provide this valuable developmental service; the Government responded with a commitment of $2.2 million over four years. This was provided to establish a national community broadcasting training fund and was subject to certain conditions. These were:

- the bulk of funding was spent in regional, rural and remote areas

- the special training needs of radio for the print handicapped, Indigenous and ethnic broadcasting were addressed

- ethnic youth and new and emerging ethnic groups and new language groups were targeted for training opportunities and

- a single coordinated structural approach was adopted.

In 2009, the Government confirmed that ongoing funding would be allocated for this National Training Program (NTP).[123]

For some time national training was managed by the CBAA's registered training organisation, but in 2010 the CBAA announced its intention to cease its involvement in training activities. The CBAA's decision effectively turned a planned review of the NTP into a redevelopment which led to the establishment in late 2010 of the Community Media Training Organisation (CMTO).[124] The CMTO, an independent, non-profit organisation now delivers training through accredited sources and via 'pathways'. 'Pathways training' is unaccredited training based on materials developed from accredited training resources and provided by recognised trainers.

According to the CBF's most recent annual report, over 6,600 people receive training each year at community radio stations and an estimated 500 people receive training at community television stations.[125]

Regulation

Licensing

Community broadcasting is regulated under the *BSA* and community radio and television codes of practice.[126]

Under the *BSA*, planning for new community radio licences and licence allocations for community radio are the responsibility of ACMA. Licences for community broadcasters can only be granted to companies which are assessed as representing community interests and which have been formed in Australia (or an external territory of Australia). Long-term community broadcasting licences are granted for a period of five years on the basis of the comparative merit of applicants in accordance with criteria set out in section 84 of the *BSA*. These include the nature and diversity of other broadcasting services (including national broadcasting services) available within a licence area and the capacity of a licence applicant to provide a proposed service.[127]

Where broadcasting spectrum is available, temporary community broadcasting licences can be granted to applicants considered by ACMA to be suitable persons. Temporary licences can be awarded for periods of up to 12 months. Temporary licences do not entitle holders to exclusive use of a frequency and if there are two or more applicants for temporary licences they are expected to share the frequency. ACMA considers that temporary licences 'foster the development of community radio by allowing aspiring community broadcasters to develop their operational and programming skills. They also help to build community support for a long-term community broadcasting service'.[128]

Codes of practice

Under section 123 of the *BSA*, industry groups must develop codes of practice for their respective sector in consultation with ACMA, and licensed stations in that sector are obliged to follow the codes. Codes cover programming requirements, fairness and accuracy in news and current affairs reporting, complaints handling and sponsorship, among other matters.

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123. Note: in 2008 interim funding of $600, 000 was provided to continue the training program.
124. Community Media Training website, accessed 13 January 2014.
125. CBF, *Annual report 2012–13*, accessed 22 January 2014.
126. Community broadcasting codes of practice: radio and Community television codes of practice, accessed 14 October 2013.
127. Section 84 of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (*the *BSA)*, accessed 14 October 2013.
128. 'Community licence allocations, renewals and transfers', Australian Communications and Media Authority website (ACMA) , accessed 14 October 2013.

Radio

The guiding principles of the community radio broadcasting code indicate that community broadcasters are united by six guiding principles which commit them to work to:

- promote harmony and diversity and contribute to an inclusive, cohesive and culturally-diverse Australian community

- pursue the principles of democracy, access and equity, especially for people and issues not adequately represented in other media

- enhance the diversity of programming choices available to the public and present programs that expand the variety of viewpoints broadcast in Australia

- demonstrate independence in programming, as well as in editorial and management decisions

- support and develop local arts and music and

- increase community involvement in broadcasting.[129]

In 2012 the CBAA undertook to review the radio code of practice, as required under the *BSA*. At the time of writing, it has yet to release the result of its consultation.

Television

A separate code of practice is in place for community television. The code covers matters such as governance and general programming principles and specifically direct licensees to provide programming that promotes Australian identity and reflects cultural diversity and which presents matters of local significance. The current code of practice has been in place since June 2011.[130]

Sponsorship condition

Community broadcasting licensees are subject to a particular licence condition that prevents them from broadcasting advertisements.[131] Instead, it is permissible for community broadcasting licensees to broadcast a range of promotional material that is not classified as advertising under the *BSA*. This includes sponsorship announcements acknowledging financial support given by a sponsor either to a community broadcasting licensee or to a particular program broadcast.

