



15 February 2022

Hon Michael Sukkar MP
Minister for Housing and Assistant Treasurer
The Treasury Langton Crescent
Parkes ACT 2600
Via email: prebudgetsubs@treasury.gov.au

Dear Minister,

2022-23 Pre-Budget Submission

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) is the peak body and national representative organisation for over 450 community media organisations. The CBAA is a global leader in the community media space, championing an independent and free media and providing a portfolio of programs aiming to strengthen the capacity and sustainability of community broadcasting organisations across Australia.

This submission provides the details of the community broadcasting sector's request that our annual allocation (through the Government's Community Broadcasting Program) be increased to \$25.37m. An additional \$5m annually, ongoing and indexed, distributed via competitive grants through the Community Broadcasting Foundation's Development and Operations grants would support stations' core operations and enhance the sector's impact. There is an \$8-\$11m shortfall in the amount of Development & Operations funding allocated and the amount requested by stations. The additional \$5m would help stations create and fund local employment opportunities; cover the cost of upgrades to ageing technology infrastructure; and increase local news reporting capacity. It would assist stations to recover from natural disasters and COVID-19 and provide them with a strong base from which to adapt and innovate – supporting their communities when they need it most.

The CBAA works closely with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and has provided the Department with the details of the sector's budget priorities. We look forward to continuing our close collaboration with the Department to support community broadcasters to serve communities across Australia.

We appreciate the long-standing support that successive Commonwealth Governments have provided to the community broadcasting sector for almost half a century. The CBAA welcomes the opportunity to provide a pre-budget submission.

Community radio is critical to Australian communities

The community broadcasting sector promotes the diverse identities of Australians that enrich the social, cultural and democratic fabric of Australian society. It plays a critical role in providing a voice for Australian communities that are underserved by mainstream media – including communities in regional and remote Australia, First Nations communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, faith-based communities, youth and seniors' communities, the LGBTIQ+

“ We really had to sit down and think about how we were going to keep ourselves viable, especially after the fires. The Community Broadcasting Foundation COVID-19 grant made us certain enough to say we could do it. We knew we could get through the pandemic and the next two years.” - Peter Crick, 2ARM FM

community, people with a disability, and diverse arts and music communities. It is Australia's largest independent media sector, recognised internationally as one of the most successful examples of grassroots media.

Our members have contributed to our policy development. We support their work and will continue to represent their efforts throughout Australia and in coordinating our engagement with Australian governments.

Community radio showcases local content, news and alternative voices fulfilling a strong need for local news and information, particularly in regional and remote communities. It is well documented that audiences feel they cannot receive localised or community-specific information from other media sources. Local media provides content that caters to the needs and interests of their local communities and contributes to the connectedness and wellbeing of those communities.

Community broadcasting is a critical pillar in our media industry. The community radio sector is an important conduit for media skills, training and employment opportunities across a range of topic areas relevant to broadcasting. Volunteers and employees gain skills in broadcasting, management, marketing, media, networking, community building, governance and more. First Nations stations have a particularly strong focus on training and development, launching the careers of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander journalists.

Community broadcasting is a critical part of our cultural ecosystem. Community broadcasting is a launchpad for Australian creatives, arts workers, composers, songwriters, performers, and producers to expand their reach and launch their careers. Community radio plays a vital role in supporting and nurturing arts, music and creative industries, and provides an avenue for local musicians and artists to be broadcast on airwaves across the country and streamed online across the world. Community radio actively champions Australian music and contributes to the health and vitality of local music scenes. It is a launchpad for the careers of many Australian musicians (e.g. Dan Sultan, Gotye, The Vines, Courtney Barnett).

Community broadcasters play an important role during a crisis. Through the COVID-19 pandemic community broadcasters have worked to provide community specific COVID-19 updates; in-language health messages; and connect people most isolated through lockdowns. During the 2019/20 bushfire season over 80 community radio stations broadcast to fire-affected regions and undertook diverse activities to support local communities – providing locally-specific emergency broadcasts; acting as a catalyst for community dialogue; supporting and coordinating fundraising initiatives; and connecting people in regional Australia to critical services.

Radio lifeline for fire affected community

“There are currently two bushfires that are not yet under control. Ash and embers are falling ahead of the main fire which may cause spot fires. There is a potential that this fire will be at the western boundary of Mallacoota by daylight today. It’s too late to leave. The safest option is to shelter indoors. The Genoa-Mallacoota Road is closed. You are in danger and need to act immediately to survive. It is too late to leave.”

This is the emergency warning that 64-year-old Francesca Winterson gave on local community radio station 3MGB as the coastal town of Mallacoota was hemmed in by a bushfire big enough to generate its own lightning. The fire hit the outskirts of town and the station lost power taking the station off-air. Unable to continue broadcasting, Francesca was left sitting in the dark studio listening to the deafening roar of the fires ripping through town and expecting the day to be her last.

