



Turning print into sound

Print Radio Tasmania Inc.
136 Davey Street
Hobart, TAS 7000

Tel: (03) 6224 1864
E-mail: station@printradiotas.org.au
Website: www.printradiotas.org.au

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The Enquiry Secretary
Parliament House, HOBART 7000
dst@parliament.tas.gov.au

INQUIRY INTO DISABILITY SERVICES IN TASMANIA

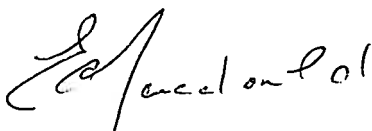
This submission to the inquiry seeks to draw the Committee's attention to the adverse consequences that have arisen for Print Radio Tasmania following implementation of the NDIS.

Print Radio Tasmania (PRT) has for almost forty years provided a valuable reading and information service to the more than half of the Tasmanian community with a print disability such as vision loss or impairment, are functionally illiterate, have a physical disability, or are aged or infirm. Throughout this period PRT has been well-supported financially by a succession of Tasmanian Governments, in recognition of PRT's valuable community service activities.

The implementation of the NDIS has resulted in the abrupt cessation of State Government funding: - we understand in the expectation that the NDIS would take over the State's funding role in the future. This has not and will not happen, as the NDIS has no plans to provide funding for organisations such as PRT which do not provide one-on-one personal support for people with disability.

The consequences for PRT from this substantial funding loss of about one third of our annual operating costs are bleak indeed and are deeply concerning for the future of this important and well-respected community service organisation.

We respectfully request therefore that the Committee take the adverse consequences for PRT arising from the implementation of the NDIS fully into account in its deliberations.



Elizabeth Macdonald
President

PRINT RADIO TASMANIA INC.

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO DISABILITY SERVICES IN TASMANIA

BACKGROUND

This submission is made on behalf of Print Radio Tasmania Inc. (PRT), a not-for-profit organisation which has been providing radio reading and information services to Tasmanians with a print disability for almost forty years so that they can participate more fully in society. Our objective is to enrich the lives of our listeners by ensuring information is freely available to anyone who finds it difficult to access or read printed material.

Our team of dedicated volunteers currently pursues this objective by providing an essential reading and information service across Tasmania "on air" every day. PRT broadcasts news, interviews, weather, book readings and much more 24/7 on Hobart 864AM and DAB+, Launceston 106.9FM and Devonport 96.1FM. Listeners can also tune into broadcasts "live" on the PRT website at www.printradiotas.org.au

PRT recognises the need to stay "current" in a rapidly changing world. To this end, we are actively engaged in becoming more innovative and in broadening the services we provide to those with a print disability. A sustainable future for PRT and the achievement of these important goals of enhanced service and innovation will depend on securing ongoing financial support from a diverse range of sources, including the Tasmanian Government.

UNDERSTANDING OUR TARGET AUDIENCE

It is not generally understood that PRT's target audience of print-disabled people embraces at least fifty percent of Tasmania's adult population. By print disability we mean people who, for whatever reason, are unable to access the printed word. This includes, but is not limited to:-

- the estimated 0.8% of the population who are blind or vision impaired (RPH website).
- the estimated 4.0% of the population who are physically disabled through age, illness or infirmity (RPH website).
- the 48% of the Tasmanian population who lack the literacy and numeracy skills for life and work (26TEN website).

Collectively these three groups comprise over fifty percent of Tasmania's "over fifteens" population, making a potential listening audience of well over 200,000 people. These are the people who make up a disproportionately large component of our society and whose

lives PRT is endeavouring to enrich. Regrettably, the size of PRT's actual listening audience at any time remains unclear, as the high cost of carrying out a reliable listener survey remains beyond the reach of a small not-for-profit organisation such as ours.

PRINT RADIO TASMANIA AND THE NDIS

PRT operates on a "shoe string " annual budget of around \$250,000 per annum, has two employees and relies heavily on a wonderful team of over 80 volunteers to carry most of the workload.

In the past PRT has been funded by a mix of State and Federal grants, augmented by donations and bequests from various sources. The Tasmanian Government provided financial support to PRT from the date of the organisation's inception in June 1982 until June 2019, when funding was to be abruptly discontinued following the introduction of the NDIS. Our understanding is that this decision was made by Government in the expectation that the NDIS would take over the State's funding role in the future. It is a matter of record that this has not happened, the NDIS having no plans to provide funding for organisations such as PRT which do not provide one-on-one personal support for people with disabilities. We understand that a suggestion from PRT at that time that the Government consider the possibility that continuation of funding from the State, or its termination be at least deferred as had occurred in other States, was declined. As it happened a delay in the introduction of the NDIS led to State Government funding continuing in part during 2019/20, with funding discontinued after 30 June 2020.

