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Australian Communications
& Media Authority

Via email: lais@acma.gov.au

**DRAFT VARIATION TO LAUNCESTON LICENCE AREA PLAN (LAP)**

Over view

Further to previous submissions lodged by Tarsadio Pty Ltd trading as TOTE Sport Radio, and hereafter referred to “Tarsadio” these comments are submitted in support of the ACMA’s proposed changes outlined in its draft variation to the Launceston Licence Area Plan number 1 of 2009. Specifically, Tarsadio supports the additional FM frequencies and new High Power Open Narrowcast (HPON) service as outlined in the explanatory paper and draft variation documents. The proposed changes promote diversity in the Launceston market, and if implemented will increase the range of services available to the listening audience in the area.

Additional FM frequencies

Since the conversion of the 7EX licence from AM to FM, Tarsadio has experienced a number of deficiencies in its Launceston broadcast footprint, most noticeably in the Central Business District. Clutter losses are evident due mainly to obstruction caused by the terrain coupled with multi-path reception. The provision of an omni-directional 200w ERP translator will address the restricted reception in an area which is vital to a commercial broadcaster – the Central Business District.

**New High Power Open Narrowcast (HPON) Service(s)**

The following comments have been taken from a submission Tarsadio made to the ACMA in May 2006 and modified where, to Tarsadio’s knowledge, circumstances have changed since that time.

Tarsadio converted its commercial radio service from the AM band to the FM band in 2008 but is denied the opportunity to put to air a high quality FM service, which provides innovative main stream programming of appeal to most listeners in the Launceston...
market, while it is compelled to broadcast its racing radio service on the commercial FM frequency. The present arrangement is sub-optimal for the Launceston radio audience, a situation which is ultimately inconsistent with the objects of the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (the Act), as provided for in section 3. The following points support this view:

- There has been a definite and accelerated move to 7 days by 24 hour racing coverage in the last two to three years due to the increase in the amount of racing product imported from overseas countries. This has severely limited, and in the future will further limit, the ability to provide a mainstream commercial service in conjunction with a racing coverage on the same frequency.

- Open narrowcasting services are used extensively in other markets throughout Australia to provide racing services. They provide an effective means of meeting the needs of a small, but highly valued, special interest group, as contemplated by section 18 of the Act. If commercial radio licences are used for this purpose it is to the detriment of the wider community, for whom such content is of little or no interest. This is the case in the Launceston area which currently has limited services compared to many other licence areas of similar or smaller size. For example, in comparison to Launceston, which had a population of 109,163 at the time of the 2001 Census and only 2 commercial services (one of which is largely a racing service) and 2 community services, the following applies:

  o Albury, which then had a population of 120,742, had 3 commercial services, 2 community services and 1 narrowcast (racing) service;

  o Bunbury, with a population of 109,296 had 3 commercial services and 1 narrowcast service;

  o Mackay with a population of 114,699 had 4 commercial services, 1 community service and 2 narrowcast services, one of which is a racing service;

  o Kempsey with a population of 107,079 had 3 commercial services, 1 community service and 1 narrowcast (racing) service;

  o Maryborough with a population of 73,641 had 3 commercial services, 1 community service and 1 narrowcast service;

  o Coffs Harbour, with a population of 73,557, had 3 commercial services, 2 community services and 1 narrowcast (racing) service;

  o Bundaberg, with a population of 68,770, had 3 commercial services, 1 community service and 2 narrowcast services, one of which is a racing service.
- Orange, with a population of 66,180, had 3 commercial services, 2 community services and 1 narrowcast (racing) service; and

- Dubbo, with a population of 64,583, had 3 commercial services, 1 community service and 1 narrowcast (racing) service.

- The Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) recognised the important and established role of open narrowcasting services in this area when it stated: “As discussed in the Legislative Framework, the ABA takes the view that planning for open narrowcasting services has an important role in promoting the object of the Act at paragraph 3 (a). For example, such open narrowcasting formats as foreign language, racing information and tourist or traveller information services have a unique contribution to the range of broadcasting services available.” (Source: ABA Discussion Paper, Launceston Radio. April 2004, p.10).

- Racing has a long and colourful history in Australia and it is widely accepted as being part of the Australian identity and culture. In addition to its recreational and entertainment value, racing is also an important industry and a major employer which makes a significant contribution to the economy, in Tasmania and at a national level. The racing radio service is an essential means of communication which contributes to the financial viability and growth of the industry. Presently all Tasmanian race meetings are broadcast by Tasradio as part of its State wide service as well as weekly “racing industry news” programs on matters of interest to local industry participants.

- Tasradio considers that the most practical and efficient way of catering for local racing industry requirements and expected increases in the coverage of international racing is to use a high power open narrowcasting format to deliver the racing service in the Launceston area, (as it does in Hobart).

- If the ACMA makes a high power open narrowcasting service available via a price based allocation mechanism, in accordance with its preliminary review, Tasradio will endeavour to acquire it and use it for the racing radio service. If successful, there will be no impediment to Tasradio providing Launceston with a second full commercial service on its FM frequency. It is entirely reasonable to assume this process will add to the diversity of programs available in the market and thereby promote the objects of the Act at section 3(a). Such a decision by the ACMA will also be in accordance with the planning criteria relating to the economic and efficient use of radiofrequency spectrum as detailed in section 23 of the Act.

- As a consequence of the conversion of the three AM services in Launceston (two commercial and one national) to the FM band, schedule 3 to the Variation to Frequency Allotment Plan – Launceston Radio – March 2005, the ABA identified the three vacated AM channels as being available (while being temporarily assigned until a date to be notified).
Considering that it is Tasradio’s intention to move its racing radio broadcasts to an open narrowcast service in Launceston, it is appropriate that the proposed new HPON service be allocated the 1008 kHz AM frequency.

This is the same frequency that racing radio listeners were accustomed to, prior to the FM conversion of the 7EX licence in 2008. Since the conversion, many listeners have contacted the radio station complaining that the new FM signal was not as clear or even non-existent in their area. Many others commented that their transistors and older style radios needed to be replaced to receive the new FM signal.

It is noted that the ACMA has advised that another party has expressed a desire to offer an Italian language service if it is able to obtain a HPON service in Launceston. Tasradio considers such a service would further add to the diversity of available services in the area. If an additional frequency is not available for this purpose then Tasradio supports the additional FM frequencies and new HPON service as outlined in the explanatory paper and draft variation documents.

Finally, consistent with its previous submissions dated 10 May 2006 and 23 May 2006 in relation to the diversity of radio services available in the Launceston licence area, and in light of the aforementioned information, Tasradio supports the allocation of two frequencies for HPON services in the Launceston licence area.

We thank the ACMA for the opportunity to make this submission in relation to the draft variation to the Launceston Licence Area Plan number 1 of 2009.

Please feel free to contact me on 03 6227 4414 if the ACMA would like to discuss this submission further.

Yours sincerely

(Craig H Coleman)
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER