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# Sydney community radio licences go to FBI, Gadigal and MCR

The ABA has allocated three new community radio licences to serve Sydney: to Free Broadcast Incorporated (FBI), Gadigal Information Service (Gadigal) and Muslim Community Radio (MCR).

FBI will serve the youth and non-mainstream arts communities, while Gadigal will serve the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and those interested in indigenous culture and issues. MCR will provide the first permanent Muslim radio service in Sydney.

'This is an exciting development for Sydney,' said Professor David Flint, ABA Chairman. 'These three new FM services will add to the diversity of voices that can be heard on the public airwaves. Sydney has Australia's largest population of young people and the country's largest indigenous and Muslim populations. The successful applicants are all strongly based in the communities they propose to serve and the ABA anticipates these new services will have an invigorating effect on those communities.'

The licences were allocated on 1 June 2001 and the licensees must commence a service within 12 months. FBI will op-

erate on 94.5 MHz on the FM band, Gadigal on 93.7 MHz and MCR on 92.1 MHz.

'The ABA formed the view that FBI, Gadigal and MCR were the three applicants that are most likely to continue to meet the needs of the Sydney community in the future,' said Professor Flint. 'In the cases of Gadigal and MCR, this is because of the likely continuing need for services addressing the particular communities to which they will be directed. In the case of FBI, it is because of the likely continuing general community need for broadcasting of material reflecting new and emerging cultures and the interests of youth.'

The ABA was satisfied that there is a significant community need for a service that gives youth, and members of the community interested in youth culture, access to programming which covers a wide range of non-commercial and non-mainstream interests. While this programming will inevitably include music, which the ABA acknowledged plays a significant role in young people's lives, it is not limited to music. There are a broad range of other activities, artistic prac-

tices and points of view of significant interest to young people in Sydney which currently have either no broadcasting outlet, or, at best, a limited outlet. This is the type of service that FBI is proposing to provide.

The service proposed by Gadigal will meet two important and presently unmet community needs:

- the need for the indigenous community to have its own broadcasting service which addresses issues of particular concern to the indigenous community, and caters to its specific cultural needs; and
- the need of the general community to be informed about indigenous issues and indigenous culture.

The unique historical and social circumstances of the indigenous community have given rise to these needs. In the ABA's view, these needs are likely to continue indefinitely.

The ABA found there is a considerable need within the Sydney licence area for a broadcasting service that specifically addresses the needs of the Muslim community. Islam is the second most populous religion in the Sydney licence area after

Christianity, and at about a hundred thousand people is of a significant size. Although there have been broadcasting services providing Muslim programming in the past, there is currently no regular programming on existing radio services, and no dedicated broadcasting service serving the community.

'This has been one of the most difficult decisions the ABA has had to make in recent times,' said Professor Flint. 'The ABA found six of the seventeen applicants had the capacity to provide their proposed service and that their proposed service would meet a clear community need. In these circumstances, the ABA regrets that it is able to allocate only three licences.'

Of the 14 unsuccessful applicants, the ABA found 11 either did not demonstrate the capacity to provide or did not establish a clear community need for their proposed service. There were three applicants that did satisfy the ABA on both these counts but whose arguments for being allocated a licence were, in the ABA's view, not as compelling as the three successful applicants. They were OutFM Pty Ltd (OutFM) and



Sydney Gay and Lesbian Broadcasters Incorporated (FREE FM), both targeting the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community and Sydney Youth Radio Inc. (WILD FM), targeting the mainstream youth (14–30) community and young people who identify with the dance/club culture.

'The ABA recognises that there is a substantial need for a service that addresses the needs and interests of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. Both applicants claiming to represent the gay and lesbian community presented strong applications and there is a high level of support within the community for a community broadcasting service, regardless of the provider,' said Professor Flint.

'However, on balance, the ABA was not persuaded that the needs of the gay and lesbian community for a dedicated broadcasting service were greater than the needs of the communities represented by FBi, Gadigal and MCR.'