Commonwealth Government funding provided through a Community Broadcasting Foundation grant has paid for a new back-up generator so 3MGB can continue broadcasting through future emergencies.

The station's revenue from fundraising and sponsorship was seriously affected as the community dealt with the impact of the fires. A grant provided through the Community Broadcasting Foundation helped relieve the financial burden on the station so it could focus on retaining presenters and other volunteers and supporting the community in the aftermath of the fires.

Over 5 million Australians listen to community radio each week

Last year's [Community Radio Listener Survey](#)¹ of more than 16,000 Australians shows that over 5 million listeners aged 15+ across Australia tune in to community radio stations each week (24% of the Australian population). Of these listeners, 690,000 listen exclusively to community radio (that is, they listen to community radio but not commercial radio or ABC/SBS radio).

The top reason listeners give for tuning in to community radio is to hear local information and news (51%). 35% tune in to hear music not available on other stations and 33% to hear local voices. 25% of Australians living outside of metropolitan areas – 1.63 million people – tune in to community radio each week. Regional and remote stations reflect the interests of their local communities – including music, sports, environment and arts – and connect people separated by hundreds of kilometres. In some regions, these stations are the only source of local news.

Community radio draws its audience from a wide cross section of the community and at least 20% of most demographic groups – across gender, age, location, employment and income – tune in to community radio during a typical week. Community radio listeners are more likely to identify as LGBTIQIA+, have a disability or reading difficulty, or hold a religious faith. One third (30%) of people who regularly speak a language other than English in their household listen to community radio during a typical week. Four out of ten of people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (38%) listen to community radio during a typical week.

\$20.37m critical baseline

In the 2021 Federal Budget, the Australian Government announced the renewal of \$8m over two years through the Community Broadcasting Program – which maintains our sector's funding at \$20.15m and \$20.37m for 2021-22 and 2022-23, respectively, before it drops back to \$16m in 2023-24.

\$20.37m is the critical baseline our sector needs to ensure community radio stations remain viable. Our sector's capacity to fundraise is limited by strict sponsorship guidelines. Commonwealth funding is a critical base which enables stations to leverage and grow other revenue streams.

Commonwealth funding also provides support for essential sector-wide projects:

- **Community DAB+ digital radio** - coordinates and supports over 55 digital radio services nationally, managing platform infrastructure and service delivery to broadcast free-to-air radio services and minimise increasing costs of analogue (AM and FM) transmission
- **The Enhanced National News Project** - produces and broadcasts 84 bulletins each week to almost 100, mainly regional, stations
- **The Multiplatform Distribution Project** - includes the development and maintenance of the Community Radio Plus App (to be launched soon); affordable streaming and website

“The Community Broadcasting Foundation grant meant we could get out to the awesome little towns and locations in our region, allowing us to tell their unique – often weird and wonderful – stories and alerting people to the cool stuff we have in our own backyard.” *Alaina Earl, 4RFM*

CASE STUDY

Able Radio at Main FM

“Able Radio is a disability radio program that explores topics related to disability, advocacy, music, film, living in regional Victoria, sport, art, and about anything else we feel like.”

Last year the Commonwealth Government supported Main FM's Able Radio through a Community Broadcasting Foundation grant. Able Radio volunteers share their own experiences, interests and stories about day-to-day life living with a disability in the regional Victorian town of Castlemaine. Recent programs include stories by parents with a disability, shared experiences navigating the challenges of rolling lockdowns and a petition to Disney to create a princess with disabilities.

¹ Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2021), Community Radio Listener Survey [online] Available at: <https://www.cbaa.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census/national-listener-survey-fact-sheets>

solutions for community stations; and affordable access to smart speakers and integration with online platforms such as for podcasting.

- **The Enhanced National Training Package** - develops the management and small-business skills of the sector by supporting the capacity, skills and competencies of the community radio sector's workforce and volunteer base.

Budget Request: Additional \$5m

The community broadcasting sector requests that our annual allocation be increased to \$25.37m to enhance our sector's impact. We consult regularly with our sector and know that additional support is still needed: many stations have limited resources, and due to COVID-19, volunteers need to be re-engaged, and fundraising/sponsorship personnel invested in to reinvigorate income streams. We also know that many stations need to replace ageing infrastructure, or upgrade equipment to undertake emergency broadcasting. An additional \$5m annually, ongoing and indexed, distributed via competitive grants through the Community Broadcasting Foundation's Development and Operations grants would enhance our sector's impact by providing stations with stability and dependability in their core operations and technology infrastructure, allowing them to innovate and adapt to serve and support their communities.

