

Contact Name: Chris Tait

Organisation Name: Wangki Radio

I have been passionately involved in community radio since I was 15 years old. My commitment to the medium is profound, particularly when it comes to community radio. The ability for anyone to have a voice and contribute to the dialogue is something I deeply value.

With over 20 years of experience in radio, I have spent the last decade working in Indigenous media. My work has taken me across Australia, from the East coast (Sydney, Melbourne) to the central desert, Derby, and now Fitzroy Crossing. Indigenous media, and radio specifically, play a crucial role in employing, empowering, and preserving cultural heritage. Despite its importance, this sector remains severely underfunded, which is perplexing given its potential for tangible community employment and the support it receives from the NIAA.

For instance, in Derby, a radio station that employed 11 people—50% of whom were Indigenous—was forced to turn away qualified Indigenous candidates due to a lack of funding. Despite our desire to expand, financial constraints limited our ability to do so. Creative individuals who might have contributed to the field were often redirected into less meaningful jobs or unnecessary courses just to retain their pensions. We operated in a building that should have been condemned, riddled with asbestos and infested with rats, with outdated equipment. In contrast, the ABC receives multimillion-dollar upgrades annually, while Indigenous media organizations struggle to upgrade their equipment and facilities. I personally secured \$200,000 from six different grants to upgrade our studio, but this was still insufficient. We had to dip into our rainy day funds to meet our needs, not only to stay relevant but also to foster a sense of pride in a functioning workplace. Additionally, setting up a studio in remote areas incurs costs nearly double those in urban settings due to the need to fly in personnel and equipment.

The lack of funding also extended to basic necessities such as a work vehicle. We had to use our personal cars for live broadcasts without reimbursement for mileage. Despite these challenges, we remained dedicated. In stark contrast, the organisation in Derby that managed the CDP program, Winnun Ngari, had its funding withdrawn but had invested in extensive infrastructure, including a \$100,000 conference room and \$250,000 worth of musical equipment for a failed pilot project. The disparity in funding and resources is glaring.

Currently, I am based in Fitzroy Crossing, where I am sleeping on a couch due to a bed bug infestation in my assigned accommodation. Meanwhile, teachers and police have newly built, purpose-built housing. My intention is not to undermine the need for quality housing for these professionals, but to highlight that media—especially community media—is undervalued.

The lack of funding for organisations, inadequate support for out-of-town staff, and the absence of infrastructure upgrades result in studios that either remain dormant or fall into

disrepair: This creates a disincentive for young people to engage with and learn in spaces that have not evolved over time.

It is evident that local grassroots Indigenous media is vital, yet securing adequate funding remains a challenge. It is disheartening to observe that other projects, despite delivering little to no outcomes, receive excessive funding, while successful organisations like 6DBY struggle to obtain necessary upgrades. This situation reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the role and value of media by funding bodies, treating it as a luxury rather than an essential component of health, education, and community safety. This short-sighted view fails to recognize the integral role media plays in these areas.

A crucial aspect that must be considered when evaluating funding for local Indigenous media is its role in disseminating information in local Indigenous languages and Kriol in remote communities. This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when communities like Wingellina in WA, which do not receive the ABC or any other radio or TV, relied solely on NG Media for local updates. Similarly, during the recent floods in Fitzroy Crossing, Wangki Radio was the only source of information and assistance for the Fitzroy Valley. The trust and reliance that local communities place on these media outlets underscore their vital role in emergency communication and community engagement. This essential function should be a key consideration in funding decisions for organisations such as 6DBY, Wangki Radio, and NG Media, reflecting their importance in ensuring accessible and relevant information for remote Indigenous communities.