

## **The Right to Know and the Freedom to Speak: 1999 Program of the Communications Law Centre, Melbourne**

### **International Conference - The right to know and freedom of information**

Organised with the International Commission of Jurists. Australian and overseas speakers will explore the themes of the "right to know", information as the currency of citizenship, and freedom of information.

### **Free Speech in the New Millennium - A framework for discussion**

As Australia is seeking to present a modern united face to the world we are struggling with the apparent tensions between free speech and human rights such as privacy, the right to freedom from discrimination and racial respect. This project will establish a framework for the consideration of free speech and expression in Australia.

### **Information - access, loss and cost**

A stocktake of the health of

information provision in Victoria. This project seeks to determine the extent of reduction in information in the public domain and develop indicators to monitor information production, access and affordability.

### **"Commercial in confidence" and public accountability**

A proposal for a research project exploring the financial and economic rationales for commercial confidentiality and how these might be balanced with the public interest. <

## **From The Archives**

### **Remote Aboriginal Broadcasting**

**While remote communities attempt to organise the right to broadcast in their own languages over their own facilities, the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) is emerging as another ill-conceived Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) initiative with inappropriate technology.**

The BRACS project is another lesson in how to not implement broadcasting policy. BRACS is designed to provide some 74 aboriginal and islander communities with satellite-delivered TV and radio services and the capacity to produce and broadcast their own programs over the same terrestrial facilities.

The DAA allocated up to \$35,000 to each community for a standard package of hardware, initially to pick up and rebroadcast only ABC TV and radio.

Pressure from BRACS recipients led to the DAA including a switch so there could be a choice between rebroadcasting the ABC, a remote commercial service, or their own TV and radio programs.

Much of the \$35,000 went toward the purchase, transport and installation of facilities such as a TV mast, transmitters and satellite-receiving and channel-switching equipment.

The production package included: one VHS-C domestic camera; two domestic VHS video cassette recorders; a mike; and a dual audio cassette recorder. This package is worth about \$4,000-5,000 and, as anyone with hands-on audiovisual experience knows, it is suitable for home video not broadcasting.

One BRACS community claims it was told to "take extra care" of the equipment because "it can't take the pressure of normal broadcasts and will only last three years".

The DAA came under fire for its failure to consult communities and the lack of any training program before BRACS even commenced.

Yuendumu Media Association asked

to nominate the equipment required as it had already established its own TV service and did not want radio as well. It told the DAA it would prefer some of the \$35,000 go toward renovating a building so its videotapes could survive the heat and dust.

But Canberra proved incapable of responding to the variety of needs in the different aboriginal and islander communities. The DAA moved ahead with its standardised approach and a standard equipment package designed by Telecom was transported for installation in BRACS communities.

Meanwhile, Department of Communications bureaucrats in Canberra spent five years trying to work out a licensing regime that could be applied to all communities. A standard regime is almost in place in the form of Limited Licences. The next step may take some time: each community must apply to and be granted a licence by the Broadcasting Tribunal.

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