



Australian Government

Department of Communications,
Information Technology and the Arts

Report on the review of the Indigenous Broadcasting Program

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Introduction

The Australian Government's Indigenous Broadcasting Program (IBP) has supported broadcasting activities in urban, regional and remote Indigenous communities since 1987. During this period, Indigenous broadcasting has grown into a vibrant sector and the program now supports over 100 Indigenous community broadcasting services. The IBP allocated \$13.6 million in 2006–07 and \$14.0 million for 2007–08.

The Government also funds Indigenous broadcasting through the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF), with \$778 000 provided in 2006–07 for Indigenous program, equipment and special project grants.

In addition, the Government supports Indigenous broadcasting through projects under the Backing Indigenous Ability (BIA) initiative. The Government is providing \$3.3 million over three years from 2006–07 for the restoration of ageing radio infrastructure in remote Indigenous communities. It is also providing \$50 million over four years from 2006–07 to establish an Indigenous television service. This will facilitate the development and broadcast, through contracted service providers, of Indigenous television content such as news, children's and drama programs that reflect the diversity of Australia's Indigenous communities.

In April 2006 the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator the Hon. Helen Coonan, initiated a review of the IBP by releasing a discussion paper on the program. The review sought to canvass a national perspective of the program.

This report summarises the issues identified in the discussion paper and the consultation process, along with the proposed way forward in relation to each.

Part one: The consultation process

The Minister, Senator Coonan, initiated the review of the IBP with the release of a discussion paper on the program on 18 April 2006.

The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) hosted a public forum on the issues in the discussion paper in Canberra on 27 April 2006. It was attended by 57 representatives from Indigenous radio broadcasting organisations around Australia—including broadcasters, Remote Indigenous Media Organisations (RIMOS), peak bodies and associated industry bodies.

The review received 18 submissions by the closing date of 30 June 2006. This included a submission from the Australian Indigenous Communications Association (AICA) and 11 submissions from Indigenous broadcasting organisations, which mainly gave support to the AICA submission as well as providing their own perspectives. Five submissions were from individuals and one submission was received from the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS).

A list of submissions is set out in Appendix A of this report.

The discussion paper and the submissions received are available online at www.dcita.gov.au/indig/indigenous_broadcasting

Part two: The issues

Key issues canvassed in the review included:

- a set of principles for governing the administration of the IBP;
- proposals for a more equitable funding model for broadcasting services;
- a new operating model for RIMOs; and
- the elimination of overlaps between the CBF and the IBP.

Other issues included staffing and training in Indigenous broadcasting services, the role of peak bodies, Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) and digital services.

The following sections provide a summary of the issues identified in the discussion paper and consultation process and the Government's proposed future direction to progress each issue.

2.1 Proposed governing principles for administering the IBP

Issue

The review proposed a set of governing principles to guide the administration of the IBP from a national perspective. These cover the scope of the IBP, concepts of equity and accountability in funding allocations and the need for sound administration in organisations receiving funding.

Overall, the submissions clearly supported the continuation of the program and gave general acceptance to the principles proposed in the paper.

Specific comments on the proposed principles are included in the context in which they were made. For example, comments on the question of the appropriate scope of the IBP are discussed in detail in section 2.14 below and are reflected in principle (a) below.

With regard to the principles covering funding and management arrangements, there was overall agreement on the need for greater equity in funding distribution within the IBP, but concerns were expressed about the details of the proposed process to achieve equity. These are discussed further in section 2.2 below.

Future direction

The principles proposed in the review received general acceptance. Some suggestions on improvements were adopted and incorporated in the revised principles, set out below, to form the future basis of the IBP.

Principles for administering the IBP

- (a) The program will assist broadcasting activity only. Non-broadcasting activity should be funded from sources other than the IBP.
- (b) Funding selections will be merit-based, within the guidelines and funding constraints of the IBP.
- (c) Funds are to be allocated fairly, having regard to national equity.
- (d) Where changes to the program result in altered funding to organisations, transitional arrangements will help manage impacts on those organisations.
- (e) The program will fund only organisations that are run on sound financial principles with appropriate governance practices in place.
- (f) The program will, as far as practicable, promote the provision of broadcasting services that meet the needs of all Indigenous people in the transmission area.
- (g) New services will be considered on a needs basis.

2.2 The funding model, including triennial funding

Distribution of funding

Issue

Indigenous broadcasting organisations work under different circumstances and in a range of different communities. However, the discussion paper noted a history of disparities in funding even for similar organisations and activities within the IBP. These inconsistencies have arisen as a result of different emphases and priorities given to broadcasting by various regional decision-makers.

The discussion paper argued that it is not equitable to continue with funding determinations that entrench historical disparities. It therefore proposed to shift the IBP to a more equitable and accountable funding model that achieves more equitable outcomes according to the number of Indigenous people receiving services.

The lack of a funding rationale and the resultant disparities was recognised by many respondents. For example, the Brisbane Indigenous Media Association (BIMA) stated that ‘radio stations cost a similar amount to operate regardless of audience size’ and that ‘the proposed funding model, by focussing on projections of Indigenous market size, does not take into account broadcast reach’.

