

Community Broadcasting Sector Sustainability Review

Submission to the Department of Infrastructure,
Transport, Regional Development, Communications and
the Arts

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(since 2010) and 3SER (since 2022)

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Background

Mr. Raymond Chow migrated to Melbourne in 1990 and has been a pivotal figure in ethnic media in Australia. He founded Sameway, a nationally distributed Chinese community magazine, in 2004. In 2010, Mr. Chow expanded his efforts into Chinese community broadcasting, starting at 3WBC and now broadcasting seven hours a week in Melbourne on both 3WBC and 3SER, in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English. As a director of the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council (NEMBC), the peak body representing ethnic broadcasting in Australia, Mr. Chow brings a wealth of experience to this submission, which draws on his personal involvement in ethnic broadcasting—a vital component of community broadcasting.

How Community Broadcasting Serves Migrants

The sustainability review of community broadcasting has often overlooked the fact that over 30% of Australians are first-generation CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) migrants who speak a language other than English or grew up in a culture distinct from "mainstream" Australia. Additionally, over 20% of Australians have at least one parent born overseas, and while they may speak English and integrate into mainstream society, they still share cultural ties with their parents' countries of origin.

When discussing community broadcasting in the context of CALD Australia, it is imperative to assess how effectively this sector meets the needs of these diverse communities. Currently, in each major capital city, the government has issued one ethnic radio license for stations broadcasting in various languages. However, many of these stations, founded in the 1990s, may not adequately address the current needs of Australia's diverse CALD communities, particularly the Chinese community.

Migration is a complex journey, varying significantly among different groups, but certain common needs can be addressed through community radio. Ethnic broadcasting remains one of the primary channels for first-generation migrants to access information, often surpassing mainstream media in significance. For communities with a long history in Australia, such as the Greek or Italian communities, ethnic radio mainly serves elderly migrants who continue to rely on their mother tongue for information. For Chinese seniors and new migrants, local

Chinese media—including community radio, commercial stations, rebroadcasts from China, and online platforms—play a crucial role in their daily lives. Despite the high demand for Chinese broadcasting across Australia, many of these services struggle with sustainability for various reasons.

Chinese Community Broadcasting in Australia

Taking the Chinese community as an example, Sydney still hosts two 24-hour narrowcast radio stations that primarily broadcast in Cantonese, with some Mandarin programming. However, Cantonese programming is practically absent from most Sydney community radio stations. The scenario for Mandarin is different. The Ostar Radio Network once operated Mandarin stations in several cities, including Sydney, offering content largely produced in China, with minimal local input. Since 2017, with the rise of social media, China has withdrawn most of its broadcasting resources from Sydney, leaving only the 2000 radio station with three hours of China Radio International programming from Monday to Friday.

The long-standing broadcast of Chinese-produced programs in Sydney raises questions about whether Australia's community radio policies are being leveraged to influence Chinese Australians with content shaped by China's state media. While this form of broadcasting might be sustainable due to overseas funding, its impact on Australia warrants careful examination by the Australian government.

In Melbourne, Rejoice Chinese Christian Communication Centre Inc. is dedicated to helping Chinese migrants understand, integrate into, and contribute to Australian society through various media. We strongly believe that the Australian government should proactively support major ethnic communities in building robust community broadcasting in their languages to foster social cohesion and harmony. This does not imply government interference in journalistic independence but rather providing essential support to communities that cannot sustain such initiatives through advertising or commercial services. Chinese language broadcasting is particularly critical, as China continues to invest heavily in global media to extend its influence.

Ethnic Broadcasting in Regional Australia

Current migration policies encourage new migrants to settle in regional Australia. As ethnic communities emerge in regional towns, we are seeing an increase in regional broadcasting stations producing ethnic programs. In these small but closely-knit communities, ethnic broadcasting serves as a vital link for isolated and under-resourced groups to access community and government information. The sustainability of these migrants' settlement in regional areas is closely tied to the presence of ethnic broadcasting. Therefore, the government should consider allocating additional funding to develop, foster, and support regional ethnic broadcasters.

Ethnic broadcasters play a unique role in community development. Unlike other community broadcasters, ethnic broadcasters are often migrants themselves, motivated by a desire to support others in navigating the challenges of migration. This culture of mutual support is consistently echoed at NEMBC conferences and distinguishes ethnic broadcasters from others who may share interests or concerns but lack the personal experience of migration. Consequently, the Australian government should recognize ethnic broadcasting not just as journalism or community interest but as a critical support system for migrants. This recognition should be reflected in funding priorities.

Regional ethnic broadcasters are also connected to their metropolitan counterparts. NEMBC is well-positioned to facilitate collaboration and resource-sharing between these broadcasters. Ethnic broadcasters in major cities can produce high-quality, comprehensive content that can be shared with regional stations. The Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF), as the government's funding arm for community broadcasting, should develop and promote grants in this area to fulfill its mission. Organizations like REJOICE, with a special focus on migrant integration and support, can serve as a starting point for innovation and consultation.

Research into a Framework for Ethnic Broadcasting

As mentioned earlier, ethnic broadcasting serves different purposes across various communities. The Australian government should establish funding to encourage discussion and research into a framework for ethnic broadcasting, ensuring that the diverse needs of ethnic groups are met.

It is unreasonable for a large community like the Chinese, with over 1.3 million people, to receive such minimal support, resulting in virtually no local ethnic broadcasting, as is currently the case. Smaller ethnic communities should also receive tailored support. Research in this area should address a range of issues, particularly in light of the "whole-of-government approach" to defense from the recent "Strategic Review of National Defense." This includes exploring how ethnic broadcasting can help migrants become more knowledgeable, engaged, and supportive of democracy, freedom, human rights, and Aboriginal reconciliation.

Summary

In summary, ethnic broadcasting is not just a medium for sharing news and information; it is a lifeline for many migrants navigating the complexities of settlement in Australia. To sustain and enhance this vital service, the Australian government must consider targeted support for ethnic broadcasting, especially in regional areas and for major ethnic communities like the Chinese. This support should encompass not only financial assistance but also research and development of a comprehensive framework that recognizes the unique role ethnic broadcasting plays in promoting social cohesion, integration, and support for Australian values. By doing so, we can ensure that community broadcasting remains a sustainable and integral part of Australia's multicultural landscape.