



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

**BROADCASTING SERVICES AMENDMENT
(MEDIA OWNERSHIP) BILL 2002**

In Committee

SPEECH

Thursday, 26 June 2003

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Questioner
Speaker Cherry, Sen John

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Senator CHERRY (Queensland) (11.53 am)—Democrat amendment (1) on sheet 3000 is to ensure that the Senate instructs the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, through this act, that the ABC network be expanded, as the ABC has requested, to all centres with a population of more than 10,000 where there is available spectrum. That is the first part of the amendment. The second part of the amendment requires a review to be conducted by the ABA of radio broadcasting of local news. The chamber would be aware that the ABA has already conducted a review of local news by television broadcasters, and I think that has produced a reasonably good outcome. I would have preferred to see the mandating of the standards to be a little bit better than the ABA recommendation. In fact, the Democrat recommendation was for twice the minimum requirement than the ABA came out with. But there has not been a similar inquiry in respect of radio news. That is a real difficulty because, as has been evidenced by the regular surveys by the ABA of the provision of local news and information—local programming—on commercial radio in regional areas, it has become increasingly clear that the amount of networked programs is growing and the amount of locally produced news is falling. I think I gave figures earlier in the debate that the number of journalists employed in commercial radio in Australia has dropped from about 650 to about 250 over the course of the last 10 years as a result of networking. So I think it is appropriate that the Senate ask the ABA to conduct that review of the provision of local news on radio, and I think that is a worthy amendment.

The other part of the amendment is equally worthy—and I hope Senator Murray has spoken to it—and that requires the minister to push out the five ABC networks to all centres with a population of over 10,000. The ABC to date—and I have to acknowledge that the government has been supporting the ABC in doing this—has been progressively pushing out its networks to this 10,000 benchmark. Local news and Radio National have been pushed out pretty much everywhere. I think Classic FM is one million listeners short, Triple J is about 1.2 million people short and NewsRadio is about 3.4 million people short. I think it is very disappointing that across Australia so many people in regional Australia are still not getting the diversity of views provided by the public broadcasters. This is particularly important, given that in so many parts of regional Australia there is probably only one commercial radio broadcaster, or maybe two owned by the same company, whereas in a lot of other centres there might be only two commercial broadcasters doing radio. So the importance of getting the ABC out into the country areas needs to be emphasised, and I think we need to make the point that we want the government to actually achieve this. That is what this amendment is about. I commend the amendment to the chamber, and I certainly hope it gets some support.