The ABA carefully weighed the respective claims of, and evidence provided by, the applicants proposing to provide a service which meets the needs and interests of the youth community, in particular FBi and Sydney Youth Radio Incorporated (WILD FM). The ABA was not satisfied that in allocating a licence to an applicant which provides predominantly a dance music service, namely WILD FM, that it would be best serving the interests of young peo-

ple in Sydney. Even if Sydney Youth Radio had been more persuasive about its ability to meet the needs and interests of its community, the ABA would have had serious reservations about allocating it a licence.

These reservations arose because of the findings of its report of the investigation into Sydney Youth Radio and Sydney Gay and Lesbian Broadcasters, in particular, the finding that Sydney Youth Radio is operated as part of a profit-making enterprise (see page 6).

Having regard to the fact that under section 15 of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, community broadcasting services may not be operated as part of a profit making enterprise, the ABA could not be confident that Sydney Youth Radio would provide a community broadcasting service within the meaning of the Act.

### Community broadcasting licences

Part 6 of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, provides for the allocation of community broadcasting licences.

The ABA uses a merit-based allocation process where applicants compete on the basis of merit for the licence. The process includes opportunity for the public to comment on applications received.

The ABA must also have regard to:

(a) the extent to which the proposed service would meet the existing and perceived future

needs of the community within the licence area of the proposed service; and

(b) the nature and diversity of the interests of that community; and

(c) the nature and diversity of other broadcasting services (including national broadcasting services) available within that licence area; and

(d) the capacity of the applicant to provide the proposed service; and

(e) the undesirability of one person being in a position to exercise control of more than one community broadcasting licence that is a broadcasting services bands licence in the same licence area; and

(f) the undesirability of the Commonwealth, a State or Territory or a political party being in a position to exercise control of a community broadcasting licence.

The Minister may also give directions to the ABA to give priority to a particular community interest or interests.

The ABA held a public hearing in August 2000 to assist it in allocating the three Sydney-wide community radio licences it made available in the Sydney licence area plan released in December 1999.

### Free Broadcast Incorporated

In the ABA's view, the service to be provided by FBi will meet the broadest range of community needs of any of the applicants. It will do so through its proposed programming format, as well as through its commitment to community participation. From the evidence given at the licence allocation hearing, the ABA has formed the view that FBi will be able to cater to a range of interests not currently met, or inadequately met, by existing national, commercial and community serv-

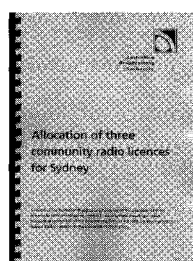
ices, and that it has the mechanisms in place to ensure that the community that it proposes to serve will be able to participate in the operations and programming of the service.

The ABA is satisfied that the service proposed by FBi will add significantly to the diversity of radio services available in the Sydney licence area.

### Gadigal Information Service

ATSIC contended in its submission in support of Gadigal's application that the mainstream media has often misrepresented indigenous people and cannot be expected to reflect or represent indigenous people accurately, either culturally, politically, or socially. It also noted that the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody made six recommendations on the need for media services to create a better understanding between indigenous and non-indigenous communities. In addition, Gadigal has argued that indigenous people do not necessarily read mainstream newspapers or watch mainstream television.

In the ABA's view, a dedicated indigenous radio service is a practical and effective means of meeting the various existing and future needs and interests of the indigenous people of Sydney. These needs and interests relate to social, cultural and political issues, as well as entertainment. An indigenous community radio service will permit members of the indigenous community to express and discuss the wide range of issues of interest to the community, and to communicate with both other members of their community, in Sydney and throughout Australia through the broader Aboriginal radio network, as well as the non-



Copies of the report, *Allocation of Three Community Radio Licences to serve Sydney*, are available on the ABA web site at [www.aba.gov.au/whats\\_new/index.htm](http://www.aba.gov.au/whats_new/index.htm) or for purchase, \$10 (incl GST), from the ABA (02) 9334 7799.



indigenous community in the Sydney licence area.

### Muslim Community Radio

Muslims in the Sydney licence area live in a society in which the dominant culture is Christian or derived from a Christian origin. The Muslim religion prescribes in some considerable detail the daily life of its adherents, yet a Muslim in a country such as Australia is isolated from his or her languages, Muslim religious teaching, the recitation of the Quran, and Islamic music. The religious content of the service proposed by MCR would directly meet the need of the Muslim community for religious broadcasting.

In addition to specifically religious programming, MCR will provide programming that addresses local news, announcements, information from the social sector and social issues of the day, all from an Islamic perspective. MCR has produced and would continue to produce contemporary music and entertainment (in Arabic, English and other languages) that is valid to Islam, sensitive to the philosophies of the Australian environment and reflects the interests and tastes of the local community. MCR claims that such activities will empower the Islamic and Arabic communities, while maintaining cultural identity woven into a better understanding of Australian philosophies.

The ABA has given some consideration to the question of the extent to which MCR represents the community interest that it claims to serve. This is because the ABA has received submissions that indicate that some groups within the Muslim community do not support MCR's application. Having considered the evidence, however, the ABA is satisfied that MCR has the support of a reasonable proportion of the Muslim population of the Sydney licence area (possibly around one-third), and that at least some of MCR's proposed broadcasts would have a common appeal. The ABA notes that during the 18 test broadcasts conducted by MCR, including during Ramadan, it did not receive any negative comments or complaints from the Muslim community about MCR's broadcasts.

The ABA also notes that in November 2000, MCR was the recipient of an award from the CBAA for its contribution to ethnic broadcasting.

### Which licence should be allocated to which successful applicant?

Having considered the financial information provided by FBi, Gadigal and MCR in their applications, and submissions made at the licence allocation hearing by the three applicants, the ABA decided to allocate the three available licences as follows:

Service licence number	Frequency	Maximum ERP	Applicant
SL 1150109	94.5 MHz	150 kW	Free Broadcast Inc
SL 1150110	92.1MHz	15 kW	Muslim Community Radio
SL 1150111	93.7 MHz	50 kW	Gadigal Information Service

See page 7 for information about the proposed variation to the Sydney licence area plan

## New community radio licences for Penrith and Bacchus Marsh

### Penrith

The ABA has allocated a new community radio licence for Penrith, New South Wales, to Way Out West Fine Music Inc. (WOW FM).

WOW FM will broadcast its service on 100.7 MHz on the FM band and has 12 months in which to commence its service.

'The proposed service will provide programming targeted to meet the needs of the Penrith community and will have programs aimed at non-English speakers, children, young people and the unemployed,' said Professor Flint. 'The applicant satisfied the ABA that it would meet the existing and perceived future needs of the Penrith licence area.'

The ABA assessed two applications for the new community radio licence: from Way Out West Fine Music and Nepean Riverland Community Radio Association.

The ABA decided to allocate the licence to Way Out West Fine Music as it considered that in comparison to the other applicant's proposed service, this group's service would better meet the needs of the Penrith community.

### Bacchus Marsh

The ABA has allocated a new community radio licence for Bacchus Marsh, Victoria, to Bacchus Marsh Community Radio Inc.

The service will broadcast on 98.5 on the FM band. Bacchus Marsh Community Radio is currently broadcasting on that frequency under a temporary community broadcasting licence which expires on 30 June 2001. The permanent community radio broadcasting licence will commence on 1 July 2001.

Bacchus Marsh Community Radio was the only applicant for the licence. Its application was assessed with particular regard to whether the proposed service would meet existing and perceived future community needs.

Bacchus Marsh Community Radio current temporary service operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The proposed service will provide programs that will cover a wide range of local issues, news, information and music that appeals to the many different community groups across the Bacchus Marsh licence area.