Originally, sponsorship announcements for radio were limited to four minutes each hour, but legislative amendments made to the *BSA* in 2002 increased this to five minutes per hour.[132] Sponsorship announcements allowable on community television were also increased from five minutes to seven minutes under legislation in 2002.

Some community broadcasters have argued for some time to have sponsorship acknowledgement limits increased further.[133] Others oppose allowing further sponsorship, as they believe it represents a step towards commercialisation of the sector.[134]

Sponsorship is the most important single source of income for community radio. It accounted for four out of every ten dollars of income in 2009–10.[135] For this reason alone, understanding the difference between what is permitted as promotional material and what constitutes an advertisement is a crucial dilemma for community broadcasters, because failure to comply may incur serious penalties, including suspension of, or cancellation of the broadcaster's licence.[136]

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129. Radio code, op. cit.

130. Television code, op. cit.

131. Under clause 9(1)(b) of Schedule 2 to the *BSA*

132. Parliament of Australia, 'Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2002 home page', Australian Parliament website, accessed 23 January 2014.

133. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, *Tuning in to community broadcasting*, op. cit., pp. 123–125.

134. K van Vuuren, 'Commercial trends in community radio: sponsorship, advertising and John Laws', *Southern Review: Communication, Politics and Culture*, 39(2), 2006, pp. 27–28, accessed 14 October 2013.

135. McNair Ingenuity Research, *Community broadcasting station census*, 2011, op. cit.

136. Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), *Community broadcasting sponsorship guidelines 2008*, accessed 23 January 2014.

In 2006 academic Kitty van Vuuren noted that the most common complaint about community radio concerned possible breaches of sponsorship guidelines.[137] In van Vuuren's opinion, a relaxation of sponsorship rules which had occurred when the *BSA* was introduced has resulted in an increase in infringements occurring. For van Vuuren then the *BSA* was 'a mixed blessing'; relaxing sponsorship rules improved fundraising prospects, but it encouraged many community stations 'to turn to the market to generate financial support. As a result, some community broadcasters have adopted professional and commercial practices and formats which are contrary to the spirit of community democracy'.[138] See the box below for an example of one such instance.

Box 5: John Laws controversy

A high profile example of the dilemma associated with the issue of sponsorship of community broadcasting is illustrated by the controversy caused when some rural community stations chose to broadcast the John Laws program. This program was produced for, and networked by commercial broadcasters. Hence, complaints were made to the broadcasting regulator that as the program contained advertising, licensees had breached their licence conditions.

Responses from the regulator concerning various episodes of the John Laws program varied. It assessed some content as advertising, other broadcasts as adhering to the requirements of sponsorship announcements, and some content as sponsorship announcements which breached the rule which only allowed five minutes of sponsorship announcements.[139]

The issue 'whipped up a fiery debate' within community broadcasting. Some thought broadcasting a program containing commercial content could be justified in terms of community demand. Others considered that any broadcast which featured commercial content was 'an anathema to the principles of community radio'.[140]

What is clear from the debate and the somewhat contradictory assessments by the broadcasting regulator of the content of the John Laws program is that for community broadcasting there remains a fine line between advertising and sponsorship. Moreover, any assessment of what constitutes sponsorship and appropriate content is likely, while the rules continue as they are, to be subject to the individual interpretations of listeners, broadcasters and the regulator.

Funding

The community broadcasting sector is largely self-funded. As noted in the previous section, the major income source for the sector is sponsorship, but other sources of funding include membership contributions, listener subscriptions, donations and government funding.[141] According to the Community Broadcasting Station Census for 2009–10, over 167,000 Australians financially supported free-to-air community radio services as subscribers, members or donors.[142]

Ellie Rennie argued in her 2003 doctoral thesis that funding is a difficult issue for community broadcasting. In Rennie's view this is because the need for the sector to raise revenue exists in constant tension with its non-commercial ethic.[143]

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137. van Vuuren, 'Commercial trends in community radio', op. cit.

138. Ibid.

139. ACMA, *Investigation report 1561*, 2005 (re Schedule 2, clause 9(1)(b) to the *BSA* and Australian Broadcasting Authority, *Investigation report 1206*, 2003 (re Schedule 2, clause 9(3) to the *BSA*), accessed 10 January 2014.