PY Media argued that geographical differences, particularly remoteness and local health, economic and political circumstances, may result in different funding requirements.

Many submissions argued against the use of audience population, an option raised in the discussion paper, as a basis for determining appropriate funding levels. However, no viable alternatives were offered in submissions or by forum participants to achieve appropriate funding levels and minimise disparities.

Future direction

As no consensus on a specific model for more equitable funding emerged from the review, the Government will consult with the sector to develop a refocused IBP funding framework. The program guidelines issued in December 2007 will indicate the revised funding model to take effect from 2008–09. In the meantime, the process of some moderate rebalancing of funding will continue for 2007–08.

Development of a new, more equitable framework will include research into the costs of providing Indigenous broadcasting services in the areas in which they currently operate. Apart from taking into account a range of broadcasting-related costs, a new funding model could also reflect the level of services provided by recipient organisations—that is, IBP funding would be proportional to the range of activities undertaken.

It is recognised that these changes may affect the future levels of funding made available to some organisations. Any such changes will be phased in over a transitional period to reduce impacts and to allow organisations time to adapt.

Funding support

Issue

Most submissions argued for an increase in the overall IBP appropriation.

For instance, AICA argued in its submission that the IBP currently offers insufficient funding to adequately address Indigenous needs. AICA stated that ‘while we accept that the Indigenous sector is unlikely to achieve the same level of funding granted to SBS, AICA anticipates that the results of this review will demonstrate the massive funding deficiencies’ along with the need for ‘increased funding levels to achieve a degree of relativity’ with the SBS to meet the real demands of the Indigenous-broadcasting sector.

In another submission, Mr Jim Remedio proposed an ABC-like model to introduce a true network structure for Indigenous broadcasting.

Future direction

Currently, indexation is applied each year to IBP funding. In 2006–07 IBP funding amounted to \$13.6 million with \$14.0 million allocated for 2007–08.

The Government also provides some funds for Indigenous broadcasting through the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF). In 2006–07, funding to the CBF to support Indigenous program grants, equipment grants and special project grants amounted to \$670 722. IBP funding to the CBF for Indigenous broadcasting (which is

directed to the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS)¹) totalled \$107 150 in 2006–07.

As part of the BIA initiative the Government will support the National Indigenous Television Service (NITV)² with \$50 million over four years from 1 July 2006 to produce and broadcast diverse programming such as news, children's and drama programs that reflect the breadth of Indigenous communities.

A further \$3.3 million is allocated under BIA over three years from 2006–07 for the restoration of ageing radio infrastructure in remote Indigenous communities.

Other funding for the sector is provided through Australian Government programs such as the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme administered by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR).³

The Government notes the call from the sector for greater funding. The issue needs consideration in the overall budget context, as well as in the context of total Government funding for the Indigenous broadcasting sector and Government support for other community broadcasting activities throughout Australia.

Triennial funding

Issue

The need for multi-year funding was mentioned in a number of submissions as an approach that would enable Indigenous broadcasting organisations to commit to longer-term projects. It was argued that single-year planning leaves organisations in a state of uncertainty.

PY Media stated that as the funding body seeks three year strategic plans from its applicants then 'funding should match the planning'.

The Aboriginal Resource and Development Service (ARDS) noted that 'while ARDS understands the reason for not providing multi-year funding, it would be beneficial to new broadcasters to have an initial period of say three years where such funding would be guaranteed so that the goal of establishing the station and getting it running smoothly could be the main focus rather than to have to constantly search for funds'.

Future direction

The Government recognises that the opportunity for multi-year funding existed when the IBP was administered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and later by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) and so will give further consideration to this matter.

¹ See section 2.11, p. 18

² See section 2.13, p. 20

³ See section 2.7, p. 15

Foundation funding

Issue

A proposal for an Indigenous Broadcasting Foundation was recommended by AICA and supported by Ng Media. Specifically, AICA recommended that the Government support the establishment of such a body ‘to fund, manage and administer the Indigenous Broadcasting and Communications industry.’

Future direction

The IBP is administered by DCITA through its central office in Canberra and its regional staff located in Indigenous Coordination Centres around Australia. It is expected that this administrative structure will continue as the Government implements the outcomes of the IBP review and promotes whole of government consistency with other Indigenous programs.

In addition, the Government’s policy is to support the CBF, which was established with the specific responsibility to solicit and distribute funds for the maintenance and development of community broadcasting in Australia. This includes specialist services for Indigenous, ethnic and Radio for the Print Handicapped broadcasters. The CBF grant advisory committees for special interest groups are informed by the views of relevant key stakeholders, communicated through sector representative organisations such as AICA.

By having a multipurpose and independent non-profit funding agency to cater for all community broadcasting, the CBF is able to achieve economies of scale that minimise administrative overheads and promote a consistency of approach across different elements of the sector. The Government therefore supports continuing the current arrangement of a single foundation catering for all of the community broadcasting sector.

2.3 RIMO / RIBS model

Issue

Currently, RIMOs undertake a range of operations—including providing operational and maintenance services for Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Services (RIBS) and retransmission facilities in their area. Services provided by RIMOs also include training, production of content and support for local video production, provision of radio services and paying of CDEP top-up wages. At present, there are six RIMOs funded under the IBP with a seventh being established.

