



**Submission to the House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Communications, Information
Technology and the Arts.**

INQUIRY INTO COMMUNITY BROADCASTING

Submission from TUNE!FM

TUNE!FM
University of New England
Armidale NSW 2350

Phone: (02) 6773 2399

Fax: (02) 6772 9195

Submission prepared by:
Andrew Devenish-Meares
Administrative Assistant
TUNE!FM

Contact:
Edward Campbell, Station Manager
ecampbell@tunefm.une.edu.au

or

Andrew Devenish-Meares, Administrative Assistant
adevenis@tunefm.une.edu.au

24th March 2006

Introduction

TUNE!FM is a Student and Youth community broadcasting service, based on the campus of the University of New England, in Armidale, NSW.

Armidale is a city of around 24 500 people, and is also considered an education centre, with two public high schools, one catholic high school and three other private schools, along with the University of New England, the New England Conservatorium of Music, The New England Institute of TAFE and the Armidale Film and Television School . In terms of population, 23.5% are aged 15-24 years.¹

The station has the honour of being one of the oldest, and indeed the longest continually operating, non-commercial, non-national broadcasting services in Australia, having been launched on 27th April 1970.

The station actively engages with its community, through a large number of active volunteers, events and promotions. Each year, the station enjoys the efforts of around 150 volunteers.

The station operates a “traditional” FM service, but TUNE!FM also runs a web site, and utilises a number of online technology to enhance its delivery of programs and information to its audience.

Scope And Role of Community Broadcasting

Despite traditionally acting as a Community Broadcaster, and being accepted as a member of the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, TUNE!FM broadcasts on a Narrowcast licence held by the University of New England.²

TUNE!FM is recognised as one of over 400 community media outlets around the country. The station commenced broadcasting on April 27th 1970, and is of historical importance as Australia’s longest running, continually operating community broadcasting station. Other points of historical importance are the spawning of Armidale’s community radio station 2ARM, and the pursuit of that licence which caused a number of early Community Broadcasting licences to be issued in 1976.

Up until 1 July 2006, the station has been supported by the General Services Fee, with supplementary funding provided through grants and sponsorship income. With the passage of the *Higher Education Support (Abolition of Compulsory Up-Front Student Union Fees) Act 2005*, the primary source of income for the station is now in doubt, with extensive planning presently underway to ensure that the station can secure sufficient income to continue its operations.

TUNE!FM relies heavily upon the works of its volunteers. Each year, around 150 volunteers contribute to the ongoing success of the station, and current fiscal estimates value the work they do at \$350 000 per year. Comparing this volunteer labour contribution to the annual operating costs of between \$75 000 - \$90 000 per year, the gain for the organisation though this work is significant.

¹ ABS 2001 Census data at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@cpp.nsf/Lookup/130150111Snapshot12001?OpenDocument&TabName=Summary&ProdNo=130150111&Issue=2001&Num=&View=&#Table3>

² See Appendix 1

Beyond the fiscal arguments, those involved in TUNE!FM have indicated increased confidence, a strong social network and an increased awareness of issues facing students and young people.³

In addition to its traditional “terrestrial” broadcast, TUNE!FM also streams its service online, which allows a large number of UNE’s 13 000 external students to also benefit from the service.

TUNE!FM is also an active participant in the Community Radio Network. The station supplies three items to the Network: a two-hour weekly program, *Air Time*, which promotes Australian Independent music; a five minute weekly segments, *The AIR Charts Countdown*, the top 10 independent Singles and EP’s each week; and a 3 minute trucking news bulletin, *Behind The Wheel*, 3 times a week..

TUNE!FM, in turn, is able to supplement its local line up with material sourced from the satellite for late night periods. This allows the station to provide local listeners with an additional suite of programs which they would otherwise not have the opportunity to hear.

TUNE!FM seeks to engage and involve the students and youth of Armidale in all aspects of its day-to-day operations, through the presentation of programs, working behind the scenes and events, competitions and requests. All feedback is taken seriously, but the station is fortunate as it all seems to be positive.

While the details of the National Listener Survey are covered by the submission from the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, it is worth pointing the committee to some of our own audience figures from a survey undertaken in 2004.⁴

The survey results show that within Armidale, 87% of those aged 13-30 listen to the station in a given month.

Content and programming requirements

TUNE!FM’s community of interest are the students and youth of Armidale, generally those aged 18-25, but also appealing to some within the 13-30 age group, as well as some outside these age groups. It is worth noting that Armidale has the highest level of youth population, by percentage, of any regional centre in New South Wales.

The nature of the volunteers who produce the programs that are broadcast on the station means the station is not ever likely to present itself as a commercial style service. The station aims to provide access to the airwaves for those needs and interests that are not otherwise adequately catered for in other media.

While there is evidence of some sharing of audience between the Armidale commercial radio services, and local and national ABC services, the other service that most of those tuning in to TUNE!FM also listen to is Triple J.

