

Broadcasting Inquiry
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**BROADCASTING INQUIRY SUBMISSION: TAFE COMMUNICATIONS
NETWORK**

Please find enclosed a written submission to the above inquiry.

It is not intended that this submission be tabled at any of the public hearings. Notwithstanding this, request has been made for the Director of TAFE Communications Network to attend the Public Hearing in Perth.

Tom Locke
DIRECTOR

12 May, 1999

SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE OF THE BROADCASTING ISSUES PAPER

MARCH 1999

SUBMITTED BY: The TAFE Communications Network
(A unit of the Western Australian Department Of Training)

QUALIFICATION: This submission represents the views of the TAFE Communications Network staff only and should not necessarily be taken as representing the position of the WA Department of Training or TAFE Colleges in Western Australia.

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Ref P10, “What major developments do you anticipate in the broadcasting industry in the short to medium term?”

In Western Australian, the WA Department of Training has made a strategic decision to secure 400 hours per annum for the delivery of Vocational Education and Training programs via the Perth based Community broadcaster, Channel 31.

This decision has been taken to test and develop the market for this mode of flexible delivery of VET short courses. It represents the largest commitment to TAFE television taken by any VET stakeholder anywhere in Australia and is linked to the WA Department of Training's existing commitment to deliver TAFE TV to rural and remote areas via the Westlink Satellite Service.

The 400 program hours will commence in July 1999 and represents a major contribution towards Australian television. The individual programs will also be made available to other community broadcasters and educational institutions around

Australia.

Ref P10, “What major developments do you expect in related areas including, but not limited to, telecommunications and Internet technology in the short to medium term?”

The internet is presently struggling with the problem of reliably delivering extended streams of vision across the World Wide Web. It is anticipated that these problems will be overcome significantly in the medium term and this will greatly extend the potential reach of all types of television, particularly those of shorter duration such as the 30 to 60 minute programs developed for TAFE television. The packaging of streams of vision with on-line learning resources will provide a powerful educational resource across the Web.

Ref P10, “What implications does technological convergence have for you or your business...”

Production of television and on-line programs will start to meld into stand-alone multi media programs in the first instance (This is occurring now in the studios of TCN). This stand alone resource will soon be able to be transported on the Net thereby delivering vision, print and graphics in a ubiquitous fashion. Also, improvements in video conferencing will see considerable overlap with broadcast TV. It is anticipated video conferencing inserts will be used as a low cost alternative to satellite “hook-ups”. TCN has already done this with 384 kb video conferencing inserts into full bandwidth video productions.

There will be more overlap in the production processes which now separate television, multi media and print-based / graphic programs. The skills of operators in these fields will overlap and converge along with the technology.

Ref P10, “Is there significant co-ordination between the various regulatory instruments”

A central data base of audio visual / multi media programs that are in production or already available would save unnecessary duplication. Often, there are projects funded from the public purse that are replicating each other. A cloak and dagger approach is adopted because the government agencies are being encouraged to be more commercial in their outlook. Paradoxically this behaviour is not in the best interests of the taxpayer. It is suggested that any project that has public funds

invested in all or part of it be registered on a central data base.

Ref P11,

“What are the relationships between broadcasting and other media. How significant is competition between different forms of Media”

TCN has a strong relationship with an on-line program developer and several multi-media development consultants because it recognises the strategic significance of these converging media (see comments above). Obviously the competition between media is fierce, however, the providers who will survive and thrive into the next millennium are the ones that position themselves with high capacities to converge production processes along with technology and seek value adding alliances between media forms.

Ref P13,

“Are existing educational broadcasting services adequate, ...”

Educational broadcasting is patchy. The Western Australian VET sector has recently made a strong commitment to it via Community TV. This will give a strong TAFE presence in the Perth metropolitan area. There has been a continued support in WA of a relatively small rural and remote VET viewing and learning public through the Westlink satellite service.

TAFE in Western Australia is planning to co-ordinate the broadcast of TAFE TV to align with on-Line learning support in Semester One 2000.

In general, these initiatives in VET broadcasting in the WA context should be viewed as more than adequate in the immediate future. These strong Western Australian moves will produce educational products that can be utilised nationally and re-transmitted in a variety of formats by other states.

Ref P13,

“To what extent does availability of, or access to, physical infrastructure affect community broadcasting?”

There are limited production facilities available at reasonable cost to support the development of community television.

TCN is resourced by the WA Department of Training to fulfill its VET program development needs. TCN also services other government departments and the private sector on a fee-for-service basis. Whilst this production capacity is limited, it

nonetheless provides an important set of physical and human resources that would otherwise be unavailable to community groups who would find the commercial broadcasters expensive and unco-operative because some of the programs being developed would be competing with their self interests. In this way TCN is able to perform an important ancillary function outside its primary mission that adds value to community broadcasting.

Ref P15,

“Can the cultural and social objectives be met with less regulation of competition?

Community broadcasting has the potential, in certain instances, to be treated as a threat to commercial broadcasting. Every time a community group secures sponsorship to support a production it has potential to impinge upon or re-locate revenue sources feeding commercial broadcasting. Existing policy which allows community broadcasts to take place with sponsorship support needs to be safeguarded in the future.

Ref P15,

“What are the main markets relevant to broadcasting? How are they changing?”

The educational market is emerging strongly across the Vocational Education and Training sector. Here in Perth we will soon have a strong VET presence on Channel 31 in the metro area and this will combine with the existing rural and remote VET presence already established via the Westlink service. These advantages together with the program output of other states present an opportunity and challenge to state based dispensations to look towards increasing strategic alliances for program production. As stated above, there is also an increasing necessity for one state to know what the other state is planning to produce so programs are not increasingly duplicated. It should become a requirement for any taxpayer-funded project to declare itself upfront and not risk “re-inventing the wheel”.

Ref P31,

Florence Agreement

Whilst there is an argument to assist Australian program makers in developing local industry with tariffs, it is a complex economic one. There is danger in protecting an industry that will eventually be exposed to competition by internet audio visual programs. The streaming of vision on the internet is already showing signs of life and audio streaming is widespread. Building tariff barriers in an environment that is riddled with Web-based communication will be a clumsy exercise that is doomed to failure

10 May, 1999