140. K van Vuuren, 'The value and purpose of community broadcasting; the Australian experience' in Gordon ed, *Notions of community*, op. cit., p. 173.

141. ACMA, *Community broadcasting sponsorship guidelines 2008*, accessed 22 January 2014.

142. McNair Ingenuity Research, *Community broadcasting station census*, 2011, op. cit. reported 111,971 subscribers or members and 55,713 donors.

143. E Rennie, *The future of community broadcasting: civil society and communications policy*, PhD thesis, Queensland University of Technology, 2003, accessed 22 January 2014.

The CBAA makes a similar point:

> To maintain both their integrity and viability, community broadcasting services must grapple with the tension between the requirement for community participation and the commercial imperatives of staying afloat. This always requires a delicate balancing act on the part of station management because as government assistance falls away commercial sponsorship inevitably comprises a larger and larger proportion of stations' incomes. Community stations are obliged to enter the commercial market place and to compete there, but if they allow commercial considerations to become paramount, and program their airtime accordingly, they risk abandoning the purpose for which they were licensed.[144]

Figure 6: community radio sources of funding: 2009–10
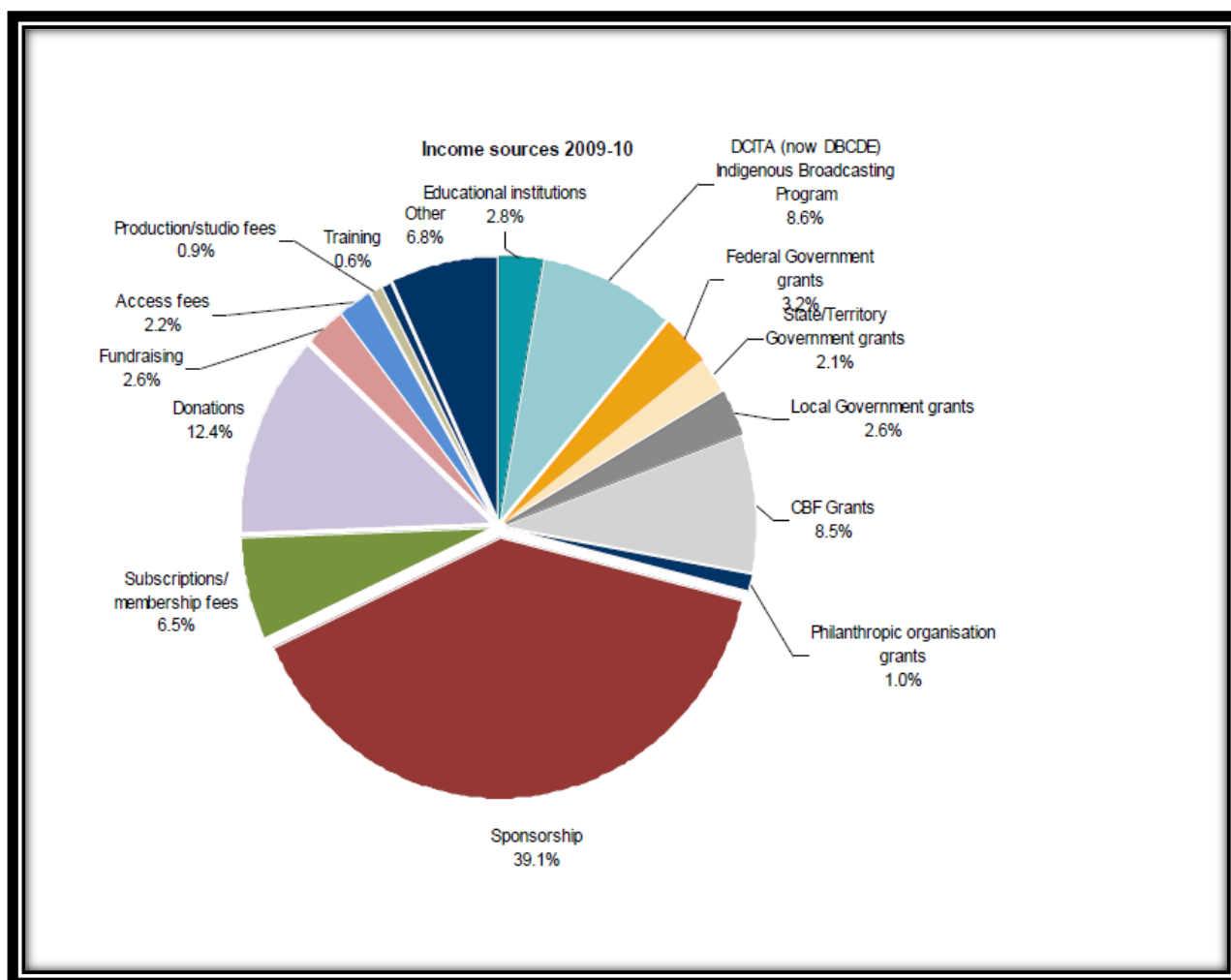
Source: CBAA[145]