RIBS are Indigenous broadcasters licensed under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* to provide community broadcasting services in remote communities, enabling communities to have access to broadcasting services similar to those available to Australian citizens generally. Currently, there are 63 mainland RIBS, with 16 Torres Strait RIBS funded from sources other than the IBP.

The discussion paper proposed a standard operating model for RIMOs that includes channelling RIBS funding through them to ensure that all RIBS with similar broadcasting outputs receive similar funding and support services.

Most RIBS have minimal capacity for detailed administrative tasks or for meeting the costs of recruiting technical personnel. In addition to equalising services to RIBS, this approach would help simplify the task of administering a large number of very small grants.

Respondents generally supported this proposal.

AICA agreed that RIMOs should manage the operation and maintenance of RIBS radio and television transmitters using IBP funding where RIBS opted for this arrangement. AICA also recommended that RIBS and RIMOs develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), if required, to cover these arrangements.

PY Media commented that the proposed relationship, if implemented, should not disadvantage RIBS.

Mr Remedio suggested an alternative—larger radio stations should incorporate RIMOs and take on more responsibility regarding RIBS. This would involve adopting an ABC-style model, where capital city stations operate as hubs for smaller stations and produce regional programs in each state or territory.

Warlpiri Media commented that the proposed funding model for RIMOs did not take into account expenses arising from operating from a remote location. It also suggested that the IBP should focus on program targets and outcomes rather than on RIMO budgets.

BIMA argued that current IBP training funding for RIMOs and RIBS is inadequate.

Future direction

The IBP will continue to fund only licensed RIBS. In future, this will occur indirectly through RIMOs while also ensuring that funding for RIMOs is based on performance measures that reflect improved outcomes for RIBS.

The Government proposes to fund each RIMO primarily for the services it provides to its respective RIBS and according to the number of RIBS serviced. It also intends to develop a common services agreement to cover those services and ensure equity in outcomes for RIBS across Australia. However, any eligible RIBS unit not funded through a RIMO will still have access to funding via a direct application to the IBP.

RIMOs currently provide a range of different services throughout remote Australia. Assessment and approval of RIMO operational expenses will continue on a case-by-case basis, with additional funding for other activities undertaken. For example, RIMOs could provide remote monitoring of RIBS transmitter sites to ensure ongoing broadcasting or might provide specific training support to RIBS. The continuing

requirements for funding submissions will include adequate budgets and acceptable outcomes.

One of the purposes for funding RIBS indirectly through RIMOs is to simplify the task of administering a large number of very small grants. While the Government is not proposing to develop MOUs with RIBS, they are at liberty to formalise their arrangements with RIMOs using MOUs or any other type of agreement deemed appropriate.

The suggested alternative proposal—for larger radio stations to incorporate RIMOs—is noted and this concept could develop as part of the ongoing consultation with the sector. If general support for the concept emerges, development of it would require significant involvement from the sector. However, such an initiative could diminish the current local focus of services—a well-recognised advantage of the present system. Therefore, while economies of scale might result from this approach, it could lead to network centralisation and a considerable reduction in the level of locally-specific cultural content.

As indicated earlier, the Government will consult further with the sector in developing an appropriate funding model with a view to commencing funding RIBS through RIMOs in 2008–09.⁴

RIBS operational and technical infrastructure

Issue

In its submission, AICA proposed a full operational, technical and infrastructure assessment of RIBS. Similarly, Mr Remedio called for an audit of RIBS to assess the application of funds and the optimum operational amounts required.

Future direction

As described earlier, the Australian Government is providing \$3.3 million over three years from 2006–07 to replace ageing radio infrastructure for RIBS through the Indigenous Remote Radio Replacement (IRRR) project. The Government is currently exploring options for managing the IRRR to determine the most efficient method of delivering a comprehensive and equitable upgrade. The early stages of the IRRR implementation will include identification of existing RIBS infrastructure and local needs. Equipment installed in licensed RIBS through the IRRR should provide the foundation for the future administration of them as described earlier in this section.

⁴ See section 2.2, p. 6

2.4 Capital equipment fund

Issue

The discussion paper proposed the allocation of capital funding for broadcasting projects, which has a lower priority than operational funding, on a competitive basis. It also noted that it would not be possible to address all requests for capital funding in any one year.

ARDS viewed the idea as a good one, but was unclear whether it should have a regional, state or national basis. The Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media Association (PAKAM) welcomed the proposal with ‘basic video camera and digital editing facilities for RIBS communities’ as its priority.

PY Media proposed an ongoing program for regular equipment upgrades and replacement, while Warlpiri Media believed that the establishment of an ongoing capital fund is long overdue. Warlpiri also wanted the IBP to ‘take into consideration other incentives available through the ABC and CBF to ensure there is no duplication of funding.’ It recommended comprehensive guidelines clarifying the boundaries of any such fund.

The Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Media Association (TAIMA) supported the idea but suggested management by ‘a newly established Indigenous Broadcasting Foundation, run along similar lines as the present CBF funding guidelines.’

AICA recommended that DCITA approve a capital fund of ‘\$5 million per year within the IBP for the capital requirement of the Indigenous broadcasting industry.’

