

Community Broadcasting

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN COMMUNITY BROADCASTING COMMUNICATIONS

The community radio and television broadcasting sector provides an alternative voice to commercial and public media. Community radio in particular, is a vital source of independent programming, delivered to audiences with specific language or cultural requirements or in a particular location.

“Local content diversity and strong news and current affairs is the burning media issue for all Australian”

**Senator Andrew Murray
Spokesperson on
Communications**

The Australian Democrats are committed to keeping the community sector strong, diverse and viable. Community broadcasting has a vital role in providing relevant local information particularly in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia. A McNair Ingenuity Survey in 2006 showed that 60% of community broadcasting is into regional areas, where there is limited commercial radio access for people. A further study undertaken by Queensland University showed that people in regional and remote areas used community radio to access local news and stay connected with their local community.

Community broadcasting provides an opportunity for people to become involved in creating media, sharing information and participating in society more broadly. The McNair Ingenuity Survey found that over 20,000 people worked as volunteers at a community station during the 2003/04 financial year and that over 4 million people aged 15 years and over listen to community radio in an average week, while 3.7 million people view community television in an average month.

Community broadcasting contributes to cohesive communities, especially through maintenance and development of culture, language skills and the alternative voice they provide to mainstream media.

Our Action Plan

- The Democrats will support ongoing financial and policy initiatives for the community broadcasting sector because it is an important cultural resource for the Australian community
- The Democrats support federal financial assistance to the sector to support the technological changeover from analogue to digital so that community broadcasters will not lose out with the advancement of technology.
- The Democrats fully support the recommendation of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts report into Community Television *Options for Digital Broadcasting* that the Government provide \$6 million to community television



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for conversion of broadcast equipment to digital and that the funding be made available immediately after a simulcast arrangement has been made.

- The Democrats support the Committee's recommendation that the Government provide funding of \$1.7 million per year to the community TV sector for each year of simulcast.
- The Democrats support the Committee's recommendation that the Government, when analogue switch-off occurs, convert Channel 31 to digital and permanently allocate it to current and future community broadcasters.
- The Democrats support ongoing funding for audience surveys to be conducted on a regular basis for both the community broadcasting sector and policy makers. It is not possible to make informed policy decisions about the sector without this information.
- The Democrats support additional funding to community broadcasters for programming, infrastructure, training, sector co-ordination and planning.
- The Democrats support policy initiatives backed by legislative change which support the ongoing diversity in community broadcasting and aspirant broadcasters.
- The Democrats support the ongoing production of local programming by community broadcasters

The Issues

The most pressing issue for community broadcasting is the switchover from analogue to digital transmission and its ability to fund the changeover in terms of equipment, expertise and spectrum. The Government says there will be spectrum available for community broadcasting, but has not backed this up with a financial package to ensure that the sector can have a seamless transition to digital.

This financial commitment needs to be articulated by the Government so that long term planning can be undertaken by community broadcasters. The most crucial period will be the simulcast period when they are running both analogue and digital signals which will put a financial burden on all broadcasters and possibly mean the demise of some smaller broadcasters unable to meet the cost burden.

The impact on the sector may be that only the well-established and well-funded community broadcasters, many of whom are funded by Christian churches, can maintain their licences. This will negatively impact on the diversity in community broadcasters, which is at odds with the purpose for which it was established.

The role of the community broadcasting sector is vital as commercial stations move from the regional and remote areas or simply run networked city programming. To maintain local information and news in regional and remote areas, the community broadcasting sector must remain viable and can only do so with realistic federal government assistance.