The Community Broadcasting Database survey of community radio stations for 2009–10 indicates that total income for the sector for the period was $66 million. The survey estimated that Australian Government funding to community radio stations which are permanently licensed (including funding from the Department of Communications—identified in the chart above by its former acronym, DBCDE) amounted to 11.8 per cent of total revenue. Total grant income from all levels of government (including CBF grants) formed 16.4 per cent of total revenue. By comparison, sponsorship, membership subscriptions and donations provided 58.0 per cent of

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144. CBAA, Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, *Inquiry into community broadcasting*, 17 March 2006, accessed 23 January 2014.

145. McNair Ingenuity Research, *Community broadcasting station census*, 2011.

the sector's total revenues.[146] Figure 6 illustrates the importance of sponsorship funding and donations as a source of revenue for the community radio sector.

Community Broadcasting Foundation

The independent, non-profit Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF) was established in 1984 following widespread consultation with community broadcasters and government. The aim of the organisation is to act as a funding agency for the development of general community broadcasting as well as for Indigenous and ethnic radio and Radio for the Print Handicapped.

CBF's objectives are to:

- solicit grants, donations, and other monetary contributions from government, the private sector, institutions, groups and individuals

- provide seeding, sustaining and special purpose finance to community radio stations in Australia and groups which aspire to form community radio stations

- provide grants for research and development by groups aspiring to form community television stations

- provide innovation grants to community radio stations and non-profit organisations for experimental and other innovative programming for broadcasting on community radio stations

- provide innovation grants to community radio stations for training, research and study, publications and audience surveys

- make grants available that enable special broadcasting projects to be undertaken and for such purposes as support the aims of community broadcasting.[147]

CBF allocations

Federal Government funding support is provided by the Department of Communications and is distributed through the CBF. Ongoing funding from the CBF is allocated to identifiable groups, such as print handicapped groups (see Box 6) to assist in meeting transmission requirements and training and for special projects, such as the Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (AMRAP) discussed below.

The Government provides core funding each year to the CBF and in 1996 it introduced the idea of targeted funding for particular projects. There have been suggestions that the government funding formula is not ideal, however. For example, it is believed by some that the government should provide annual guaranteed funding for capital expenditure for the sector and that stations should have to justify to the CBF any application for other funding. Others consider in relation to targeted funding that the sector, not the Government, knows best what funds are needed and in what areas they are needed. Moreover, CBF should be required to consult across the sector before allocating funding for projects. Still others have attacked the CBF funding application process, arguing that it was too lengthy and that often the programs it funds are not based on their acceptance or popularity within local communities.[148]

Moreover, some stations are concerned that when they seem to be successful in raising funds they are then excluded from receiving CBF funding. One participant in the study by Forde, Meadows and Foxwell, remarked:

> We get penalised when we become efficient. If we have, say, an exceptional year and reach say $200,000 worth of sponsorship–mind you, that's a nice wish–but if we apply to the CBF next year and said, 'We want to do these programs', and they say 'Wow, you've got that [amount of sponsorship]', then straight away we'd be excluded.[149]

On the other hand, the CBF guidelines make it clear that limited funds need to be spent where they are most needed, so it prioritises general grants for example for stations with minimal income and small funding reserves,

146. CBAA et al., *Community broadcasting and media: year 2015*, op. cit. Note: According to the Community Broadcasting Database, community broadcasting stations also receive grants from other Australian Government departments, as well as from their respective state and local governments for specific projects or purposes. The Senate Inquiry into community broadcasting in 2007, however, noted that only some State Governments contribute funds to the community broadcasting sector.

