

Aotearoa Broadcasting Systems and other third tv channel contenders

Aotearoa Broadcasting Systems Incorporated, one of the third television channel applicants, is going on a membership drive to gather more supporters and funds.

With over two thousand members currently, the drive is on for individual membership costing thirty dollars. All Maori people are eligible because they are members of hapu and iwi. Pakeha are eligible if they belong to any organisation that has among its aims the promotion of Maori culture or race relations, or if they are members of a hapu or iwi through marriage or adoption.

ABS chief executive, Derek Fox says the hearing of applicants before the Broadcasting Tribunal is estimated to cost around ten million dollars, with two applicants telling him they've budgeted on two million dollars apiece just for the hearing costs. He says with that sort of muscle, it's obvious how serious ABS has to be. It's estimated that it'll cost around a hundred million dollars to set up a television network in New Zealand.

Backed by the New Zealand Maori Council, the Bishopric of Aotearoa, the Kohanga Reo Trust, the NZ Students Association and the Maori Women's Welfare League, plus financial members, Aotearoa Broadcasting Systems has already made headway in the competitive television world.

The Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand has agreed to supply transmission services for the ABS

signal at no cost to ABS. Instead it will cost Broadcasting around forty million for the first four years.

Broadcasting has also agreed to top up the overall advertising revenue of TVNZ and ABS to a figure of fifteen per cent of the total. Derek says this means even without any advertising on ABS, a guaranteed sum of at least twenty two million dollars a year based on today's figures will come in.

He says Television New Zealand acknowledges that ABS is the least threat financially and the only contender that has complementary programmes. This backing means ABS has guaranteed funding of eight million dollars.

But what is the difference between the various contenders?

Derek Fox says Aotearoa Broadcasting Systems is the only one not planning to serve up more of the same programmes, that is, high on overseas content and low on local content. He says the channel will have a substantial Maori emphasis within a New Zealand context. Sixty five per cent of the programming will be in English language and thirty five per cent in Maori. That's why it's wrong he says to label ABS 'Maori television', anymore than saying the present television setup is 'Pakeha television'.

He's sceptical of the other channel applicants like ITV and Energy Source TV who are promising some ethnic programmes. He says ITV's four hours per week of multicultural access programmes largely feature after ten thirty at night. And Energy Source is look-

ing at slotting fifteen minutes a week on Sunday evenings. He says another contender, Televid Three has gone for the mainstreaming line with Maori content being included where appropriate.

He says with proposals like that, the Maori people should look closely. Already he says Television New Zealand, which is legally obligated under its warrant and as an arm of the government, to cater for the needs of the Maori people, has reneged on these obligations. What he sees are more promises and the plea to 'trust us'.

Derek says ABS would extend the range of television viewing within this country because it is committed not to buying the A team, the B team and C team, but rather using regional broadcast facilities from the marae and community centres around Aotearoa.

Over five hundred high quality jobs will also be created, some involving new technology from producers through to journalists.

This is an area that draws fire from Derek Fox, because he believes the government is more interested in stop-gap PEP type jobs rather than meaningful careers that will lift a people as well as individuals. And he says Maori politics are already making divisions among the applicants with various tribal affiliations siding with different contenders. As well prominent Maori people have accepted honorary positions on applicants' boards.

While he says that's good that Maori needs are appearing on the agenda, the control stays firmly in the hands of Pakeha shareholders who are only in the third channel race to make money. An example he gives of the profit motive is that a typical overseas programme like Hill St Blues costs TVNZ two and a half thousand dollars an episode. The first commercial break alone is worth four thousand dollars. That's profit. Compared with this is local drama that can cost around three quarters of a million an hour to make.

He sees the independence of ABS as being crucial to reflecting a bi-cultural view of New Zealand. The Maori perspective will be encompassed through extensive use of the Maori language and also in programmes covering tangihanga, kohanga reo and rangatahi through to talkback on different marae.

Comedy, music and waiata tawhito plus korero a rohe (regional reports) will also find its way to the screen.