Future direction

Historically, the IBP has provided both operational and capital funding for broadcasting projects and most submissions supported the concept of a capital fund, with general acceptance of the proposal to allocate funding on a competitive basis.

However, as requests for IBP funding generally exceed funding allocations, the IBP has limited capacity to fund a large number of requests for capital requirements at any one time.

The IRRR project will provide upgraded broadcasting infrastructure to RIBS units over the next three years and the feasibility of a capital equipment funding pool will be explored as part of the revised funding model proposed in section 2.2 above. An offer of capital funding would occur only when all eligible operational funding requirements are met.

As the IBP is a program with a national focus, any proposed capital equipment funding pool would have to operate on a national basis, with changes implemented from 2008–09.

2.5 Employment of Indigenous staff

Issue

The review asked questions in relation to employment of Indigenous staff regarding:

- ways of encouraging more Indigenous employment;
- the possibility of setting staffing targets within funded organisations;
- the possible provision of two hours paid work per day for operators at qualifying RIBS sites; and
- ways of monitoring two hours of daily broadcasting activity by RIBS operators.

The review also asked whether annual reporting on progress in meeting specific targets for Indigenous employment should become a condition of IBP funding.

AICA recommended that the Government develop ‘a strategy for the IBP that provides solutions and ensures that there is full time employment provided for Indigenous broadcasters and RIBS trainees.’

PY Media proposed making available funds for developing staff positions ‘beyond CDEP top-up support.’ It stated that this would provide a degree of recognition of the activity that would engender greater community commitment and support.

Mr Remedio suggested that organisations designate media positions exclusively for Indigenous staff. He also suggested that the IBP identify such classified positions in funding agreements and that communities wishing to employ non-Indigenous media workers use royalty funds for that purpose.

ARDS suggested the addition of a component to IBP funding that would allow organisations to take on trainees and assist with their later integration into the permanent workforce. ARDS believes that targets can be set only if the IBP directly funds those positions. If two hours paid work per day were approved for RIBS operators, ARDS suggests it would best be controlled through the local RIBS licence holder.

TAIMA recommended setting Indigenous employment targets of 70 per cent within funded organisations and expressed support for a whole of government approach to the issue.

BIMA suggested using SRAs, with a variety of whole of government funding, to create an Indigenous media training and employment strategy.

Future direction

Indigenous-identified positions

The Government notes the call for assurances of ongoing positions within the sector, but is unable to recommend the creation of Indigenous-identified positions. If individual Indigenous organisations propose to establish any ‘Indigenous only’

positions, organisations would need to consider the anti-discrimination legislation of the jurisdictions within which they operate. Subject to these conditions, targets to improve Indigenous employment levels could also form another part of this approach.

Funding for RIBS operators

The Government acknowledges the achievements of RIBS on behalf of their communities and is aware that there is often no commercial revenue base in remote areas for RIBS units to use to supplement Government funding. Consequently, trained RIBS operators may move away from those communities that particularly value them to seek full employment elsewhere.

To assist RIBS operators to remain in communities, the Government will work towards provision within the IBP funding model of up to two hours of funding per day, five days per week (10 hours in total per week per operation) to assist qualifying RIBS to retain an operator. However, these positions are clearly not full time and operators would still need to rely on some other source of income. An effective monitoring framework would also need to ensure RIBS operators undertake their daily broadcasting activities.

The proposed two hours broadcasting per day funding initiative would not occur before 2008–09 to allow time to develop an appropriate process and supporting guidelines.

2.6 Training and traineeships

Issue

There are currently several sources of funding for training relevant to Indigenous broadcasting.

The IBP funds 105 media training places at Batchelor Institute in the Northern Territory for students from remote and regional areas. In addition, for the four years from 2004–05 the CBF is administering a national training program to enable the community broadcasting sector to plan and deliver accredited management and media skills training to broadcasters. The bulk of this training is expected to occur in regional, rural and remote schemes and will be available to all community broadcasters including Indigenous broadcasters.

As an alternative, the review proposed employing an accredited trainer in each of the RIMOs to provide community-based, accredited broadcasting training.

Near Life Productions Pty Ltd submitted that the existing training role of Indigenous media organisations gives ‘untold value to Australian communities as a whole—both in training and in content.’

Mr Remedio noted that certified training is required for Indigenous people to meet ‘a need for multi-skilling training, it is necessary in today’s climate of convergence and

the review did not appear to take this into account.’ He proposed that short six week basic courses, similar to those used by commercial radio to give basic training to announcers, are required in the Indigenous sector.

AICA recommended that the IBP consider the broader implications of training in media production to meet the multi skilling needs of RIBS operators. It argued for training delivered at community level by registered training organisations and dedicated funding to enable Indigenous employees to receive appropriate training.

TAIMA asserted that because funding is ‘annual, not triennial, it is difficult for organisations to deliver training’. It also submitted that the IBP does not take into consideration career and training pathways, that there is little recognition of Indigenous training needs and that the approach proposed in the review would lead to a reduction in multi-skilling.

