



Community Broadcasting Update

CBAA Finances Still Grim

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) - representative body for community broadcasters - may be dissolved in October unless funding is forthcoming to keep it going.

After a financial crisis earlier this year (see *CU* 87), the CBAA is currently battling on with greatly reduced staff.

Mike Thompson, who has had an extensive career in broadcasting and policy, and most recently managed the Sydney ethnic community station 2000, took over as Executive Director in August. His immediate task is to persuade the Public Broadcasting Foundation, which channels government funds to the sector, to give the CBAA a 'bail-out' grant which will allow it to mount its annual conference, scheduled for November. As *CU* went to press, the prospects for a bail-out looked promising.

The organisation had been receiving approximately the same amount from its members and the PBF - around \$130,000 each annually - to allow it to operate. Another source of revenue, Natfund, the sector's initiative to sell bulk sponsorship of community radio to national advertisers, is making only a little more than it costs to operate, Thompson told *CU*. An unbreakable three-year lease on expensive premises is not helping the financial situation.

The other main factors in the crisis at the CBAA were losses on the current affairs program *Undercurrents*, which cost \$100,000 a year to run but failed to find sponsors (it is now produced independently); and a commitment to pay fees to copyright organisations which has left the CBAA carrying the can for defaulting stations.

The CBAA is looking into an '\$80,000 black hole', Thompson said.

He believes that many in the sector are busy keeping their stations going and are not very concerned about the work that the CBAA has traditionally done in the policy area, looking at issues like the satellite, auxiliary licences and DAB, though such work is vital for the continued viability of the sector.

While some in community broadcasting might not care if the CBAA went under, it would be extremely awkward for a Government in the process of handing regulatory and other responsibilities over to industry representative bodies. Perhaps the Government itself may have to undertake a bail-out?

The Government's allocation in the 1993-94 budget for community broadcasting was just over \$3 million, which included an additional \$750,000 for Aboriginal broadcasters, Radio for the Print Handicapped, rural and suburban stations. Funds were also provided for research into the use of both national and community services, and the value placed on them by the public. □

Community TV Update

Community television has begun!

CBAA Community TV co-ordinator Margot Natoli told *CU* that LINC TV in Lismore, Northern NSW began providing a four-hour-a-day service on weekends on 11 September.

LINC is first cab off the rank following the allocation of 12 month 'open narrowcasting' licences to four community TV groups by the ABA earlier this year.

The Adelaide group is finalising transmission arrangements and expects to be on air by the end of this month. The Melbourne group is aiming to use a 5kw transmitter which will extend its coverage to the Mornington Peninsula, and after test transmissions starting in October, hopes to be on air by the end of the year.

Sydney community TV has been delayed by problems flowing from claims that the group's board was not adequately representative of the interests involved, in particular indigenous and NESB interests. A Supreme Court action taken by an Aboriginal group was dropped when it became apparent to everyone that the longer the delay, the longer it would be before the station went to air (the licence runs from February 1993 to February 1994), and some changes were made to the composition of the board. As it is, they are unlikely to be on air until early next year.

Groups in Brisbane, Canberra and Wodonga have also applied for licences, and a group in Perth is doing test transmissions.

A working party has been set up to seek national sponsorship, and one area being pursued is that of contra deals with large organisations. □



\$150,000 Windfall for Community Station

Community radio station 5MMM in Adelaide recently sold its call sign to Village Roadshow, owners of the Triple M Radio Network, for \$150,000.

Does this suggest that community stations with a desirable call sign might have found a profitable new way of raising funds? Unfortunately for the sector, there are no other MMM community stations. □