147. CBF, *Annual report 2002–03*, accessed 23 January 2014.

148. Forde, Meadows and Foxwell, *Culture, commitment, community*, op. cit.

149. Ibid.

and stations that have recently received a permanent licence. In addition, it is more prepared to provide funding to stations which can demonstrate their contributions to diversity and local programming.[150]

Box 6: Radio for the Print Handicapped

Radio for the Print Handicapped (RPH) grant is a service provided to almost 3.8 million Australians—or 18.4 per cent of the population who have some form of disability with regards to viewing printed information.

The first RPH services began broadcasting in 1978.

The RPH Network consists of 18 AM/FM radio services across Australia as well as digital radio services in the five mainland capitals.

Eight of Australia's fifteen RPH stations are operated by Vision Australia, a not for profit agency specialising in service delivery to blind and vision-impaired people.

The following table shows government funding and total income for the CBF and **Appendix A** shows CBF grant allocations made from 1998–99 to 2012–13.

Table 1: CBF funding 1998–99 to 2013–14

Year	Government funding	Total income (a)	Grant allocations
1998–99	4 959 880	5 172 404	5 109 901
1999–2000	6 041 942	6 238 333	5 767 929
2000–01	5 469 573	5 583 830	5 072 719
2001–02	5 124 117	5 245 553	5 642 470
2002–03	5 402 140	5 606 712	4 894 760
2003–04	5 524 978	6 585 157	5 819 953
2004–05	9 517 310	10 120 213	6 732 340
2005–06	7.678 989	8 948 355	8 877 050
2006–07	8 289 919	9 705 764	8 429 931
2007–08	10 310 543	11 464 682	10 808 378
2008–09	9 608 119	10 464 822	9 463 263
2009–10	14 032 000	15 411 436	14 084 065
2010–11	12 091 000	14 407 067	11 600 225
2011–12	15.320 933	17 227 519	15 719 563
2012–13	14 388 000	15 193 735	13 516 515
2013–14	17.7	na	na

a.   Includes interest, returned grants monies and donations from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

Source: CBF annual reports[151]

Special projects: example—Australian Music Radio Airplay Project

Community radio has received federal government funding over the years to undertake special projects. These include the Community Access Network Project (CAN) which has assisted stations to gain access to the Internet. Many stations have embraced the new online technologies so that community radio and television audiences often have the options of listening live, re-streaming programs on demand to various devices or listening to podcasts of favourite programs.[152]

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150. CBF grants information pages, accessed 23 January 2014.

151. CBF, Annual reports, accessed 14 January 2014.

152. Cpod, the podcast hosting service from the CBAA provides registered listeners with a directory and wide selection of programs, accessed 24 January 2014

One special project which has been especially successful is the Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (AMRAP).

In 1998, as part of a $10 million compensation package provided to the Australian music industry following the introduction of legislation to allow parallel importing of music on compact discs, the Howard Government provided $1.5 million to the CBF to assist community broadcasting in promoting contemporary Australian music.[153]

The AMRAP project began in November 1999 with the establishment of the CBF's Contemporary Music Project Committee (later the Australian Music Project Committee), a group which represented community radio and music industry interests, and AMRAP commenced operation in 2000. The project involved two separate, but related initiatives:

• CBF AMRAP grants: a program for community broadcasting organisations. This provided funding under the categories of programming, live concerts and festival broadcasts, recording and distribution and training and development, innovation and partnerships

• AMRAP operations centre: this was based at, and managed by CBAA. The operations centre was involved with:

    – development of an AMRAP website

    – development of a database-driven music distribution system that matched music releases by genre with community radio stations broadcasting that music genre

    – development and maintenance of further relationships between the Australian music industry and community radio stations and

    – support for the production and distribution of Australian music programs via the Community Radio Network (CRN) satellite channel and its digital data delivery counterpart, the Digital Delivery Network.

Through careful management the initial funding allocation for AMRAP enabled it to survive until 2004 at which time grants were suspended. In 2005 the CBF commissioned an independent review of the project. The review recommended that the federal government extend financial support for the service for an additional four years, but this was not forthcoming under the Howard Government.