ARDS suggested adding ‘a training component within IBP funding so that each broadcaster funded by the IBP would be asked to take on trainees.’ The funded organisations could also work towards integrating the trainees into the workforce over the years following completion of training. It also argued that a two-year traineeship scheme would provide better outcomes than the current annually-based training model by allowing development based on traditional Indigenous learning methods.

PY Media proposed funding for an adequate number of trainers for all of the communities they serve on a weekly basis across regions of South Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. They also recommended the use of traditional Indigenous learning methods to achieve better outcomes.

Future direction

It is recognised that too few radio trainers are currently available to provide an accredited trainer in each RIMO. To assist the sector by facilitating greater flexibility and choice in available technical, governance and management training options, the Government proposes to consider supporting the use of a range of accredited training packages (such as those provided by Registered Training Organisations) across the states and the Northern Territory, or packages such as the governance training provided by the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations.

Options will also be explored with DEWR and the Department of Education, Science and Training for the possible provision of additional training support to the sector.

2.7 Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme

Issue

On 22 April 2005, the Australian Government announced a new direction for the CDEP scheme to achieve better outcomes for participants through increased transparency of funding for government services and normalising employment

arrangements where possible. The Government stated it would work with agencies with programs (such as IBP) that are currently supported, in full or in part, by CDEP to ensure the effective delivery of these services in the longer term.

A number of submissions to the IBP review emphasised the key role that CDEP currently plays in supporting Indigenous broadcasting organisations, particularly in remote areas. Indigenous stakeholders urged the redirection of current CDEP funding into the creation of ongoing employment for Indigenous workers within the IBP.

Warlpiri Media recognised that CDEP offers important options for employing staff and allows for ‘flexibility in employment patterns’ within broadcasting organisations.

Both PAKAM and the Derby Media Aboriginal Corporation indicated that, without CDEP subsidies, they would have to reduce staff numbers and, consequently, services.

AICA submitted that the Indigenous broadcasting sector often provides the only employment opportunities for Indigenous workers and suggested that the CDEP changes would force many long term media workers into jobs in other industries. The submission said that former CDEP funding should not be lost to the IBP. AICA also asked for the development of innovative strategies to allow full time employment in the sector. A number of other submissions supported this view.

PY Media said that while CDEP has a role to play in developing community involvement the establishment of ongoing positions would produce greater long-term self-reliance.

Future direction

On 6 November 2006, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations released a discussion paper—*Indigenous Potential meets Economic Opportunity*—that ‘proposes a new model of employment services for Indigenous Australians in strong labour markets’. It introduces a new enhanced Structured Training and Employment Projects (STEP) brokerage service to take effect in some urban and major regional centres from 1 July 2007 and states ‘Where the labour market and employment service provisions are not as strong, including remote Indigenous communities, the Australian Government would continue to fund CDEP services for eligible Indigenous people’ (see www.workplace.gov.au/cdep). These changes aim to help provide longer term employment opportunities.

DCITA is currently working with DEWR to address transitional arrangements arising from implementation of changes to the CDEP.

The 2006–07 CDEP program guidelines (see www.workplace.gov.au) refer to time limits on CDEP participation. However, these do not relate to CDEP participants in remote areas.

2.8 Local content

Issue

Local content is programming (radio or TV) produced locally and for the primary benefit of local audiences. Indigenous communities seek to maintain, introduce or reintroduce local content production as a means of preserving local culture, covering local issues of interest to the community and as a training ground for potential media workers.

There is substantial production activity with RIMOs creating community radio and video features. According to most RIMO submissions, these activities appear to provide worthwhile training to media workers. Most larger and less remote broadcasters have similar production commitments.

Local content production is a fundamental requirement for Indigenous broadcasters, including RIBS units, with some broadcasting operations undertaking both radio and video production and others producing only radio content. A number of broadcasters also contribute to a national radio programming grid via major Indigenous broadcasting organisations—including the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, 4K1G and NIRS.

Respondents strongly supported continued IBP funding for local content by remote Indigenous broadcasters.

BIMA cited the importance of local content to remote communities because it enables the distribution of information about health services, cyclone warnings and community events.

AICA noted that local content generated by RIBS communities is not necessarily intended for wider audiences. AICA also said that each RIBS unit should have access to funding to cover local production costs.

Future direction

The Government notes the sector's support for a competitive funding pool specifically for the production of local content and will consider this as part of the revised funding model as proposed in section 2.2 above.

While the IBP will remain the major source of funding for local content production by RIBS radio services, the NITV initiative (see section 2.13 below) will offer the most appropriate funding source for video content production in future.

NITV funding will support content development for broadcast via Imparja's satellite uplink (and possibly other outlets) including from remote Indigenous broadcasting organisations as well as Indigenous content producers around Australia. It is expected that this will, therefore, provide an opportunity for remote video content producers and the Government will keep this arrangement under review during the transition period to ensure continuity of service.

2.9 Peak bodies

Issue

Over recent years the IBP has funded two peak bodies to represent the interests of Indigenous broadcasters: AICA and the Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA). AICA maintains a national focus, while IRCA is chartered to represent only remote area broadcasting services.

AICA sought recognition of its central role and requested triennial funding under the IBP.

