



Radio Prominence on Smart Speakers

Submission of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA)

The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts on its proposals paper for radio prominence on smart speakers.

MEAA is the most established union and industry advocate for workers in the media, film, music, and arts industries, with a history going back more than 110 years.

Response to the proposals paper

The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance congratulates the Government on proposed reforms to ensure the prominence of radio on smart speakers. The proposed reforms play an important role in ensuring the sustainability of the sector and safeguarding its crucial public interest role.

Radio broadcasting is a crucial component of both the news media and music industries in Australia. The sector employs nearly 5,500 people in Australia¹, including nearly 500 radio journalists² and 1,600 radio presenters³.

Beyond this, radio plays a crucial public interest role. Radio is a key source of news, current affairs, and other public interest matters. It is particularly crucial in emergency situations, where other mediums for up-to-date information may be scarce.⁴ Radio is also a critical source of local and hyperlocal news for those living in regional areas. It also offers an interactive platform between audiences and presenters, offering an important way for local voices to be heard.⁵

Radio also plays a critical public interest role in promoting local Australian music. Commercial radio outlets in Australia are subject to Australian music content quotas, courtesy of the Commercial Radio Industry Code of Practice, and key community and public radio stations like Triple J and FBI Radio have a long history of promoting Australian talent.⁶

The role of radio in promoting Australian music is increasingly important in an era where streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music dominate our listening behaviours. ACMA reports that 70% of Australians used a streaming service in 2023, with the highest audiences aged 18-24, where 94% listened to a music streaming service.⁷

Unlike commercial radio in Australia, streaming companies are not subject to Australian content quotas and therefore are not obliged to make their algorithmic recommender

systems promote Australian content. They also provide no analogous service for local news or the provision of information in emergency situations.

The uptake of streaming is in turn related to an increased consumption of smart speakers, a product market dominated by Amazon, Google, and Apple.⁸ These multinationals effectively act as a 'digital gatekeeper' to the technology and promote access to particular audio providers in return for payment or revenue sharing deals.

As Australian radio providers often cannot compete with these global companies, they are being effectively shut out from the technology. MEAA therefore strongly agrees with the Government's view that radio prominence on smart speakers should be provided without the imposition of a fee, charge, or other form of monetary payment.

MEAA also supports the Governments' view that no alteration to radio content should be permitted by smart speaker providers. This measure will prevent smart speaker providers from inserting advertising or other content into existing radio broadcasts for their own private gain.

Furthermore, MEAA believes that a nominated access pathway is preferable, as this maximises control and income for radio service providers, rather than via third party aggregator services. This will prevent gatekeeping by aggregators and/or the imposition of a payment for services.

We also encourage the Government to extend these reforms to audio devices used in cars. This is a particularly important market for radio outlets, as a large portion of radio listening is commuter-based.⁹

References

- ¹ IBISWorld (2024) *Radio Broadcasting in Australia*,
<https://my.ibisworld.com/au/en/industry/J5610/performance>
- ² Jobs and Skills Australia (2021) *Radio Journalists*,
<https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/occupation-and-industry-profiles/occupations/212414-radio-journalists>
- ³ Jobs and Skills Australia (2021) *Radio Presenters*,
<https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/occupation-and-industry-profiles/occupations/212113-radio-presenters>
- ⁴ Commonwealth of Australia (2001) *Local Voices: An inquiry into regional radio*, p. 109,
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_representatives_Committees?url=cita/regional_radio/report/front.pdf
- ⁵ Ewart (2013) 'Local people, local places, local voices and local spaces: How talkback radio in Australia provides hyper-local news through mini-narrative sharing', *Journalism* 15(6): 790-807
- ⁶ Commonwealth of Australia (2001) *Local Voices: An inquiry into regional radio*, p. 109,
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_representatives_Committees?url=cita/regional_radio/report/front.pdf
- ⁷ ACMA (2023) *How we watch and listen to content*, <https://www.acma.gov.au/publications/2023-12/report/communications-and-media-australia-how-we-watch-and-listen-content>
- ⁸ Statista (2024) *Smart speaker ownership by brand in Australia as of September 2024*,
<https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1187985/smart-speaker-ownership-by-brand-in-australia>
- ⁹ IBISWorld (2024) *Radio Broadcasting in Australia*,
<https://my.ibisworld.com/au/en/industry/J5610/performance>