

14 April 2014

RNZ DESPERATELY NEEDS PROPER FUNDING

The Coalition for Better Broadcasting (officially launching Monday) is calling on the government to end its six-year funding freeze of Radio New Zealand, and provide adequate funding for the national broadcaster.

“Radio New Zealand is important to 86% of all New Zealanders* and RNZ National consistently outperforms the commercial stations winning awards and ratings surveys each year” says Myles Thomas, Chief Executive of the newly-formed Coalition for Better Broadcasting. “RNZ National appeals to listeners from all walks of life, all over the country – rural, urban, men, women and right across the political spectrum.

“But our government ignores the importance of RNZ and has condemned it to struggle through a recession with it’s funding frozen at 2008 levels.

When the government imposed the freeze Radio New Zealand was already struggling. A 2007 independent audit by KPMG concluded that the organisation was seriously under-funded, under-staffed and under-resourced, and recommended immediate funding increases of \$6.7m, with further increases each year.

Instead the government has effectively cut RNZ’s budget by 9% as rents, power and other expenses have risen steadily. At a public meeting last week it was revealed that RNZ has survived by selling land around its Auckland transmission site, selling off its grand pianos and paying lower than average wages.

But RNZ has run out of assets to sell and efficiencies to make. It’s lost many experienced staff and indications are that this year the lack of funding will have a big impact on the broadcaster, and listeners too.

Thomas said the five-year freeze was unheard of internationally. “No other broadcaster of its type has been subjected to this kind of treatment by a government. Similar countries provide far greater funding for radio (see note below) and even Iceland where one might expect a freeze after facing bankruptcy, funding for the national radio broadcasters has kept pace with inflation.

Which begs the question, why the freeze in New Zealand?

“We think the government has seriously miscalculated the public’s regard for Radio New Zealand”, says Thomas, “but perhaps that is changing. We’re pleased to see government ministers allow themselves to be interviewed on RNZ National after a long period of not fronting up on public issues.”

We urge the government to ‘defrost’ RNZ funding. As the global economy recovers and NZ business/consumer confidence returns **there is simply no reason to continually cut funding to Radio NZ each year.**

The CBB calls on Broadcasting Minister Craig Foss to increase RNZ funding by an extra \$10.2m for financial year 2014/15. This relatively minor amount takes account of inflation and would bring RNZ back to par with the KPMG report’s recommendations.

About the CBB:

The Coalition for Better Broadcasting Trust publicly launches today (14 April 2014). Growing out of the Save Radio NZ and Save TVNZ 7 campaigns, the CBB has taken up the fight for public service broadcasting and media in New Zealand. While commercial broadcasters and interest groups have a ready ear in government, the CBB aims to represent the most important stakeholder of all – the audience.

“We’re planning to tap into the massive groundswell of popularity and publicity that Save RNZ and Save TVNZ 7 raised” says Myles Thomas, CBB Chief Executive “and establish a permanent lobby group to bring back public service television, protect Radio New Zealand and support public service online initiatives.”

Notes re RNZ funding:

- 1 RNZ National is the most listened to station in NZ with 10.3% audience share (source RNZ/Nielsen)
- 2 RNZ funding is significantly lower than similar organisations around the world:
 - BBC radio £669.5m (£10.59 per person)
 - ABC radio \$315.3m AUD (\$13.90 AUD per person)
 - Irish Radio €55m (€11.99 per person)
 - RNZ \$31.86m NZD (\$7.19 NZD per person)
- * Radio New Zealand Value Indices Research carried out by Colmar Brunton Research among the general public. (Telephone survey conducted among randomly selected respondents in March - April 2013. The survey was fully nationwide with a sample of 1003 people aged 15 years and over.)

For more information go to www.betterbroadcasting.co.nz or call Myles Thomas on 021 666297