

## **Abstract**

In 1967, the Post-Master General's Department (PMG) and the Australian Broadcasting Control Board (ABCB) formally permitted use of the 'two-way' radio technique in Australia. While radio broadcasters had infrequently employed the technique from 1949 for news and information relays, the *modi operandi* were bound by technological developments, and further subject to industry regulation and Commonwealth telephone privacy legislation. With the introduction of the Swedish 'beep-a-phone' in 1964 – a device allowing a caller and compère to be broadcast 'on-air' simultaneously after only a few seconds delay – the debate turned to moral questions regarding the involvement, character and conduct of members of the general public participating in radio programmes. This paper will examine the protracted process preceding the introduction of talk-back radio in Australia, with reference to legislative and regulatory restrictions, and additionally, the commercial radio sector's enthusiastic adoption of the technique.

In 1967, the Australian Broadcasting Control Board formally overturned a statutory ruling which prohibited the recording of telephone conversations for general radio broadcasting purposes. Although talk radio became a competitive form of leverage for a media form struggling to find its feet after the introduction of television in Australia in 1956, from 1949 telephone calls on radio were used for quite different purposes. From 1949 onward the ABCB granted occasional permission for the telephone to be used as a news gathering instrument. Although members of the public were not involved in this process, the PMG, and later the ABCB, were reluctant to allow the technique, even for purposes deemed sufficiently serious, such as 'news' gathering. In the 18 year period prior to the restriction being overturned, the arguments employed by the ABCB against use of the technique shifted from recourse to technological constraints, and the private nature of the domestic telephone, to (written and unwritten) moral codes of conduct.

The cautious approach adopted by the ABCB and the Post Office, was in part a response to the limitations of telephonic broadcasting technology, and paradoxically, to advances in this technology. Moreover, the sometimes confused sharing of jurisdiction between the two administrative bodies was used as an advantage by several persistent commercial radio broadcasting stations willing to surmount technological and regulatory hurdles in the quest for programming techniques new to Australian audiences. This control, enshrined in both Commonwealth and statutory regulations, substantially delayed the introduction of 'talkback' radio in Australia, which, when finally introduced, came more than twenty years behind developments in both Britain and the United States.

## News

In October 1949, the PMG received a formal request from the Macquarie Network's 'Radio News and Newsreel Service' for permission to obtain occasional 'short statements by important personalities' recorded by means of a landline telephone connection.<sup>1</sup> The PMG acceded to the request on the condition that the subject of an interview was aware of the recording process, and additionally, that the station was prohibited from using a telephone trunk line for the gathering of such statements.<sup>2</sup>

In December of the same year, the Hobart station 7HO decided to broadcast a series of Christmas messages as part of a local Carols by Candlelight festival. The messages were addressed to the Lord Mayor of Hobart, and included seasonal statements from the Lord Mayor of London, and from the Lord Mayor of each capital city in Australia. Notwithstanding the PMG ban on the recording of trunk-line telephone connections, the task of gathering such statements – including the coordination of the participants as well as the various manual telephone exchange switch operators<sup>3</sup> – would have been complex and subject to delay. 7HO's solution was no less complicated. The station formally requested permission from the PMG to relay these messages locally from an Overseas Telecommunications Company (OTC) coastal radio station at Hobart, via telephone landline, to be received at 7HO's Hobart broadcasting station. 7HO then arranged for the Captain of a DC3 aircraft to fly over Hobart between 10pm and midnight on December 24, in order to relay the original message from each Lord Mayor to the OTC radio

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<sup>1</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, Letter from 3AW, Macquarie to PMG, 18 Oct 1949.

<sup>2</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, Letter from PMG to ABCB, 21 Nov 1949.

<sup>3</sup> Telecom Australia, *The Palace of Winged Words: the Development of Telephone exchanges in Australia*, Melbourne, 1980.

station. The messages were thus relayed via local telephone connection to station 7HO for transmission to the festival, bypassing the need for trunk line connections.

## Regulation

In Australia, the prelude to the introduction of the recording and broadcasting of telephone conversations in 1967 was bound by legislative rulings, and further subject to protracted bureaucratic deliberation. Lesley Johnson notes that 'talkback' dates back to the start of radio broadcasting. As early as 1925, Sydney station 2BL invited listeners to ring the studio and ask questions of the host. Both sides of the conversation were heard on air. However, an early PMG regulation prohibited conversations between individuals on wireless; this regulation prevented wireless competing with the postal and telegraphic services supplied by the PMG's Department.<sup>4</sup> Signalling a shift from the earlier anti-competitive regulatory emphasis, in 1950, a ban on this sort of audience participation was reformulated by way of a clause inserted into the Post & Telegraph telephone regulations<sup>5</sup> prohibiting the recording of telephone conversations, without the formal permission of the PMG.