As part of its Arts Policy, *New Direction for the Arts,* released prior to the 2007 Federal Election, the Australian Labor Party (Labor) committed $2.4 million over four years for the re-introduction of AMRAP noting:

> Community radio broadcasters play a crucial role in promoting contemporary Australian music to every corner of the country. Since 2000, this role has been supported through the highly successful Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (AMRAP). The project has provided regular and targeted distribution of new Australian music to Australia's 350 community radio stations, helping the sector broadcast diverse and fresh local releases to its four million weekly listeners.

> Under the auspices of the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA), AMRAP has distributed more than 75,000 CDs by Australian artists. Over the same period, the level of contemporary Australian music played on community radio has increased 25%. AMRAP also produces and distributes radio content promoting Australian music, and is responsible for developing a web presence to help community broadcasters, musicians, industry bodies and the public learn about new Australian artists.

> Despite its clear success, AMRAP has not received any additional funding subsequent to its initial allocation of $1.5 million in 1998. Over the last seven years, the project has been forced to gradually cut back its activities, and now operates in a reduced form.

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153. Parallel importation of music compact discs was permitted in Australia following changes to the *Copyright Act 1968* in 1998. The changes were meant to promote competition in the Australian market and allowed parallel importation after 30 July 1998 provided that the CDs were manufactured with the licence of the copyright owner in the country of manufacture.

> Labor will provide the Australian Music Radio Airplay Project with increased and extended funding of $2.4 million over four years, helping promote new Australian music to community radio's four million weekly listeners throughout the country. [154]

The 2008 Federal Budget delivered the promised funding which was able to increase the amount of Australian music played on community stations by five per cent through various means, such as distributing music files and CDs to stations and funding grants for contemporary Australian music projects. However, despite an independent review of AMRAP commissioned by the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy in 2011 reporting that the restored funding had 'returned highly positive results', AMRAP funding was not extended in the 2012–13 Budget. [155]

With CBF support AMRAP was able to continue while the CBAA lobbied the Government to continue what it argued was 'an extraordinarily low cost/high return project that has enormous support from community broadcasters and the Australian music industry who have long understood the valuable role of community radio in profiling Australian music'. [156] The Government agreed to provide interim funding until March 2013 when further funding of $2.4 million was allocated over four years as part of the Creative Australia national cultural policy. [157]

The future

The community media in Australia manage to do a lot with little funding—engage communities with local news and views, foster diversity and maintain culture and identity. This is in keeping with what is often argued is the ethos of community media to deliver an independent, people-based and focussed media that operate for social benefit on a not-for-profit basis.

It is clear some print community media in Australian would fit under the label of radical. But it is arguable whether the broadcasting community media in Australia have ever been truly radical. This is not to say that there are some stations which have in the past fitted that definition, and some which continue to be left of mainstream. It is also acknowledged that the genesis of the sector lies in the protest movements of the 1970s. However, as a somewhat dated survey by Roy Morgan (taken in 2000) has suggested, there has been a move in the sector towards conservatism. Indeed, the Morgan survey found that radio station managers and listeners in both metropolitan and rural areas are more likely to vote conservative than for Labor or for more radical parties. [158]

At the same time, the sector remains:

> … committed to notions of access and participation for both its members and general audience. Unlike commercial or state radio, community radio stations see audience members as potentially active participants in core activities such as program production, marketing, administration, and station management … This has occurred regardless of whether the stations are fine music, or politically progressive, or ethnic broadcasters. [159]

Over the years some observers of the Australian community media sector fear that undesirable trends have emerged to undermine the essence of what makes the sector unique. The instigation of more formal training for community media workers is seen for example as part of a move towards:

> … *professionalisation:* the desire to produce 'good' radio, usually by copying commercial formats; *popularisation*: the pressure to increase audience size; and *commercialisation*; the adoption of commercial approaches to raise revenue. [160]

154. Australian Labor Party, *New directions for the arts: supporting a vibrant and diverse Australian arts sector*, September 2007, p. 14, accessed 23 January 2014.

155. CBAA, *Help restore AMRAP funding*, media release, 11 September 2012, accessed 17 January 2014.

156. CBAA, *Community broadcasters call on the Federal Government to restore funding*, media release, 23 November 2012, accessed 17 January 2014.

