



**Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy
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Digital Economy**

**Deputy Leader of the Government
in the Senate**

**Address to Christian Media Association 30th
National Conference**

**Gold Coast
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20 mins + 10 mins questions

Thank you.

It is a pleasure to be here today.

.... And I would like to congratulate the Christian Media Association on the thirtieth anniversary of this conference. It's a great achievement.

The title of this year's event, "30 years - 1 million stories", reflects the power of community broadcasting and Christian media.

Over the last 30 years you have told the stories of people that otherwise may not have been heard in mainstream media.

There have of course been many changes in media during this time....

.... Particularly over the last decade, as digital technology has transformed the way people interact and communicate.

In 1978, when you held your first conference, no one could have imagined the level of global connectivity that exists today.

Back then, people had little choice in what they could or would see or hear in the media.

In many ways, this of course added to the appeal of community broadcasting as an alternative to mainstream media and a source of local information.

Today, we see an explosion in the choice of media platforms and also, of course, an increasing trend toward user-generated content.

The world's largest media organisations have had to adjust to the new world of YouTube, FaceBook, internet TV (IPTV), and podcasting.

.....Community broadcasting is no different – it too must navigate its way through this new media landscape.

The Christian Media Association is certainly a key player in the community broadcasting sector.

...and one which has a positive influence its listeners.

This conference is a great opportunity to discuss the importance and the future of community broadcasting and Christian broadcasting.

It is very encouraging to see that the community sector is adapting in the new media environment and that it is continuing to experience significant growth.

As the title of this conference confirms, Christian media reaches well over one million viewers and listeners each week.

The Australian Christian Channel (ACC) is broadcasting both local and international programs, with the potential reach of some 2.2 million homes on Pay TV...

.....the ACC is also available via the free to air data-casting trial currently being broadcast in Sydney.

Additionally, I understand there are now some 350 licensed community radio stations operating throughout Australia.

...And that more than 70 per cent of these are located in regional and remote areas.

Community broadcasting *really* is an essential part of Australian broadcasting.

It provides important services to local communities and supports diversity in the broadcasting sector.

It gives a voice to communities of interest, such as Australia's Christian community, provides an outlet for contemporary Australian music.....

..... And, through the wide variety of programs delivered, it enriches the Australian media landscape.

Christian Community Broadcasters are of course supported by the Government through grants from the Government funding agency — the Community Broadcasting Foundation.

I know that these Australian Government grant programs are valued by the Christian Media Association.

General Grants assist with establishment costs for new stations, sustaining funds for permanent licensed stations, the production of programs for national distribution, development activities and mentoring between community stations.

An example of the way the General Grants program is making a real difference is 1WAY FM in Canberra.

1WAY FM received a grant in April 2007 to develop more training materials to meet the accredited training requirements.

This helped raise their training standard and led to improved quality of on-air sound.

I also note that the majority of those that received the benefit of the training course were under 25.

Increased youth involvement not only bodes well for 1WAY FM's future, but also for that of community broadcasting.

Christian Community radio stations have also benefited from several grants from the Transmission Support Grants category.

These grants help long-term licensed community radio stations with transmission equipment purchases and subsidise their operational costs.

Using grant money from this category approved in June 2007, 3TSC Light FM in Melbourne replaced a Studio to Transmitter link that had caused them a number of on-air problems.

Since the installation of the new system, 3TSC Light FM is now able to provide a much more reliable service to its listeners.

Mentoring, training and transmission support have helped these and many other community broadcasters to improve their services, attract new listeners and reach more people than ever before.

And, I am happy to add that the Christian Media Association received a General Sustainability and

Development grant of \$5000 which contributed to this conference.

Additionally, the Rudd Government last year committed to provide the Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (AMRAP) with increased and extended funding of \$2.4 million over four years.

AMRAP works with musicians and community broadcasters and the recording industry to increase radio airplay of contemporary Australian music.

AMRAP also helps to improve links between the music industry and the community radio sector.

This funding is intended to promote new Australian music to community radio's four million weekly listeners throughout Australia and more details on the funding will be included in the Budget announcement on 13 May.

