



Community Broadcasting Program Evaluation and Sustainability Review

Terms of Reference

November 2022

Context

Community broadcasting plays an important role in promoting the diverse identities of – and providing a voice for – Australian communities that are underserved by other media sources. It is Australia’s largest independent media sector and showcases Australian music, local content, news and alternative voices. It has played an important role throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in getting accurate, community relevant information out to audiences, and supported community resilience in the wake of natural disasters.

Over five million listeners tune in to community radio each week – up from 3.76 million in 2004. Broadcasters hold 462 permanent and temporary licences, and broadcast 518 services on AM, FM and DAB+, as well as sharing content online.

Since 2011-12, the sector has grown from 285 permanently licensed broadcasters to 361 – a 26% increase. DAB+ has also rolled out to eight major capital cities, with Gold Coast slated for launch mid-2022. Fifty six digital community radio services are on-air across Australia.¹

Alongside analogue broadcasting, listeners expect community broadcasters to be discoverable across the multiplatform environment. This includes delivering content online and via apps, streaming and podcasting. The industry’s aggregate app, Community Radio Plus, launched in 2022.

¹ 42 services are the same as the analogue services, 13 are unique services, 1 is a mixture of analogue and unique, and 11 are time-shifted (the same as the analogue service but programs are played at a different time). Additional ‘pop up’ services, such as Christmas radio services, are available at certain times of the year.

The primary reason audiences listen to community radio is for local information and news.² There is an opportunity for community broadcasters to increase their provision of local news, information and public interest journalism to meet community needs, particularly in regional Australia.

These emerging opportunities and increased community expectations have resulted in the core funding through the Community Broadcasting Program (the Program) being pushed to try and meet increased needs.

Funding through the Community Broadcasting Program

In 2022-23, the Australian Government will deliver \$20.5 million through the Program, distributed by the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF). Approximately \$16 million is allocated to recurring activities, including:

- specialist programming (First Nations broadcasting, \$1.27 million; multicultural broadcasting, \$4.18 million; RPH radio reading for people with a print disability, \$1.36 million),
- general station operations, development and transmission (\$5.12 million), and
- national projects, including:
 - the Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (\$0.63 million),
 - national training (\$0.69 million),
 - the maintenance of current DAB+ digital radio services (\$2.44 million), and
 - CBOOnline (supporting national content sharing and station website services, \$0.68 million).

Another \$4 million has been secured ongoing in the October 2022 budget, and is typically used for sector-wide development initiatives, including:

- the roll out and ongoing development of DAB+ digital radio services (\$2 million),
- national training for business development skills (\$0.61 million),
- enhanced national news (\$0.82 million), and
- multiplatform adaptation, connecting stations with online audiences via apps, streaming, podcasting and on-demand solutions (\$0.61 million).

The general-purpose station funding pool has not received an increase since 2011. While the sector has received an additional \$4 million per year since 2017, this money has been to support subsidised, sector-wide projects (DAB+, multiplatform adaptation and distribution, news and training).

The CBF has also noted that there has been increased demand for funding from the First Nations funding pool. Alongside community broadcasting funding, First Nations broadcasters currently receive \$21 million per annum through the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA). The 2021 *Renewing a Vital Indigenous Voice and Community Asset – The Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Sector* report recommended that the NIAA and DITRCA discuss options for bringing the two funding sources under one government department.

In the Federal Election campaign, the Government committed to providing an additional \$4 million per annum ongoing from 2023-24, restoring the Government's total investment in the Program to around \$21 million. This commitment was delivered in the 2022-23 October Budget and provides funding certainty to a diverse, innovative and resilient community broadcasting sector, ensuring that all Australians can enjoy being part of a community that is informed and inclusive.

The sector has long called for an additional \$5 million per annum, increasing the annual funding allocation to \$25 million and taking the funding out of budget cycles. Industry has also called for adjustments to legislation

² 51% of listeners aged 15+ tune in to community radio each week to hear "local information/local news". McNair YellowSquares, Community Radio Listener Survey, 2022 Wave 1. Available online: <https://www.cbba.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census/national-listener-survey-fact-sheets>

and regulation to increase organisational flexibility, align requirements across jurisdictions and reduce reporting burdens. There is opportunity to explore what non-financial levers may also exist to support sector sustainability, which could include legislative reform and regulatory streamlining.

To support the Government's election commitments, the department is undertaking a review of the sustainability of the community broadcasting sector.

Objectives

The sustainability review will deliver advice to Government regarding:

- The effectiveness of the Program in supporting community radio sustainability.
- The adequacy of current funding delivered through the Program and an examination of the claim for additional funding to support a sustainable sector.
- The priority areas related to unmet demand, including a consideration of any emerging funding priorities.
- Options for consolidation of First Nations community broadcasting funding across government.
- Non-financial measures to support sector sustainability.