Future direction

The Government considers it essential to have effective representation for Indigenous broadcasting in Australia. However, the Government also considers that it is primarily a matter for the Indigenous broadcasting sector itself to determine the types of peak representation that it prefers.

The Government is working with AICA to increase its strategic capacity to provide valuable advisory and membership services to the sector as a whole. These efforts aim to help AICA improve its accountability and reporting processes to the Government, while helping it to build the governance and financial management capabilities of its member organisations.

Over the past two years, IRCA has experienced a number of organisational problems. The Government is working with IRCA to assist it to meet the needs of its membership and to put IRCA on a firmer basis for future funding consideration.

2.10 Imparja Television

Issue

Imparja Television is the licensee of Australia's only Indigenous-owned commercial television station. With its main terrestrial transmitter in Alice Springs, Imparja also delivers programming content to other remote and regional centres either terrestrially or via a digital satellite platform.

Under ATSIC and then ATSIIS, the \$2 million per annum allocation for Imparja was always a separate budget line item outside the IBP. However, since assuming responsibility for them, DCITA has administered the two programs as one, incorporating the Imparja funding within the global IBP appropriation.

As the transmission provider for the new NITV television content stream, Imparja will provide a range of services including satellite capacity and uplink, compilation, ingest, playout and multiplexing. NITV may directly purchase other services from Imparja as required.

Future direction

The Government currently envisages that, while the IBP will deal mainly with radio, it will continue the existing model in which specific funding to Imparja remains part of the IBP.

2.11 National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS)

Issue

NIRS is a national content distributor that facilitates program sharing among Indigenous broadcasters, disseminating programs that originate from many Indigenous stations. NIRS provides live coverage of Indigenous festivals and actively promotes Indigenous culture, language and traditions. It also produces and distributes a number of programs in its own right including the National Indigenous News Service (NINS). NIRS currently receives operational funding from the CBF.

The discussion paper sought comments on whether NIRS was representative of the Indigenous community and whether it should provide a wider range of content.

One respondent recommended that NIRS should receive a national licence and be funded in a similar way to the ABC's Radio National.

ARDS noted that it did not use NIRS because it was an English language service and Yolngu Radio finds that broadcasting in traditional languages is more effective in the communities it serves.

Future direction

It is unlikely that NIRS would obtain a national broadcasting licence under existing legislation and it is unrealistic to expect that NIRS will secure funding similar to Radio National. The IBP could not support funding NIRS at that level without significantly reducing its commitment to local Indigenous broadcasting activities.

As noted in the discussion paper, IBP presently funds the NINS, which provides an hourly national radio news service with an Indigenous perspective for re-broadcast by Indigenous community stations throughout Australia. Operational funding for NIRS is currently provided though the CBF rather than directly through the IBP.

Historically, the IBP has placed a higher priority on local Indigenous broadcasting activities than on national content distribution. However, NIRS has provided a means by which Indigenous broadcasters can freely choose from a wider variety of programming to augment their own productions. Program sharing by Indigenous broadcasters allows stations to broadcast content beyond their own production capabilities and resources. It also means obtaining additional value from pre-existing content by sharing programs with additional audiences in other markets.

In its role as a network support service, NIRS needs to be cost efficient and to deliver value for money. The responses to the review indicate that most Indigenous broadcasters believe NIRS satisfies these criteria.

The CBF tends to fund content and special project, whereas the IBP focuses more on operational funding. NIRS is an obvious exception to these arrangements. Therefore, the Government supports in principle the proposal for directing funding of NIRS through the IBP rather than via the CBF and will work with the parties concerned to implement the new arrangements in the next funding round.

2.12 Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs)

Issue

SRAs are voluntary agreements between governments and Indigenous communities, initiated and developed by Indigenous people to address specific local priorities. SRAs focus on the whole of the community and not on discrete organisations. They set out what both the Government and the community will contribute to achieve benefits beyond the provision of basic services.

Submissions to the review of the IBP varied in their views on the utility of SRAs in the Indigenous broadcasting sector.

ARDS suggested that linking funding to media services would not provide any benefits.

Mr Remedio said that SRAs should not apply to broadcasting simply because the licences are governed by the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* and the codes of conduct for community radio.

By contrast, PY Media believed that ‘SRAs will provide greater support and recognition for that vital area of responsibility borne by media organisations if all involved support the outcomes.’

AICA recognised that SRAs were envisaged as an important means of support for Indigenous broadcasting organisations, but recommended that DCITA initiate a whole of government solution to streamline and overcome problems associated with them.

As part of a submission advocating the use of Indigenous broadcasting services to provide a positive health message, RWM Consultancy suggested the development of a health related ‘test’ SRA in a single region, with the participation of the Australian Government, state and territory governments and local health organisations.

Future direction

The Government remains committed to implementing SRAs that address particular community priorities and that provide communities with discretionary benefits in return for specific community commitments.

While there are currently no completed SRAs that relate to Indigenous broadcasting, two are currently under negotiation. The Government will continue to work with the Indigenous broadcasting sector towards community development of and involvement in SRAs that relate to broadcasting.

To assist community appreciation of opportunities offered by SRAs under the IBP, DCITA has developed a range of model SRAs for consideration by Indigenous broadcasting organisations within a whole of government context.