Increasing need for community radio

The community broadcasting sector has grown rapidly over the past ten years. Station size and operational models have grown as well as the size of the sector itself. Since 2011-12, the community broadcasting sector has grown from 285 permanently licensed broadcasters to 358 as of 3 February 2022 - a 26% increase.

Community radio has been a lifeline for communities through the isolation of lockdowns, connecting people to their communities and community-specific information and services. For communities impacted by hurricanes, droughts, floods, fires and other natural disasters stations have helped to coordinate relief efforts, link people to services and keep the community connected. With the recent closure of many local news outlets, community radio is often the only remaining provider of hyperlocal news and information critical to the wellbeing of regional and remote communities.

Listenership has grown by over a million weekly listeners, from 3.7 million in 2004 to over 5 million in 2021. The increased demand and desire for community radio services has not been matched in an increase in Government funding. The sector's core funding is being stretched to meet the needs of more stations.

Innovative local news solutions

Hyperlocal media is an important element of the media landscape in Australia and is critical to the wellbeing and connectedness of communities, particularly in regional and remote areas.

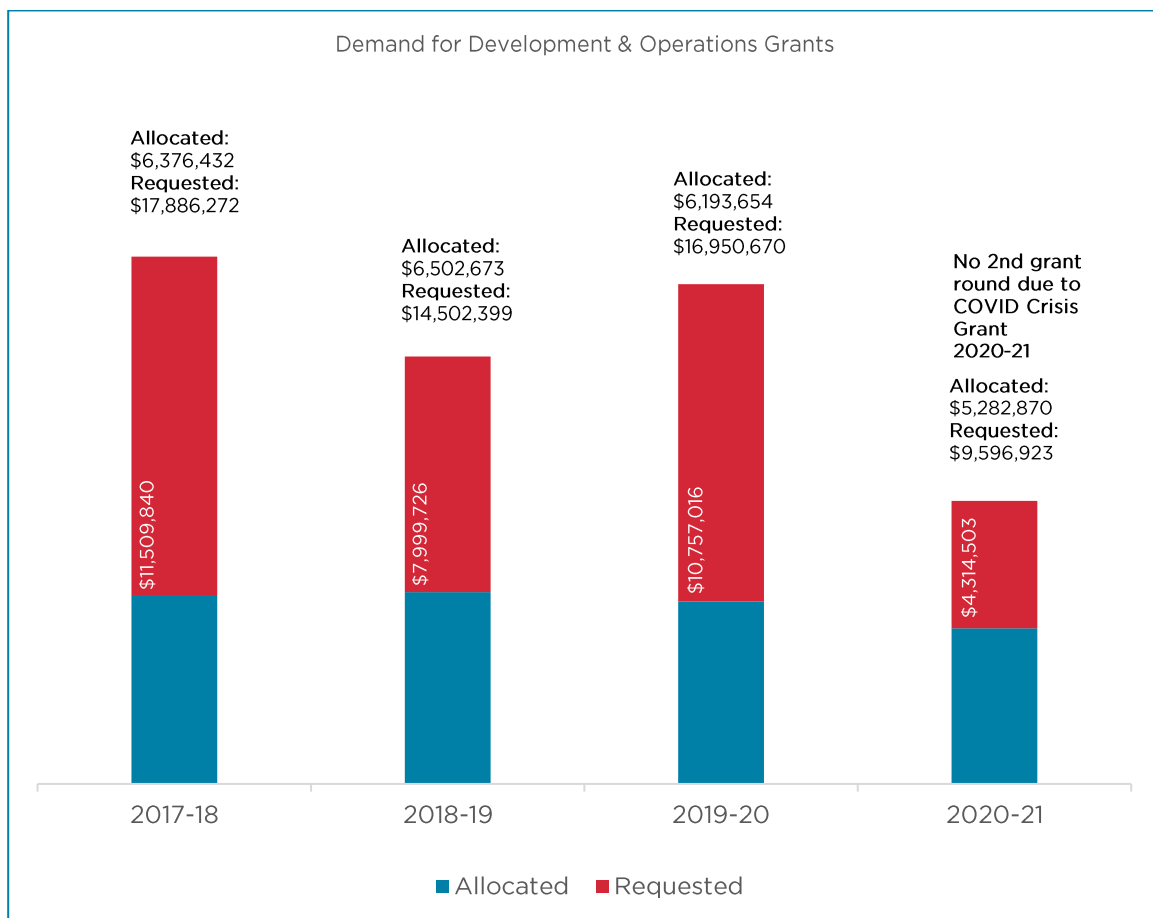
When Thursday Island and Outer Island communities lost their local paper due to declining revenue, the Torres Strait Islanders Media Association's community radio station 4MW found a way to save the paper by relaunching it themselves.