However, TUNE!FM does not aim to be any kind of Triple J clone (nor would one say that Triple J imitates TUNE!, as TUNE!FM is the older station). TUNE!FM provides a service that is complementary to that provided by the national service. Triple J is a nationally

³ See Appendix 2 (Confidential)

⁴ See Appendix 3 (Confidential)

available service which cannot hope to provide a local service like TUNE!FM, and one would argue that, being a national service, it shouldn't.

There are elements of commonality between both stations. However only TUNE!FM has the opportunity to speak to the youth of the region as the youth of the region. TUNE!FM is produced by people who understand the listeners needs and wants as residents in a regional area; as University, TAFE and High School students; and as part of the local community.

TUNE!FM's program grid is divided into several parts. A general music and information format is used between breakfast and drive (8am – 6pm weekdays), while specialist programs are broadcast outside of these hours.

Specialist programs focus on Rock, Metal, Hip Hop, and Dance music genres, as well as current affairs around the University and City, plus global topical items of interest.

In terms of the diversity of programming provided by TUNE!FM, there is actually very little duplication, even in the 'general music' format. While current tracks are promoted across all daytime shifts, the specifics are left up to the individual. For specialist programming, volunteers tend to choose their own areas of interest, or join with an existing program, rather than create a second program covering the same area of interest.

In terms of the topics used in talk breaks, again the volunteers are free to choose their content. Some materials are provided for them, including items such as Community Service Announcements, and the station provides both internet access and a library of timely information that can be used at a volunteers discretion.

With respect to the promotion of Australian culture, TUNE!FM requires that all broadcasters play at least 33% Australian music, and in practice the majority of on-air volunteers exceed this expectation. TUNE!FM also tends to focus upon new and emerging Australian talent.

Interview opportunities are also shared among announcers, though are more often used in specialist programs.

Technological Opportunities

It is widely recognised that, through the processes of digital convergence, the lines of distinction between what radio, and other media, can and cannot do are becoming increasingly blurred.

Two key areas are the use of online distribution systems, and further down the track, digital radio.

TUNE!FM maintains a web site at www.tunefm.une.edu.au, and through that provides a wide variety of items of interest to our community.

Text-based items, such as music news, gig guides and programming information is provided in a fairly tradition sense.

The web site also provides internet users with audio content through three different methods. The station provides: a live stream of its broadcast in both high and lower

quality format; on-demand streaming of various items, primarily interviews; and podcasts of interviews and other program elements.

Some supplementary materials, including website links, and other relevant information is provided online from time to time.

As a station dedicated to students and youth, TUNE!FM is keen to use new and emerging alternative distribution methods to complement our on-air service, and provide a useful and relevant information service to our community.

Digital radio is likely to provide a number of interesting and innovative opportunities for the Community Broadcasting sector.

While TUNE!FM is unlikely to be involved in the early stages of digital roll out, being in a regional area, and licensed as a Narrowcaster, the station is in a unique position to be potentially able to offer a variety of different, complementary services on a digital platform.

The issues relating to the costs of TUNE!FM Digital Conversion, like the rest of the Community Broadcasting sector, are yet to be fully addressed. However, TUNE!FM is looking towards the roll out as a unique opportunity.

Opportunities and Threats to Achieving diverse and robust community broadcasting

Opportunities

Training

TUNE!FM, being based at an education institution, in a city with a large number of education facilities, is in an ideal situation to provide training services, through a number of different partnerships which will allow the station to utilise a variety of resources that are available in Armidale.

A fair amount of the present planning work being done at the station, in conjunction with others, is aimed towards providing a reasonable income stream through training opportunities.

Digital Media and Distribution

As stated above, there are significant opportunities in digital technology, including further distribution options for materials already being produced by the station. The concept of “produce once, distribute many” is designed to allow this station, and others, the ability to broaden the appeal of the content that is already being produced.

The idea of being able to share content with other Community Broadcasters is also important, especially in non-metropolitan areas, where it can be more difficult, simply because of the population base, to staff a station overnight. The advances made by the Digital Delivery Network (DDN), as outlined in the submission by the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, have proved to be very worthwhile. The exploration of other opportunities, that could expand the DDN, or other delivery options, is a goal worth pursuing, both in terms of a co-operative approach to Digital Radio broadcasting, and strengthening regional community radio.

Threats

The primary threats to TUNE!FM's ongoing viability in 2006 are financial. We have been fortunate this year, as in many years previously, to have a strong number of volunteers who are keen to keep the station operational.

Staffing

In terms of expenses, the largest item within TUNE!FM's budget are staff costs. The station presently has 50 hours of paid work each week, divided between two members of staff.

In many stations, who operate within an older community of interest, the functions carried out by TUNE!FM staff are covered by volunteer labour. However, it is important in a University environment, where many students are living away from home and testing as many boundaries as possible, that professional staff are employed to guide these young people, in particular so they don't get themselves into legal trouble.

Additionally it is important that these students are able to acquire additional skills through their volunteer work. These skills can be most properly taught through a paid staff member who is required to be present.

RECOMMENDATION: That the committee investigates some form of employment subsidy for community radio to employ staff, additionally that this is non-exclusively focused on stations in non-metropolitan Australia.

