

Asa Masterman

Dear Sir/Madam,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christian Signal/Channel

In response to Simon Pelling's correspondence of 20 June 2003, I would like to make the following submission of correspondence (6th January 03) already made available to the Department through the Minister's office especially in respect to the following statement from the media release of 20 June 2003.

"While the Government will fully consider the ACCC report, there are very cogent reasons for not supporting two of its recommendations:

- The ACCC raises the possibility that Telstra relinquish its shareholding in Foxtel and its HFC network unless it can be shown that the costs outweigh the perceived benefits of divestiture...."

Copy of correspondence 6th January 03

Correspondence to Foxtel included the following, to which no denial has been given in their reply except the statement, "As your concern appears to be focused on regional Australia, then I recommend your concerns are directed to Austar" – the fact is Foxtel is entirely responsible for Western Australia for example.

The facts that will be expressed would include that: - 78% of a rural and remote community state that they are Christian. That 79% of income of \$1,500 per week or more state they are Christian in this community. That Foxtel has actively denied this community access to Christian programming. That Foxtel was requested to indicate where these figures did not reflect other rural and remote communities in Australia and has not done so. This means that Australia wide that Foxtel is denying access via its satellite service, which is the only feasible delivery service, access to Christian programming. That it uses an excuse of entering agreements so competition has been denied to these communities and so deny access to Christian programming.

That the General Manager of Telstra expressed recently on the Sunday program broadcast by Channel Nine that Telstra places no influence on the programming of Foxtel and that nearly another billion dollars had been poured into pay television. So Foxtel by not programming to whom the community expresses themselves to be is denying Telstra income return for this level of investment. When this was expressed to Telstra in telephone communication I was told to present it to the Telecommunications Ombudsman and that is a course of action amongst others being considered at this time.

Politically this issue has not been addressed but the bureaucracy certainly needs to be aware of the extent the misuse of power is being used in this issue. That the question of who is fit to hold a license will need to be addressed. The political will for that is that no government can afford to deny 78% of people that vote for their local members, who in turn if become part of the majority to form government.

The opportunity of dialogue with Austar has been welcome but is hard to put up any proposal that includes rural and remote Australia without having access for dialogue with Foxtel. That dialogue would have to include a desire to meet these communities needs because if this were done then the switch on rate of PAY-TV would increase and hence a return for the capital invested. This does not leave scope for 'future consideration' (as the future is your next heartbeat just as is the year 2050); it is an excuse for denying the rural and remote community yet again. Please note that I have used Christian programming – this does not limit one to just considering the Australian Christian Channel as they to would need to be prepared to hear, consider and act upon the needs of rural and remote Australia as well.

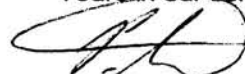
In my last letter to you I stated, "This issue of Christian Television was raised in a public forum and is of public significance, which makes correspondence or the lack of it, a matter of public record.

There is an expression that it takes a grain of sand to infuriate an oyster into action to form a pearl and this word picture is very fitting to this whole exercise.

I am aware of addressing the issue to rural and remote Australia simply because you can take the people out of the 'bush' but you can not take the 'bush' out of the people. That is to say that if you meet the needs of rural and remote people you will also be meeting the needs of people in cities and towns but not necessarily vice versa.

Enclosed is the statistical evidence for each State and Territory as well as the combined figure for Australia as presented to the Minister in the correspondence dated 17th June 03 as part of this submission.

Yours in our Lord's service,

 PETER CLARKE