Future of Community Broadcasting

This leads me to the future of community broadcasting.

There is no slowing in the pace of change in the communications world, and any sector runs the risk of being left behind if it does not move with the times.

As I mentioned earlier, technologies such as podcasting, the internet and the future arrival of digital radio and television pose challenges that the community broadcasting sector must face.

A recent U.S. study showed that 85 per cent of 12 to 24 year olds prefer to listen to their MP3 players rather than radio.

The national study also found that online listening, including online streaming, was more preferable than radio.

54 per cent of respondents indicated a preference for the web.

We can see similar trends in Australia, with an estimated 300,000 ABC programs downloaded each week.

Australian community broadcasters are interested in finding new ways to serve their communities, and many

stations now provide downloadable archived programs as 'radio on demand'.

I recently saw an article in the Sydney Morning Herald about Dennis Trevarthen who produces the Salty Dog Blues 'n' Roots podcast out of his home studio in Elwood, Victoria.

He broadcasts his show on community FM in Port Douglas, but he has more than 25,000 monthly podcast listeners and most of them are in the United States.

The Christian community broadcasting sector decided some two years ago to invest in new technologies such as 'live streaming', 'audio-on-demand' or 'podcasting'.

This was a positive step, taken in order to keep up with new developments in the sector and to serve the Christian community and listeners of interest.

Today, Christian community broadcasters in each state capital provide an 'audio-on demand' or streaming function on their corresponding website to enable listeners to download programs.

Due to the accessibility of their programming, stations utilising this new technology are now able to reach a wide audience, including overseas listeners.

The Community Broadcasting Foundation has also recognised the need to keep up with innovation and has introduced a new grant category - Online Development Grants.

These encourage the development of new and innovative program distribution technologies for application to the wider community broadcasting sector.

This includes building skills in podcasting and writing appropriately for the web.

Digital Radio & TV

The trend towards digital delivery platforms for both television and radio is a key issue in the future of community broadcasting.

The Rudd Government firmly believes that community broadcasting should have a place in the digital world.

As many of you would be aware, the Government has announced 13 December 2013 as the date for the completion of digital TV switchover.

This is change on a national scale and could be the largest logistical challenge since the introduction of decimal currency in 1966.

It will affect every household and dwelling in the nation; and every TV receiver in every living room, bedroom, study or kitchen, including receivers in VCRs and other recorders.

That is why the Rudd Government has committed a further \$37.9 million to drive digital television.

We have also established an Industry Advisory Group to bring together broadcasters (including the Australian Community Television Alliance), retailers, manufacturers, antenna technicians, public and commercial housing agencies and government departments.

This group will assist in developing a cross-industry strategy to raise awareness and understanding of the

switch to digital and help increase the take up of digital television.

After appropriate consultation, I expect to announce an indicative switchover timetable at the end of 2008.

In the digital era, the Government appreciates that the community sector faces new challenges.

We are actively working with the sector to address these challenges.

We will ensure an appropriate avenue for the transition of community television and community radio to the digital environment.

Networks Operations & Spectrum

Another key communications issue facing the Government is future spectrum policy and how to meet increasing demand for spectrum.

Questions as to future spectrum use have arisen particularly in light of:

- the digital television switchover,

- the expiration of mobile phone and broadband spectrum licences; and
- an increased focus on the more efficient use of government spectrum.

Spectrum realised in these processes could be used for new and alternate uses, such as wireless internet, mobile telephony and broadcasting services.

A whole of spectrum approach needs to be taken to ensure that opportunities for significant productivity gains and increased competition in services are not lost.

National Broadband Network

The internet is used by Australian Christians and the Christian Media as a relatively new platform by which to connect with the Christian community both in Australia and overseas.

The Australian Government is also recognises the importance of broadband in a converged media world.

To this end, the Government is moving quickly yet systematically to fulfil its commitment to provide up to \$4.7

billion and to consider necessary regulatory changes to facilitate the roll-out of a National Broadband Network.

The National Broadband Network will rival the Snowy Mountains scheme in its scale and national significance.