The removal of the compulsory student fees income has placed the station at a considerable disadvantage without an adequate amount of time to adapt to the new environment. Extensive work is being done to attract more voluntary income through increased promotion of subscriptions. While there appears to be a group within the community that are prepared to pay on a voluntary basis, it is hard to know exactly how much income might be generated through these means until we actually attempt to raise the funds.

Grants

During 2004, the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts directed the Community Broadcasting Foundation that TUNE!FM, as a Narrowcast licensee, was no longer to receive grants funding through the foundation.

As indicated in Appendix 1, the stations licence is something of an anomaly. While the station has always acted as a Community Broadcaster, for many reasons it has never actually held a Community licence. It is worth noting that after passing the *Broadcasting Services Act* the then Department of Transport and Communications was actually quite keen to see stations operating under the Class Licence system rather than Community Broadcasting licences:

"This expected trend towards using alternative delivery mechanisms is likely to be accompanied by a movement away from the community licensing regime. The one major advantage of being a community broadcaster is the access it gives to free spectrum within the broadcasting services bands. If technological developments drive the price of access to alternative delivery means down, the advantage of being a community broadcaster diminishes.

An open narrowcaster has far more freedom in its financing, programming and staffing than a community broadcaster, and if the price of delivery access becomes negligible, a rapid movement from community broadcasting to the more open class licence regime can be expected."⁵

While there appears to have been a rapid turn around in policy on the part of the broadcasting regulator and the department, TUNE!FM has been left a victim of this now erroneous administrative decision.

TUNE!FM adheres to the community broadcasting codes of practice, only broadcasts sponsorship, not advertisements, and practices open membership and encourages active participations by members of its community of interest.

We would seek the committee's assistance in re-opening the CBF Grant opportunities for TUNE!FM for some targeted supplementary income for the station.

⁵ The document in question is called *Broadcasting Reform – A New Approach to Regulation*, and is cited in an article in the CBAA's magazine *CBX* for September – October 1994.

Appendix 1 – History of TUNE!FM

In the 1960's a group of students from the University presented a weekly program on the Armidale Commercial radio station 2AD. The program faced a number of issues, which came to a head when 2AD refused permission to broadcast a story on anti-Vietnam war protests that occurred in the city. After this refusal, the students withdrew the program from the station.

Professor Neville Fletcher, a lecturer in the Physics department at the University presented the idea of a campus radio station to the students, and following discussions within the University, letters were written to the Postmaster-General requesting a licence.

The station was established through 1968-69, and utilised a "closed loop" system. The system allowed the broadcasts to be heard only inside the residential colleges at the University, where the vast majority of students lived in this period.

The licence holder was to be the University, but the station was established under the auspice of the Students' Representative Council.

After a number of hurdles, a licence was granted to use this innovative system, and the station went to air as Radio UNE on 27th April 1970.

In 1975 a letter was sent to the station, by the then Minister for the Media, Dr. Moss Cass, regarding the expansion of the Community Broadcasting trial. The station was to be offered an Experimental FM licence under the *Wireless Telegraphy Act*. The letter concluded that all members of the community should be allowed to join in the broadcasting activities of the station.

Radio UNE was then formed into a co-operative, the Radio UNE Co-Operative Ltd, which would hold the licence. After some initial tests as 2UNE-FM, the station eventually went to air in 1976 as 2ARM-FM, reflecting a wider community involvement. The service that was provided by 2ARM was different to that provided under the closed loop licence, but the Co-Operative ran both services.

It is worth bringing to the committee's attention that following the dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975, the future of the FM service was in serious doubt; however RUNE pursued the licence for some time before it was allocated. It has been commented that without the persistence of the Co-Operative, a number of these initial licences may not have ever been issued.

In 1979, after much disagreement, Radio UNE returned to the operations of the SRC, while the Co-Operative moved, with the Community Licence, into the City of Armidale.

Between 1970 and 1980 the population of students shifted from living within the residential college system to living in the city of Armidale, with around 40% of students living outside the residential system, a situation that continues to this day.

From 1979 to 1980, a number of letters were sent to the relevant government authorities requesting a change of licence from the closed loop to low-power AM and FM licence that might allow the station to be heard by the students who were not living in the college system.

Eventually, some time around 1986, an FM licence was granted under s.24 of the old *Radiocommunications Act*, licensing the station as “General Station Class A”. It is our understanding that only one other licence of this type was ever issued.

The station was licensed to broadcast initially at 5 Watts, but this was reduced to 1 Watt after complaints from 2ARM.

With the merger of UNE with the Armidale College of Advanced Education (and other CAE's), an in-town residential college was added to the University, S.H. Smith House. A licence to broadcast at 0.03 Watts at Smith House was granted, however not used, given the small number of students residing there and the high cost of program lines.

In early 1992, the station made another application for a Community Broadcasting Licence. This application was rejected, but ultimately resulted in the then Spectrum Management Agency increasing the output of the Smith House licence to 10 Watts, allowing coverage of the City of Armidale.

With the passage of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, the station's Class A licence was transformed into a Narrowcasting licence. While this might have been in line with the Administrative policy of the then Department of Transport and Communications, recent clarifications from the ABA/ACMA make this position less clear.