2.13 National Indigenous Television (NITV)

Issue

The Government is providing \$50 million under the BIA program over four years from 1 July 2006 for the establishment of the NITV service.

PAKAM said it looked forward to NITV commissioning funds becoming available, but pointed out that the initiative does not fund basic video equipment, supplies and video training in communities.

TAIMA stated that a lack of video training in remote areas will impact adversely on skilled personnel numbers, which will further impact on both NITV and the programming schedules of the narrowcast Indigenous Community Television service.

AICA expressed concern that there will be no funding for audio-visual content beyond the announced four years of funding of the NITV. It concluded that NITV funding will create an increase at the national level in video production funds, but may create shortfalls for capital, operational and training funding. AICA stated that the IBP should retain opportunities for local communities 'to produce local video programs for their distinct and unique communities.'

SBS stated that it currently provides support to the NITV in the form of television, radio and online services that include Indigenous news and current affairs, documentary, drama and special event programming. While supporting 'initiatives which address unmet demand for Indigenous broadcasting services', SBS argued that it is essential to maintain nationwide Indigenous programming.

Future direction

The NITV service is envisaged as a content provider and aggregator rather than as a broadcaster.

As discussed in section 2.8 above, from 2007–08 it is expected that NITV will facilitate the future development of Indigenous television content and deliver it to the contracted transmission provider while the IBP will primarily support radio.

2.14 Indigenous broadcasting and technological change

Issue

There have been many changes to Indigenous broadcasting in Australia since the inception of the IBP. Numerous Indigenous media organisations have moved from being solely radio broadcasters into other media such as television, multimedia and online telecommunications services. Thus, the sector is already using these platforms for a variety of purposes including the production of audio and video content.

Several submissions noted that the technological delineation of the IBP was too narrow in focussing primarily on radio. AICA submitted that

...the definition of “Broadcasting” in the DCITA discussion paper is illogical and poorly conceived. The broadcasting and communications industries are rapidly moving toward convergence of radio, video, online, multimedia, and communications on a multi-platform basis. DCITA’s proposal to separate radio from audio visual flies in the face of industry trends towards convergence, is retrograde and fails to recognise how media and communications services are delivered to our communities.

Ng Media made similar points.

The review is seeking to reduce and prescribe the scope of what media organisations deliver, despite the Industry wide convergence of media and communications and cross-platform delivery of services. Ngaanyatjarra Media provides a range of services (radio & video production/broadcast/training/ support, telecommunications advocacy, print media, digital photography, music festival and recording, IT training and technical support and facility management, R&M, etc.). In most cases, we are the only organisation delivering or able to deliver these services. We recommend that DCITA take a whole of government/department approach in this Review to recognise the changing roles of the Remote Indigenous Media Organisations and fund them according to the range of services they actually deliver.

Other organisations—including PY Media, Derby Aboriginal Media, 4K1G and Goolarri Media—made similar comments or described their multifaceted activities, which have expanded beyond radio broadcasts.

As explained in several submissions, the convergence of technologies supporting broadcasting, IT, telecommunications and multimedia is making it more difficult to delineate between these forms of media.

Future direction

Technological developments are increasingly making it possible for people to receive and use media services in different ways and it is recognised that, to produce this wider variety of media services, broadcasters require extra staff and technical resources. For example, live television costs significantly more per hour to produce than live radio and pre-recorded video content tends to be many times more expensive to produce than audio.

From an audience perspective, new convergent services also imply additional costs in order to access them. Consumers need additional equipment and services—such as a

computer, an Internet service or a mobile phone service—to access online TV, mobile TV, multimedia or streaming audio services whereas to access radio or television services simply requires a domestic receiver. Therefore, many of these services are not really free-to-air from the consumer point of view.

The IBP was established primarily to provide supplementary funding to Indigenous radio broadcasting services and its current resources are insufficient to provide significant support for new convergent applications without compromising its ability to fund free-to-air radio services. Radio remains the most cost effective method for Indigenous media organisations to reach their audiences. It is the most mobile and convenient of communication systems because of existing public access to portable and car radios. It is inappropriate at this time to remove support from the proven cost-efficient medium of radio by diverting IBP funds to more expensive and exclusive technologies.

Other funding sources such as the BIA telecommunications program, NITV (see section 2.13 above) or other initiatives may assist with funding Indigenous communications projects that fall outside traditional IBP activities. For example, the \$36.6 million BIA telecommunications program is expected to include funding to support online content development and public access Internet services.

As a further example, the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records (MILR) program assists the revival and maintenance of Indigenous languages as living systems of knowledge, shared by communities and passed down from generation to generation. The range of MILR projects, totalling \$8.6 million annually, include the production of Indigenous language databases and digital resources for use by Indigenous communities and organisations.

In summary, while the Government will continue to monitor the impact of developments in technological convergence for the Indigenous broadcasting sector, the primary focus of the IBP will remain on funding radio in the foreseeable future.

2.15 Digital conversion

Issue

The discussion paper referred to the status of digital radio and television planning. On 14 October 2005 the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts released a policy framework to guide the implementation of digital radio that recognised digital radio services as supplementary to existing services, rather than providing a replacement technology. Therefore, unlike digital television, there is no current program for ending analogue radio transmissions, nor any ‘cut-off date’.