CONSEQUENCES FOR PRINT RADIO TASMANIA

The cessation of Government funding equal to around one third of PRT's annual operating costs has created an unsustainable financial dilemma for PRT. We have no option at present other than to call on PRT's retained earnings to close this substantial funding gap:- an action which, if allowed to continue, will have a predictable and inevitable outcome. Bridging the funding gap from private sector donations and the like is unlikely to succeed, unless the lack of Government support for PRT's community service activities arising from the withdrawal of Government funding is reversed.

These deeply concerning matters led to a request to the Government in September 2020 for the restoration of funding to a minimum of \$75,000 per annum and preferably an increase to \$100,00 per annum:- this compares with the average Government grant received for each of the three years ending 30 June 2019 of \$82,000 per annum. Our request for the reinstatement of Government funding was declined.

It seems to us that the NDIS has failed to live up to community expectations in that it is unable to support charities such as PRT that do not offer direct personal assistance for people with disabilities, irrespective of the benefit that charity brings to that community. At the same time we have great difficulty in understanding why, after almost forty years of collaboration with PRT, the Government has seemingly abandoned the large cohort of the State's population who live each day with a print disability.

NEW INITIATIVES RELEVANT TO THIS SUBMISSION

The two initiatives outlined below serve to illustrate how PRT can add value to existing activities through collaborative arrangements that are to the benefit of both parties. The first example is of a ten-year Government initiative to improve literacy and numeracy in Tasmania. The second example relates to the long-term dementia research and education activities being undertaken in Tasmania.

PRT is of the view that there are many other such opportunities yet to be identified, but which could ultimately lead to PRT becoming the “go-to” centre for relevant community benefit information and action.

1.The 26TEN Program

The 26TEN program is a ten-year Government initiative, aimed at raising awareness and helping Tasmanians improve their literacy and numeracy skills. These aims are consistent with PRT’s own objectives for the print disabled in the Tasmanian community. PRT has therefore become a member of the 26TEN network, bringing with it the additional dimension of “on- air” capabilities as a means of communicating the 26TEN message to a much wider audience, for the mutual benefit of both parties.

This PRT initiative has so far resulted in a number of interviews with high-profile participants in the 26TEN network, each of whom has described their 26TEN involvement in their own way for the benefit of our listeners and prospective 26TEN clients. Each of these interviews has been broadcast by PRT, remains available on the PRT website and can also be accessed from the 26TEN website. The interviews are to be followed by the broadcasting of a number of 26TEN success stories which are currently only available on the 26TEN website, with the objective of communicating the benefits of participation in the 26TEN programs to a wider audience.

This initial collaboration between PRT and 26TEN is showing great promise and is an excellent illustration of the way in which organisations with similar objectives can jointly promote or pursue common goals to the benefit of both parties, by leveraging the inherent strengths of each of them.

It is somewhat ironic that the withdrawal of Government funding for PRT may eventually adversely impact on PRT’s ability to maximise the benefit to be gained by the Government’s own 26TEN program through mutually beneficial arrangements of this kind.

2.The Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre (The Wicking Centre)

The Wicking Centre carries out multi-disciplinary research into the causes, care and prevention of dementia and offers educational programs closely linked to the Centre's research themes. The work of the Wicking Centre is of direct relevance to Tasmania's ageing population and, by inference, to PRT's target audience.

This second initiative, again instigated by PRT, aims to bring the activities of the Wicking Centre to a wider audience than at present through the medium of radio. To this end, PRT will shortly commence a series of non-technical interviews with key Wicking Centre people, supported by the reading "on-air" of extracts from the Wicking Centre monthly newsletters. It is expected that a similar arrangement for interchange of information between the PRT and Wicking websites will develop in due course, to the mutual benefit of both parties.

REQUEST TO THE COMMITTEE

It is clear from the foregoing that, with the benefit of dependable financial support from Government, Print Radio Tasmania has provided an excellent service to the Tasmanian community over a period of almost forty years. PRT is strongly committed to continuing and enhancing this service. It is therefore most unfortunate that the creation of the NDIS and the resultant withdrawal of State Government funding has occurred, with unintended but severe consequences for the ongoing financial viability and operation of PRT.

It is a matter of fact that the NDIS does not support charities such as PRT that do not offer direct personal assistance to people with disabilities, irrespective of the benefit that charity brings to the community. In these circumstances PRT does not believe that the State Government would deliberately abandon the very large cohort of the State's population who comprises the print disadvantaged, people who have few if any other ways of getting vital information.

It is against this background that we request the Committee to take the adverse consequences for PRT arising from the implementation of the NDIS into account in its deliberations.

This submission is made under the Committee Terms of Reference Articles 1, 2, 3 and 5.



Elizabeth Macdonald
President
2 April 2021