Scope

The review of the sustainability of community broadcasting will have two key phases:

1. An evaluation of the Program, and
2. An assessment of other policy, regulatory or other options to support the sustainability of community broadcasting.

In scope for this review

The working group will undertake the following activities in order to **provide evidence-based recommendations** to improve the sustainability of the community broadcasting sector.

Phase one

Activity in phase one will focus on **an evaluation of the annual funding allocation delivered through the Program** in addressing the needs of the community broadcasting sector, and the program's impact to date. This includes consideration of:

- The Program's priorities and their contemporary appropriateness, and the Program's funding allocations to each stream
- The unmet demand versus allocation of funding
- The role of funding in supporting day-to-day station operations and development
- The funding's impact, including how the funding is meeting the Program's outcomes, and consideration of emerging priorities
- The effectiveness of the granting body and its governance, the CBF, taking into consideration its recent review

Phase two

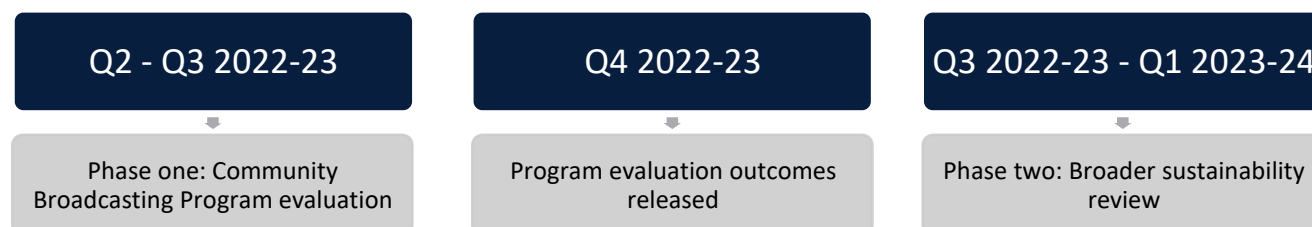
Activity in phase two will focus on a **broader review of the sector's sustainability**. This includes the extent to which **emerging priorities are being met through the Program** and a **review of regulatory, legislative and other policy options** to support sustainability. Review considerations include:

- How the Program funding is meeting Government objectives within a changing media landscape (including but not limited to the role of community broadcasting in times of emergencies and public interest journalism), and:
 - The extent to which NIAA funding for First Nations broadcasting complements the department's funding, and whether there are any improvements that could be made
 - The extent to which current Program funding supports Outcome 17 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan
 - What other government funding sources support community broadcasting (e.g. NIAA, NDIS)
- What regulatory, legislative and other policy sustainability options exist, including consideration of:
 - Not-for-profit alignment with other jurisdictions
 - Community participation requirements in relation to employment and volunteering
 - The role of charity and/or DGR status in supporting station sustainability
 - The role of sponsorship and government advertising in supporting local media

The department may also consider and provide advice on any other matters – including what data is currently collected and used for performance monitoring – related to the objectives above.

Proposed timing and deliverables

Timing



Phase one:

- The Community Broadcasting Program evaluation will commence in November and be completed by Q3 2022-23.

Phase two:

- The community broadcasting sector sustainability review will commence in Q3 2022-23 and be completed by Q1 2023-24.
- Government consideration of recommendations will commence in Q1 2023-24.

Deliverables

Phase one, Q4 2022-23: Recommendations from phase one: Community Broadcasting Program evaluation regarding Program funding to address sector sustainability.

Phase two, Q1 2023-24: Recommendations from phase two: legislative, regulatory and other options to provide additional sustainability measures.

Stakeholder engagement and reviews

The department will consult with the sector through the CBF and peak bodies, including the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) and members and guests of the Community Broadcasting Sector Roundtable.

The department will take account of initiatives underway by the CBF to review its governance arrangements, and the CBF and CBAA's joint development of a strategic roadmap for the sector. Both of these bodies of work will be important contributions to the review.

We are not proposing a public submission process, but will involve key stakeholders in the review. This could include seeking feedback on interim findings from the Community Broadcasting Program evaluation, participating in roundtable discussions and/or seeking written submissions. To the extent possible, we will use existing opportunities for engagement such as the CBAA's annual conference, the Community Broadcasting Sector Roundtable and CBF Board meetings.

Governance

The working group sits within the Online Safety, Media and Platforms Division, Media Industry and Sustainability Branch. It will be led by the Media Programs Section with support from the Broadcasting and Gambling Regulation Section.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) and the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) will lend specialist support.

The Project Sponsor will be the Assistant Secretary, Media Industry & Sustainability Branch, Online Safety, Media and Platforms Division.