

For immediate release

16 January 2013

RESPONSE TO THE RESIGNATION OF RNZ CEO PETER CAVANAGH

The CBB applauds Peter Cavanagh for steadfastly keeping RNZ commercial free despite pressure from the National Government to commercialise NZ's favourite radio station. We urge the RNZ Board to recognise that the vast majority of listeners are against any kind of commercialisation of RNZ, as they decide who will replace Peter Cavanagh at the helm of New Zealand's iconic national radio broadcaster.

"If Radio New Zealand ain't broke, don't fix it!"

Radio New Zealand again topped the ratings last week with Nielsen research showing RNZ National had a greater share of listeners than any other station in NZ¹. This proves New Zealanders have an appetite for non-commercial news and information radio.

At the height of this success RNZ CEO, Peter Cavanagh has announced he will be retiring later this year. Mr Cavanagh is applauded for his efforts to strengthen RNZ, while resisting pressure to allow sponsorship or other forms of commercialisation of this great Kiwi institution. That pressure is heightened by the government's funding freeze, funding which was already recognised as deficient by a KPMG report in 2007 (MCH Baseline Review 2007).

Despite the government's neglect, RNZ has achieved much with international recognition for Kim Hill and consistently excellent audience feedback. As Cavanagh points out on the RNZ website "Public support for Radio New Zealand is the highest we've ever recorded, Charter approval ratings are at near record levels and we're the clear market leader in online broadcasting."

Today in an email to staff Cavanagh repeated that sentiment: "We can all take enormous pride in the fact that New Zealand's only national public service broadcaster - the only media organisation which exists solely for the purpose of serving the public interest - is also the country's most successful radio service."

Any criticism that Cavanagh resisted innovation seems to be ill-founded as RNZ is close to announcing a new digital radio channel targeting youth – the first of its kind in NZ.

The real story here is that the National Government - having fully commercialised TVNZ and done away with non-commercial TV channels Stratos, TV6 & 7 - is also slowly strangling RNZ to the point that it cannot survive. In 2007 a KPMG report to the Ministry of Culture and Heritage found that RNZ was already running as efficiently as possible. It recommended a funding increase to allow RNZ to continue its high standards. But the following year, the National Government froze the RNZ budget and that freeze still exists with RNZ operating on the same budget as 5 years ago.

The CBB believes this is a shockingly poor way to treat our national radio broadcaster: the station we rely on in times of emergency, disaster and crisis. We note the repeated absence on RNZ of our Prime Minister (who prefers to goof around on commercial stations) and many of his Cabinet colleagues. This fact and frequent remarks made by Ministers, makes it clear that the decision to freeze funding to RNZ is an attempt to influence the station's ability to present in-depth news and current affairs. This contradicts statutory requirements that the government does not influence RNZ editorial stance and may even be illegal.

ENDS

1 – The RNZ commissioned 'All New Zealand Radio Survey' by Nielsen is more reliable than Research International's Commercial Radio Audience Measurement Surveys for the following reasons:

- The commercial survey is taken for only 6 weeks a year whereas the Nielsen survey keeps rolling almost all year (40 weeks) smoothing out any bubbles in audience caused by competitions or special promotions.
- The commercial survey covers only the three main cities twice a year and ten smaller cities once a year whereas the Nielsen survey covers the whole country.

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