It will provide infrastructure to transform our society and our economy and will underpin future applications and services across all parts of the economy, including broadcasting.

Offensive Language on Television

I would now like to turn to an issue that affects all broadcasters and an area of concern for many viewers and listeners.

The Government takes very seriously community concerns that the content of some television programs is offensive to some viewers.

Recent examples that have been raised with me by concerned constituents are 'Californication', 'Underbelly' and 'Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares'.

The law requires broadcasters to meet certain standards and consumers have the right to voice their concerns if they believe programs are not meeting the required standard.

Programs featuring violence, sex and nudity, offensive language, drugs and adult themes must all be appropriately classified.

The Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice is currently being reviewed by Free TV Australia in consultation with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA).

It is important that the Code reflects community standards and this will be addressed in the review.

Members of the public will be able to make submissions to the review process, expected in mid 2008, and I would encourage all those interested in this issue to submit submissions.

This will ensure that community standards are made clear and can be reflected in any amendments made to the Code.

The Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Committee is also conducting an inquiry into the effectiveness of the broadcasting codes.

The inquiry was established with bi-partisan support.

The inquiry has particular reference to the frequency and use of coarse language in programs, the effectiveness of the current classification standards and the operation and effectiveness of the current public complaints process.

The Government supports the industry review and Senate inquiry processes....

..... and again I encourage you to make submissions to ensure that both Government and industry regulations adequately reflect community standards.

Sexualisation of children

The Rudd Government also takes very seriously concerns about sexualised images of children in the media.

I am aware of a previous proposal for ACMA to report on this issue.

However, a major concern is the use of sexualised images in the print media such as magazines, and advertising material such as billboards and retail catalogues.

This material falls outside of ACMA's statutory responsibilities.

The Government therefore supported the establishment of an inquiry into this issue by the Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts Committee, so that all the issues for all kinds of media can be carefully considered.

We also welcome the release of the revised 'Code for Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children' by the Australian Association of National Advertisers.

The Code has been revised after extensive public consultations and now specifically prohibits use of sexual imagery of children in advertising or marketing material, whether in print, on television or online.

Cyber-Safety

As I mentioned, the digital era offers many opportunities and choices, but there are also significant risks and areas of concern.

During the election, Labor announced its Cyber-Safety Policy to address some of these concerns.

Many parents, for example, are worried about how easy it is for children to be exposed to harmful content on the internet, such as x-rated material and child pornography, and also the potential impact of this exposure.

While parents must stay informed and take responsibility for their children's activities online, parents rightly expect Government and industry to play a role in helping protect children.

Our comprehensive cyber-safety strategy is targeted at reducing communication risks through education programs that focus not only on children but also on parents and teachers.

This includes improving the existing on-line safety website and developing a new children's cyber-safety website.

The resources will be age-appropriate and online so that they are easily accessible.

We will also develop a child-friendly cyber-safety helpline.

We will support Australian research into the changing digital landscape and its effect on Australian children.

This will help inform and fine tune our cyber-safety program and ensure we continue to meet our goal of producing good cyber-citizens.

In order to address content risks, the Rudd Government has an election commitment to the introduction of mandatory ISP level filtering to reduce the exposure of children to illegal content identified by ACMA.

The ACMA blacklist of prohibited websites is currently compiled by a complaints-driven mechanism.

The list will be expanded through international co-operation.

The Government does not believe children using the internet should be exposed to this material and ISP filtering is an important step in the overall strategy to make the internet a safer place for children.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to thank you for this invitation to speak today.

The community broadcasting sector and its dedicated volunteers provide a valuable community service and an independent voice that speaks to many Australians.

It also speaks *for* many Australians.

The Government certainly recognises this important role and also the diversity that this sector brings to the broadcasting landscape.

Christian broadcasters are a very important part of this, and I thank you all for your efforts in giving our communities an excellent and professional service.

I am sure you will get a lot out of the conference over the next few days, and I am also sure you will have some interesting discussions about the future of community broadcasting and Christian Media.

Thank you.

[END.]