



Radio New Zealand Amendment Bill

30—1

Report of the Commerce Committee

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Radio New Zealand Amendment Bill

Recommendation

The Commerce Committee has examined the Radio New Zealand Amendment Bill, and recommends that it be passed.

Introduction

The bill would amend the Radio New Zealand Act 1995 to update Radio New Zealand's charter. The new charter results from a parliamentary review, which the Act requires at five-yearly intervals. The review was carried out in 2006, but did not issue in legislation during the term of the previous Government. The enactment of this bill would complete the review process.

Background

Radio New Zealand began its charter review in 2005 by examining the charters of various comparable public broadcasters overseas. The draft was approved by its board of governors and the Minister of Broadcasting, and an extensive public consultation process was carried out. In total 165 submissions were received, as a result of which several minor amendments were made to the draft charter.

The Commerce Committee of the 48th Parliament reported to the House on 22 March 2006, noting that it considered the consultation process to have been satisfactory and that it was satisfied with the charter's drafting.

Committee consideration

We received and considered one submission, which supported the bill's amendments to the charter.

We took advice from the Ministry for Culture and Heritage and received assistance from the Clerk of the House of Representatives on whether to propose an amendment to the bill requiring Radio New Zealand to broadcast summaries of parliamentary proceedings. This advice was sought in relation to the fact that Radio New Zealand no longer broadcasts *Today in Parliament* and *Week in Parliament*, programmes funded by New Zealand On Air and the Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives.

We were advised that the arrangement for broadcast of *Today in Parliament* and *Week in Parliament* is contractually controlled by the Office of the Clerk, and that the broadcaster has no editorial input. We were also advised that the reason why the programme is no longer broadcast on Radio New Zealand is that the Office of the Clerk and Radio New Zealand could not reach agreement over production issues relating to Radio New Zealand's need to exercise editorial control.

Compelling Radio New Zealand to broadcast any programme is precluded by current legislation. Any requirement to provide dedicated coverage of parliamentary matters and

impartial day-by-day accounts of proceedings would be more appropriately considered in the next charter review.

Labour Party view

The Labour members support the full live coverage of the proceedings of the House that Radio New Zealand provides under contract to the Office of the Clerk. However, we believe regular summaries of the proceedings of the House would be particularly valuable, as few people have the time to follow the live broadcasts. We believe reporting tends to focus on Government announcements and activities rather than the business of Parliament. The programmes *Today in Parliament* and *Week in Parliament*, which were broadcast on Radio New Zealand from 1994 to 2005, were commendable as they provided an impartial summary of the proceedings of the House, with background but no editorial overlay.

It is disappointing that Radio New Zealand decided to drop these programmes in 2005. Variations on the programmes are now broadcast by several private radio stations,¹ and although we welcome the extended audience this has allowed, we are concerned that these programmes are no longer reaching the audience Radio New Zealand caters for.

The Labour members are glad to see that the Office of the Clerk shares our desire to increase the information broadcast about Parliament's activities, and to widen the audience receiving it. The office is considering several initiatives to this end, including making video of parliamentary debates available on demand through the website www.inthehouse.co.nz, broadcasting select committee hearings, and reviewing the current approach to *Today in Parliament* and *Week in Parliament*.

The Labour members support these efforts, but believe that New Zealand's public broadcaster should be providing both dedicated coverage of parliamentary matters and an impartial day-by-day account of proceedings.

¹ Radio Live, Kiwi FM, Access Radio, Radio Dunedin, Community Access stations, and Scoop (as podcasts), as well as a Pacific edition on Radio New Zealand International.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The Radio New Zealand Amendment Bill was referred to the committee on 24 June 2009. The closing date for submissions was 13 August 2009. We received and considered one submission.

We received advice from the Ministry for Culture and Heritage and assistance from the Clerk of the House of Representatives.

Committee members

Hon Lianne Dalziel (Chairperson)

John Boscawen

Charles Chauvel (until 14 October 2009 and from 18 November 2009)

Clare Curran

Te Ururoa Flavell

Raymond Huo (between 14 October and 18 November 2009)

Melissa Lee

Peseta Sam Lotu-Iiga

Katrina Shanks

Jonathan Young