With the creation of the ABCB as a dedicated broadcasting regulator in 1949, internal debates over the consequences of the use of the technique were complicated initially by the sharing of regulatory control between the PMG and the ABCB. This early bureaucratic collaboration, and the resolution of issues relating to telephonic recordings, was often complicated by the unclear delineation of jurisdiction between the two bodies. The ABCB was responsible for administering the Broadcasting Programme Standards: the statutory regulations governing broadcasting, created in 1958. These included a clause which reflected the broader ruling in the *Post and Telegraph Act*<sup>6</sup>: the Standards forbade the inclusion of recorded telephone calls in any broadcast programme unless special permission was obtained from the Postmaster-General, in consultation with the ABCB. While the newly created ABCB was anxious to assert its own authority and dicta, it was often dependent on the PMG for a final resolution.

Until 1960, official requests made by commercial radio stations for the recording of telephone material fell into two broad categories of content: general statements to be used in items for newsreel and news service broadcasts; and – for use in single and unrelated instances – statements from notable or important public figures. Several opportunistic commercial stations pushed for the technique to be more widely utilised. One Melbourne station manager, citing a rival station's interview with Sir Arthur Warner in 1959, was adamant that his competitor had been granted general permission for such interviews and was anxious to obtain similar approval.<sup>7</sup> He was reminded that the Broadcasting Programme Standards required broadcasters to obtain formal permission in order to record telephone conversations.

In addition to the prohibitive clause in the Board's Programme Standards, the ABCB warned against use of the technique on grounds of the poor technical quality of such broadcasts. The telephone receiver, they argued, was never designed for recording purposes, and was of a far

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, Lesley, *The Unseen Voice: a cultural study of early Australian radio*, Routledge, London, 1988, p25.  
<sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup>

<sup>7</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, ABCB internal correspondence, 7 April 1959. Station manager for station 3UZ maintained that Melbourne stations 3AW and 3DB had received approval to use telephone conversations.

inferior quality to a purpose built studio microphone. The Board's policy was to insist on certain technical standards, cautioning that public invidium might otherwise be directed against either the station or the PMG.<sup>8</sup> In 1950 several audio simulations performed by radio stations 3AW and 2GB were submitted to the PMG as test recordings. Highlighting the poor sound quality of the recordings, ABCB permission was given for use of the technique only when not practicable to use a studio or outside broadcasting equipment.<sup>9</sup>

Despite over a decade of use of the technique for news items and interviews, it was not until 1960, in response to repeated requests for permission from several commercial radio stations, that the ABCB formally laid down a uniform set of conditions to govern the use of recorded telephone conversations.<sup>10</sup>

...The recording of telephone conversations is generally an offence under the Telephone Regulations but [the Board has] decided that recordings may be made by broadcasting organisations to meet their particular requirements under certain circumstances. The approval to record telephone conversations applies only in cases where a person is being interviewed over the telephone for, say, newsreel items and is located within the Commonwealth...<sup>11</sup>

This permission was accompanied by a list of provisions detailing both technical procedures and formally approved apparatus, as well as other instructions intended to protect the subject of the recording. Additionally, a new Parliamentary Act, which came into force from 1960, formally articulated the ABCB's argument premised upon the private nature of the domestic telephone. The *Telephonic Communications (Interception) Act* rendered illegal any attempt to record a telephone conversation without the speaker's knowledge<sup>12</sup>. Reiterating this ruling, the ABCB conditions stipulated that the recording procedure was to be arranged in advance, and that any statements obtained via these means were not to be broadcast direct from the telephone conversation.<sup>13</sup>

Although no clear reasons were given at the time, the earlier PMG restriction on the use of telephone trunk-lines in 1949 recognised the technological limitations of the use of long distance telephone connections. A decade later, despite considerable improvements in trunk line technology, the ABCB's condition that telephone interviewees be located within the Commonwealth was less convincing as an argument on technological grounds. Regardless, in 1961 a request by radio station 4BK to connect to Hawaii for a telephone interview with the entertainer Elvis Presley was granted.<sup>14</sup> However, the ABCB's exemplification of newsreel items adumbrated the Board's growing wariness toward approving content deemed to be insufficiently serious in nature.

Moreover, the contradiction existing in the use of both public and private technology for two-way radio broadcasting was evident in the ABCB's concern to preserve the 'private' nature of the domestic telephone, on moral, ethical and technological grounds. Far from being deemed a

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<sup>8</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, letter from ABCB to PMG, 7 Dec 1949.

<sup>9</sup> 3AW and 2GB proposed to use radio telephone interviews conducted and recorded by the Sydney Morning Herald news service. 2GB already shared news resources with the SMH.

<sup>10</sup> These regulations were initially drawn up for the ABC in 1958, but were extended to all commercial stations in 1960.

<sup>11</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, PMG memo, 12 Aug 1960. See also same file, PMG memo, 11 Sep 1958.

<sup>12</sup> Commonwealth of Australia: Parliamentary Acts. *Telephonic Communications (Interception) Act*, 1960.

<sup>13</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, PMG memo, 12 Aug 1960.

<sup>14</sup> On condition that applications be submitted to the OTC and the PMG.

neutral technology, in this view the telephone was considered an instrument not designed for use in 'public' broadcasting.

