



Taking a Sledgehammer to a Gnat?

Opinionated Sydney broadcaster and sometime rugby coach Alan Jones stuck his neck right out when he spoke disparagingly on radio station 2UE during January about the selection of Aboriginal teacher/performer Mandawuy Yunupingu as Australian of the Year.

Among the media colleagues who supported Jones when he was arrested in rather unfortunate circumstances in London a couple of years ago was Radio National's Phillip Adams. Adams, who also happens to chair the Australian of the Year Committee, delivered a king hit to the pontificator in his *Weekend Australian* column.

Adams took the opportunity to neatly encapsulate everything that is unpalatable about talkback radio, including its propensity to allow ignorant and prejudiced opinions to pass without question, and for its practitioners' view of their own infallibility to be constantly reinforced by their like-minded, sycophantic listeners.

If this wasn't enough for Jones, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Robert Tickner also weighed in with a strongly worded media release (27 January).

(Mr Jones's) scant knowledge of Mr Yunupingu's work is in keeping

with his lack of knowledge of most issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people which he regularly preaches (sic) from his coward's castle of the airwaves.

Mr Jones's ignorance is eclipsed only by his regular practice of playing on the worst prejudices of the community.

Perhaps people like Jones do serve a purpose, by reminding more moderate listeners of the kinds of deep-seated and mindless prejudice which, regrettably, still prevails at the fringes of Australian society.

In this context, it is a matter for concern that the draft codes of program practice drawn up by FACTS do not deal with racial vilification at all, and the FARB codes merely touch on it. Neither set of codes deals with the portrayal of diversity in Australian society.

Meanwhile, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs sponsored a major conference on *The Media and Indigenous Australians*, held in Brisbane on 15-17 February. The conference, predictably enough, was scantily reported in the major media. *CU*, which only heard about it after the event, plans to take a look at some of the papers in our next issue. □



Community Radio Goes High Tech

More than 70 community (public) radio stations around Australia are now part of a satellite network which enables them to receive programming instantly and at reasonable cost.

Up till now, the sector has relied on tapes distributed by the PBAA's National Program Service, with the associated disadvantages of time delay.

The stations have acquired satellite equipment as part of an ethnic broadcasting grant from the Department of Transport and Communications. Conditions of the grant are that stations:

- use the equipment for the reception of SBS radio programming on a high priority basis;
- publicise the availability of non-English language program services in their community and consult with local ethnic community groups about their needs.

The BBC played a role in this development by negotiating the establishment of a four channel satellite network with Optus and the program syndicator ARNSAT, who in 1992 launched the first satellite distribution system for radio, using digital audio compression technology.

In addition to SBS programs and the Ethnic Radio Current Affairs Service (ERCAS), programs immediately available for transfer to satellite distribution include the PBAA National Program Service, the current affairs program *Undercurrents*, programs for the print handicapped, public radio news programs, and the Aboriginal tape exchange. □