AICA noted progress on planning for the new digital environment and recommended ‘that DCITA involve AICA in consultations leading to the drafting of plans for digital radio and television services.’ AICA also argued that the Government should

adequately fund the Indigenous broadcasting and communications industry...to ensure the maintenance and, where possible, the development of diversity, including public, community and Indigenous broadcasting...in the transition to digital broadcasting.

Mr Remedio submitted that the issue for Indigenous communities in relation to digital conversion was primarily one off funding. He sought advice on the level of commitment by Government to the conversion process in Indigenous broadcasting.

Future direction

Digital radio will first be introduced in the state capital markets where national, commercial and wide-coverage community broadcasters operating within the Broadcasting Services Bands will have the opportunity to commence digital broadcasts by 1 January 2009 (subject to the passage of legislation). Wide-coverage Indigenous community radio services in capital cities are included in this first stage, with solutions for services in outer metro, regional and remote areas due for consideration at a later date.

The continuity of Indigenous radio broadcasting faces no disruption from the introduction of digital radio, because there is no plan for analogue radio to cease. However, the Government accepts that, as digital receivers become more prevalent in Indigenous communities, it will need to address digital supplementary service planning as well as its implementation and funding implications.

In regard to television, on 23 November 2006, the Minister launched the Digital Action Plan for Australia. This initiative includes the establishment of Digital Australia, a dedicated digital switchover body within DCITA to coordinate and oversee Australia's transition to digital television. The Digital Action Plan states:

Digital switchover was originally scheduled to occur in 2008 and 2011 for metropolitan and regional areas respectively. The Government is now of the view that a more co-ordinated effort is required to achieve digital switchover across Australia and will reset the timetable to commence in 2010–12.

The Government has committed to working with the community television sector as it makes the transition to digital as part of the Digital Action Plan. The sector is being encouraged to explore options for a simulcast arrangement with a digital platform operator.

However, should no opportunity for a simulcast arrangement materialise, prior to digital switchover, the Government will consider the allocation of the Channel 31 analogue channel for digital services. Any such allocation would be made with a 'must carry' requirement including as a condition of the allocation, digital community television services must be carried on that spectrum. Analogue community television services would then cease and community television broadcasters would operate in digital mode.

Government will introduce any necessary legislative amendments to ensure that community television licensees are authorised to operate in digital mode. ...

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Government will work with the community television sector to explore opportunities for simulcast and later conversion of Channel 31 to digital.

The conversion from analogue to digital television will ultimately affect NITV and local Indigenous television services. However, NITV will be a producer, aggregator and distributor of content but not a broadcaster in its own right.

In the meantime, the Government intends to consult regularly with AICA and the Indigenous broadcasting sector generally as plans for implementing digital radio and television are developed.

Conclusion

Many of the proposals in the review discussion paper gained general acceptance. It is also clear that they need further development to implement them effectively.

In particular, since no specific, agreed funding model emerged from this review, the Government will continue to work with the sector to rebalance funding arrangements.

The Indigenous broadcasting sector is unique, dynamic and creative. It provides a diverse range of culturally appropriate and authentic content to Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous audiences across the country. It is a key mechanism for retaining traditional culture and language in Indigenous communities and for conveying important health, education, emergency service and other information.

The Government appreciates the contributions of Indigenous broadcasters and other key stakeholders to this review. The process to date should provide a solid foundation for further development, in consultation with the sector, of Indigenous broadcasting in Australia.

Appendix A: List of submissions

Aboriginal Resource and Development Services (ARDS)

Australian Indigenous Communications Association (AICA)

Brisbane Indigenous Media Association Incorporated (BIMA)

Bumma Bipperra Media

Derby Media Aboriginal Corporation

Goolarri Media

Richard Frankland

Professor Gavin Mooney

Near Life Productions Pty Ltd

Ngaanyatjarra Media (Ng Media)

Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Media Aboriginal Corporation (PY Media)

Jim Remedio

Philip Rodrigues, 2BOB

Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media (PAKAM)

RWM Consultancy

Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)

Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Media Association (TAIMA)

Warlpiri Media Association Incorporated

Acronyms

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
AICA	Australian Indigenous Communications Association
ARDS	Aboriginal Resource and Development Service
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATSIS	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service
BIMA	Brisbane Indigenous Media Association
CAAMA	Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association
CBF	Community Broadcasting Foundation
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects scheme
DCITA	Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
IBP	Indigenous Broadcasting Program
IRCA	Indigenous Remote Communications Association
IRRR	Indigenous Remote Radio Replacement project
IT	Information technology
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
Ng Media	Ngaanyatjarra Media
NINS	National Indigenous News Service
NIRS	National Indigenous Radio Service
NITV	National Indigenous Television
PAKAM	Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media
PY Media	Pitjantjatjarra Yankunytjatjara Media Aboriginal Corporation
R & M	Repairs and maintenance
RIBS	Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Service
RIMO	Remote Indigenous Media Organisation
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
STEP	Structured Training and Employment Projects scheme
TAIMA	Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Media Association

Indigenous programs | www.dcita.gov.au