Now Torres News journalists work in conjunction with 4MW journalists, sharing resources and collaborating to cover community grassroots storytelling, information, profiling, and good news stories from Thursday Island and the 14 other communities in the Outer Islands. Published weekly, the newspaper is available online and in print in both English and Torres Strait Creole.

This innovative solution to a problem that is happening all over Australia is possible because of the operational support provided by the Commonwealth Government through Community Broadcasting Foundation grants. Last year, the Torres Strait Islanders Media Association's 4MW received a grant to fund specialist programming for their community and COVID crisis grant to help the station weather the impacts of the pandemic.

\$8-\$11m shortfall in development and operational funds for sector sustainability

The Community Broadcasting Foundation's general purpose funding has not received an increase in Government funding since 2011. Just over \$6m is awarded in Development and Operations grants in an ordinary year with \$1.7m of the \$6m earmarked for radio transmission support, and around \$3.4m specifically and importantly earmarked for specialist services including First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse and RPH text-to-radio services for people with a print disability. The remainder, about \$1m is the most oversubscribed funding segment and is the only available funding to hundreds of applicants. This funding shortfall restricts the ability of the sector to sustain essential services, with impacts felt most significantly across regional Australia – regional and remote community radio stations make up about 70% of potential applicants.



Every year the difference between the amount of Development & Operations funding allocated and the amount requested is \$8-11m a year. (The 2020/21 figures are an anomaly because the grant structure was changed to meet the needs of stations across the sector struggling with the impacts of COVID-19 – meaning, there was only one grant round not the traditional two. The 2020/21 figures also reflect several multi-year grant applications requested and approved in 2019/20.)

Community broadcasters are low cost/high output

The community radio sector is powered by the efforts and dedication of approximately 688 full-time equivalent jobs and 22,200 volunteers.² Stations are closely linked to their local areas and communities, drawing their announcing, producing and support volunteers and staff directly from the towns and locales where they broadcast.

Well-resourced stations have a strong base from which to explore new ways to serve their communities – and Australian Government funding is critical to this. Government funding enables stations to develop relationships with sponsors; upgrade ageing infrastructure; build readiness and resilience for emergencies; and create employment and training opportunities.

The investment of communities into their local radio station means that a community radio station is able to be of exponential value to its community. The commitment, passion and ingenuity of volunteers and staff drawn from the community the station serves, sees innumerable examples of innovative and inspiring projects emerge to meet community needs. From programs sharing unheard stories, showcasing local arts and culture, or encouraging communities to get vaccinated; to projects that go beyond the studio to save local news outlets, coordinate emergency relief efforts, or deliver baskets of essentials to members of the community isolated through lockdowns. Community radio stations are not only media outlets, they are a point of connection around which communities can rally to support and care for their communities.

First Nations Media Funding

Just over 30% of community broadcasters are First Nations stations. Community broadcasting plays a vital role in strengthening First Nations communities. Commonwealth support is essential to allowing First Nations media organisations to maintain broadcast infrastructure, develop partnerships to generate their own income streams, provide training and career development opportunities, support their communities through crises like extreme weather events and the COVID-19 pandemic, build organisational resilience and develop local content to connect and serve their communities. The CBAA works closely with First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) and supports their budget request for Commonwealth funding delivered through the National Indigenous Australians Agency to support the sector's capacity to provide essential information services, increase jobs and skills, and improve community-controlled sector sustainability.

Conclusion

The community broadcasting sector thanks the Commonwealth Government for maintaining our funding at \$20.37m. This funding is the critical baseline to support community radio stations and sector-wide projects. It ensures our sector can continue its vibrant output and meet evolving community need.

An additional \$5m annually, ongoing and indexed, distributed via competitive grants through the Community Broadcasting Foundation's Development and Operations pool would enhance our sector's impact. It would ensure stations can invest in their core operations and infrastructure,

CASE STUDY

223 episodes of *Let's Talk* for 4AAA

The Commonwealth Government through Community Broadcasting Foundation grants has supported the production of 223 episodes of *Let's Talk*, a daily current affairs radio program and podcast hosted on the Brisbane Indigenous Media Association's 4AAA/98.9FM by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presenters.

Last year 4AAA received a grant for *Let's Talk*. The station also received a COVID crisis grant and a grant for equipment upgrades and transmission support, leadership workshops and improving their financial sustainability.

² Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2019), State of the Sector Report [online] Available at: https://www.cbaa.org.au/sites/default/files/media/CBAA%20State%20of%20the%20Community%20Radio%20Sector%20Report%202019_4.pdf

securing a base from which they can innovate – delivering local information and, and connecting their communities through emergencies like the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Should you wish to discuss our submission further, please do not hesitate to contact Holly Friedlander Liddicoat, CBAA's Head of Advocacy and Communications at holly.friedlander@cbaa.org.au or via 02 9310 2999.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jon Bisset', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jon Bisset
Chief Executive Officer