157. Executive summary, Creative Australia policy, Creative Australia website, accessed 17 January 2014.

158. Roy Morgan survey 2000 cited in S Forde, M Meadows and K Foxwell, 'Community radio, radicalism and the grassroots: discussing the politics of contemporary Australian community', *Transformations*, 4, September 2002, accessed 21 January 2014.

159. Forde, Meadows and Foxwell, 'Community radio, radicalism and the grassroots, op. cit.

160. D Barlow, 'The promise, performance and future of community broadcasting', in van Vuuren in Gordon, *Notions of community*, op. cit., pp 174–75.

Others in the sector believe that not only is it time for the sector to become more professional and more entrepreneurial, but that this must occur in response to the changing media landscape. In this vein, the CBAA has argued that lifting the current restrictions on advertising will not affect the public interest dimension of the sector, but it will help make the sector more viable.

But the issue is not simple. In a 2004 thesis on community broadcasting Saba El-Ghul illustrated the dilemma with regards to conflicting views on sponsorship and government funding.[161] According to El-Ghul, the station manager of the community station Life FM at the time, Jim Seymour, was in favour of increasing sponsorship announcement times so his station could continue to exist 'to pay our bill but not to generate dollars'. Seymour saw this as a more desirable option than seeking increased government funding as in Seymour's view government support inevitably came with the attached strings of increased control.[162] The President of CBAA, David Melzer, rejected this view, arguing that commercialisation was the real threat to the sector. At the same time, Melzer put forward ideas others would also consider a threat by advocating that the sector develop 'whole-of-community support' and that it seek to operate 'in a business-like way'.[163]

Divergent views about what should constitute community media, and the means which it needs to employ not only to survive, but thrive, continue to be debated. Conclusions reached by the House of Representatives committee inquiry into community broadcasting in 2007 reflected what appeared to be the view of governments to that time. This was, in effect that they were unwilling to contribute substantially to community broadcasting unless the sector could illustrate that the local content it delivered attracted audiences.

A spokesperson for Stephen Conroy, Minister responsible for the community broadcasting sector in the government defeated at the 2013 election, made it clear that Labor considered the primary source of funding for community media had been, and should continue to be drawn from within its communities. While government was 'proud to augment this funding, it should never be seen as a substitute for independent community-sourced revenue'.[164] The spokesperson perhaps could have added, as Susan Forde and her academic colleagues pointed out in their 2002 study, that in a climate where value is evaluated by profitability, efficiency, competition and numbers, so called 'soft' notions which frame community broadcasting in terms of social and cultural benefit 'fail to carry much weight'.[165]

Given that it is unlikely that this approach will change dramatically under the current Coalition Government, it may be that more community broadcasters will be convinced to lobby for further easing of sponsorship limitations in the future. There are other options which the sector could also contemplate. These include making government and government agencies more aware of advantages to be gained in targeting their various health and social welfare messages and information campaigns in community media—particularly in rural areas.[166] In conjunction, the sector could lobby for sponsorship and advertising regulations to be modified for the broadcast of these types of announcements.

Fund raising could also adopt new emphases, which would not necessarily detract from the participatory and local dimensions of the sector. Stations could do more to sell air time to local organisations, or to sell sponsorship acknowledgments to local suppliers in return for goods or services. Exploring the option of seeking increased funding support from philanthropic donors is another option for the sector, as is adopting more cooperative approaches to sharing technical and training resources.

This is not to imply that certain community stations do not already undertake some of these types of activities, but it appears that in the future, such fund raising exercises could become critical to the survival of the sector, regardless of the misgivings of those who consider them to compromise the values and ideological underpinnings of the sector.

161. S El-Ghul, *A future for community radio in Australia: funding, licensing and legislative issues*, Master of Arts thesis, Queensland University of Technology 2004, accessed 22 January 2014.

162. Ibid.

163. Ibid.

164. S Fitzsimons*,' Exclusive: Senator Conroy: 'Thanks Gotye, but community radio can fund itself'* the music.com.au, 7 May, 2013, accessed 23 January 2014.

