



Public TV Extended

Nearly a year after their one-year licences were granted, the first capital city community television stations are not yet on air.

The Sydney group suffered internal problems related to the election of its board, resulting in legal action (now resolved). *CU* understands that both groups also experienced difficulties in obtaining the substantial funds required to acquire appropriate technical equipment. As a result of the delays, both groups were last month granted an extension of 12 months on their licences.

The Melbourne Community Television Consortium (MCTC) has now come to an arrangement with the Harness Racing Association by which the Association has purchased them a transmitter in return for a relatively modest amount of air time. Sydney's Community Television Services (CTS) has concluded a similar deal with Southern Pacific Network, a Dunedin (NZ) community media group now based in Sydney.

Both groups told regulatory authorities that they will be broadcasting 'within the next few months'.

The renewals were granted by the Spectrum Management Authority. Under the new Radiocommunications Act, the SMA takes over responsibility for renewals of open narrowcasting licences. The ABA is responsible only for the initial licence grant.

A brochure issued by CTS invites people to submit information about film or video programs they might have, or hold the rights to, thus implicitly acknowledging that a major problem they now face is obtaining sufficient suitable program material to sustain a viable service. The CTS brochure says that it does not matter how 'old or grungy' the programs are. They could be 'reformatted and presented in an interesting way'. □

ABC Shows Guts over Mardi Gras

A bouquet is due to the ABC and Managing Director David Hill for sticking to their guns and broadcasting highlights of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

The decision to proceed with the broadcasts was made in the face of strong protests, including a poll conducted by the program TVTV which produced a result strongly against the screening, and a letter from 90 MPs of all persuasions and some church representatives, urging that the telecast be moved to a later timeslot. Some signatories to this letter were predictable (Howard, Tuckey, Costello), some surprising (Barry Jones, Peter Duncan and John Langmore). To their credit, Alexander Downer and Andrew Peacock refused to sign.

In an interview on ABC Radio (3 March), Hill said that the Mardi Gras was now an international event attended by many family groups. He believed that much of the protest had been orchestrated; for instance, thousands of protest letters carrying the same wrong post office box number had been redirected to the correct ABC box number.

In the event, the carefully edited telecast of the parade, with brief documentary inserts, was unlikely to offend any but fundamentalist Christians and the diehard homophobes. It was a pity that the quality of the telecast did not do more to justify the ABC's courage in screening it. Its marketing arm is however doing a roaring trade in a three-hour extended video of the event. □

Facts: Positive Move on Cultural Diversity

A campaign initiated late last year to improve the portrayal of cultural diversity on Australian television (*CU* 95) has already seen positive results.

A coalition of unions, cultural and community groups kicked off the campaign in December with a formal request to the ABA to determine a television standard on this issue.

At a meeting last month with commercial broadcasters, it was revealed that the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) had issued a draft Advisory Note for the Portrayal of Cultural Diversity and invited comments. FACTS plans to include the advisory notes in their final form in its Codes publication. Viewers feedback on the representation of cultural diversity on screen will also be reported by FACTS once the Advisory note is finalised. □