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Submission to the Commerce Committee on the Radio New Zealand Amendment Bill (30-1)

Introduction

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 42 Nationally Organised. It has 31 Branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies. The Council's functions are to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussions and action. NCWNZ welcomes the opportunity to consider the Radio New Zealand Amendment Bill.

The response has been prepared by the Consumer Affairs Standing Committee following circulation of questions to NCW members about the amendments to the Radio New Zealand Act 1995 and the new Charter resulting from the Parliamentary Review by the Commerce Committee. It has also been reviewed by a member of the NCWNZ Board and the Parliamentary Watch Committee of the National Council of Women of New Zealand. It is pleasing that the Government is prepared to support this revised and stronger Charter for Radio New Zealand.

NCWNZ responses from members generally support the proposed amendments.

Clause 4 - Interpretation. Section 2 definition of "commercial free".

The insertion of a definition to amend the wording "commercial free" is supported and members strongly agree that Radio New Zealand continues to have no advertising or sponsorship and accept that this does not include any announcements by Radio New Zealand of its own services.

Clause 5 – New Section 8 - Charter.

It was agreed that the division of the Charter into two parts – Purpose and Delivery – achieved clarity in setting out the Charter of the public radio company. It ensured the objectives were more easily understood, and identified what the New Zealand tax payer may expect in the provision of these services.

Clause 5 – New Section 8A - Principles of Operation.

Some members made comments about funding and considered that failure to increase funding to ensure that the Charter can be properly implemented would be of concern.

In supporting the amendments to the Radio New Zealand Bill, NCWNZ strongly recommends that there is adequate funding provided in the operating budget to meet any outlined changes and research conducted annually or from time to time.

Clause 5 – New Section 8B - Review of Charter.

Members supported the review of the Charter by the House of Representatives at intervals of not less than 5 years and considered this to be important to effect necessary amendments and changes on a regular basis.

Clause 5 – New Section 8C - Reporting.

Members agree that an assessment of the extent to which the public radio company performance fulfils its Charter should be included in its annual report. A performance review available to the public was considered to be necessary to provide information about annual research relating to current evidences, any research conducted from time to time (including people not in its current audience) and the measures, if any, taken as a result of the research. This was considered important and necessary to ensure that the expectations are being met and the reasons of non-performance assessed and reported.

Conclusion

NCWNZ supports the amendments to the Radio New Zealand Act 1995 and the new Radio New Zealand Charter.

Resolutions passed by NCWNZ over many years reflect ongoing support for a public broadcasting system which is responsible for complete national coverage, that is viable, politically independent, and impartial. This will enable the provision of programmes of the highest possible standards which meet the needs of New Zealand audiences as citizens, not simply as consumers.

NCWNZ members thank the Select Committee for the opportunity to make comments on this Bill.

Elizabeth Bang

Jan Brown

National President

Convener: Consumer Affairs Standing Committee