165. Forde et al., *Culture, commitment, community*, op. cit.

166. Government advertising campaigns show minimal expenditure in ethnic and Indigenous media ($0.5 million of $40.5 million spent in the period 1 July to 31 December 2012) but there is potential for allocation to community broadcasting in general. Governance and Resource Management Group, *Campaign advertising by Australian Government departments and agencies*, Department of Finance and Deregulation, May 2013, accessed 23 January 2014**.**

Concluding comments

Community media play an important role in Australian culture—empowering participants, providing voices for different cultures and minorities, delivering local news, information and views, providing alternative music formats, a forum for Australian musicians and writers and programs that create a sense of belonging for people and maintaining projects which nourish Australian content in the face of an increasing reliance on overseas content by other broadcasters.

The sector survives with minimal government assistance and much support from within the communities it serves—from sponsors to a largely volunteer workforce. It has struggled throughout its nearly forty years of existence; but importantly, it has survived.

In a changing 21st century media environment, it is likely that the sector will need to become more professional and innovative, and this may be difficult given that the idealists in the sector see this as an unacceptable compromise. It can only be hoped that idealists and pragmatists will broker a solution which allows community broadcasting to remain viable and to continue as the media 'of the people'.

Appendix A: CBF grant allocations

Community broadcasting grant allocations 1998–99 to 2012–13

Year	Ethnic (a)	Indigenous (b)	General (c)	RPH (d)	AMRAP (e)	Transmission and satellite	Online access and other	Training	RIBS and !RRR (f)	Digital radio	Content development and Community TV
1998–99	2 614 950	682 368	651 533	275 179	500 000	339 501	389 256	44 345	-	-	196 000
1999–00	2 237 428	395 298	606 681	272 621	500 000	138 782	675 099	94 801	-	-	204 280
2000–01	2 562 871	589 303	782 194	271 040	307 596	80 540	446 422	-	-	-	-
2001–02	2 615 578	636 571	577 532	275 894	351 830	78 350	405 810	115 800	-	-	194 060
2002–03	2 700 474	716 643	574 622	289 110	230 214	206 146	370 616	44 720	-	-	175 400
2003–04	2 607 482	715 786	632 799	291 870	285 144	169 045	735 984	9 500	-	-	197 735
2004–05	2 633 843	681 582	657 767	302 525	157 372	1 583 787	517 765	-	-	-	218 122
2005–06	2 676 995	789 177	804 393	308 010	125 500	1 807 681	496 878	246 443	1 723 325	-	254 670
2006–07	2 784 137	729 686	615 026	315 480	-	1 983 118	588 899	1 054 024	260 871	117 918	269 317
2007–08	2 807 556	709 921	575 195	322 540	-	1 866 244	549 829	607 194	137 225	192 105	246 757
2008–09	2 896 564	745 021	875 783	332 125	528 504	1 674 453	490 848	853 759	853 877	100 000	263 310
2009–10	2 968 774	721 544	748 305	347 065	713 890	1 686 889	521 410	442 541	593 960	5 095 700	272 655
2010–11	2 946 868	710 225	938 838	335 405	610 313	1 775 860	440 458	690 910	3 500	3 054 000	294 536
2011–12	3 637 195	1 134 098	1 036 030	720 485	609 553	1 760 163	685 460	718 262	-	3 902 000	2 081 571 (g)
2012–13	3 661 413	1 177 165	1 065 517	722 740	250 000	1 717 218	527 876	614 379	-	2 364 463	2 028 830

a.   Ethnic funding is provided to assist with the maintenance and development of ethnic community broadcasting. Ethnic funding prior to the establishment of the National Training program in 2005 includes funding for ethnic training grants.
b.   Indigenous funding is provided to assist with the maintenance and development of Indigenous community radio broadcasting.
c.   General funding is provided to assist with establishment costs for newly licensed stations, sustaining funds for permanent licensed stations, the production of programs for national distribution and development activities.
d.   Radio for the Print Handicapped (RPH) funding
e.   The Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (AMRAP) is an initiative aimed at promoting Australian music.
f.   Funding for Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Services (RIBS) and for the Indigenous Remote Radio Replacement (IRRR) project to improve technical quality and level of service provided by RIBS licenses by replacing obsolete radio equipment.
g.   From this year this is a dedicated grant allocation. Community television content development ($291 571 in 2011–12 and $306 034 in 2012–13).