The terms of the new ABCB conditions were not incorporated into the Programme Standards. Similarly, in internal correspondence, the PMG stated that the technique was to be recognised as an "emergency" facility.<sup>15</sup> Reflecting this principle, the ABCB was conspicuously silent on the issue. Consistent with the Board's intention to restrict use of the practice, no mention was made in the ABCB Annual Report for 1960-61. The ABCB Annual Report 1961-62 again made no mention of the changes, obliquely referring only to the 'observance of good taste and common sense in the presentation of programmes'.<sup>16</sup>

## Listener participation

In the United States, the discovery by broadcasters of the telephone as a 'new' vehicle for inviting listener involvement occurred as early as the 1930s, when stations invited listeners to 'phone in with comments, which were then relayed by the announcer.<sup>17</sup> One of the first two-way conversations was broadcast on-air in 1945, by a late night D.J. in New York.<sup>18</sup> In the 1950s, the form continued to expand, increasing in popularity throughout the 1960s. In 1961, Los Angeles station, KABC, was one of the first stations to introduce a dedicated 'talk' format.<sup>19</sup>

At a broader level, the concept of audience participation was not new to radio programming in Australia. From the early days of radio broadcasting, game shows and radio quizzes, such as Bob Dyer's long running *Pick-a-Box*<sup>20</sup> were performed in front of, and involved, members of the public who formed 'live' audiences. In a more pedestrian manner, listeners were also able to offer feedback in the form of letters and other correspondence to individual radio stations. One enterprising Brisbane station offered listeners the chance to speak 'on air', circumventing the restrictions on the broadcasting of telephone conversations, by offering a free taxi ride into the station, and morning tea, for the first housewife to ring through to the station.<sup>21</sup>

In 1961, however, several commercial stations introduced (or threatened to introduce) radio programmes incorporating the use of a telephone as central to the show's concept. The introduction of this thematic programming marked a profound shift in the motivation of the use of the technique. The advent of direct telephone contact from listener to broadcaster offered possibilities for an immediacy, intimacy and popularity surpassing earlier channels. It substantially stiffened the resolve of the PMG and the ABCB. The Victorian office of the PMG demanded a withdrawal of the broadcaster 3DB's new programme *What Do You Think?* in May

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<sup>15</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, ABCB Minute Paper, 9 April 1959.

<sup>16</sup> ABCB, *Annual Report of the Australian Broadcasting Control Board*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1961-62, p20.

<sup>17</sup> Scott, Gini Graham, *Can We Talk?: the power and influence of talk shows*, Insight Books, New York, 1996, p36.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Munson, Wayne, *All Talk: the talkshow in media culture*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1993, p37.

<sup>20</sup> Jacqueline Kent, *Out of the Bakelite Box: the heyday of Australian radio*, ABC Enterprises, Crows Nest, 1990.

<sup>21</sup> *B & T: Broadcasting and Television*. Sydney: Greater Publications, 1961-1967. Undated clipping.

1961,<sup>22</sup> while the ABCB began internal discussions regarding action to be taken against stations 2UE and 2SM, who had also commenced similar programmes.<sup>23</sup>

Following these developments, the broadcaster guidelines issued by the ABCB in 1960 were altered. Despite producing a concession allowing listeners to contact radio stations directly, rather than the station initiating the call<sup>24</sup>, a concomitant condition barred use of the practice if utilised for what was, in the ABCB's view, insufficiently serious programming matter. This definitively ruled out material which was not news related; in particular, 'listener participation' programmes which were pejoratively classified as 'novelty' items.<sup>25</sup> The formal objection to the use of the technique as a gimmick built upon earlier arguments, including the 'private' nature of the telephone line, and the poor quality of the telephone receiver for recording and broadcasting purposes. Although tolerated if ostensibly unavoidable, programming constructed solely around the use of the telephone violated the Board's preference for contingency use.

### The "beep-a-phone"

In April 1964, with the introduction of a new mechanical device, old questions and concerns resurfaced as several commercial stations leapt into action in order to take advantage of the new technology. The marketing and sale of the Swedish 'beep-a-phone' in Australia heralded not only significant technological improvements for the recording of telephone conversations, and a permanent solution to possible contravention of the *Telephonic Communications (Interception) Act*; it also steered the focus of the debate to the role of members of the public as participants in the broadcasting process.

As implied by the name, the beep-a-phone was designed to produce an intermittent beep to alert both speakers to the fact that the conversation was being recorded. The device recorded the dialogue of both caller and compère simultaneously, reducing the mechanical complexity of this task, and allowing the call to be rebroadcast as a two-way conversation with only 4-5 seconds' delay. Although markedly improving the clarity of the sound recorded, allaying some of the ABCB's technological concerns regarding the poor sound quality produced by the standard domestic telephone mouthpiece, calls were still subject to technical hiccups such as noisy lines and dialling impulses.<sup>26</sup>

At this time, *what* was being said on air, *who* was saying it, and moreover, the immediacy of this performance, became new areas of concern. The ABCB argued that in the past the verbal content of broadcast material had been controlled by either a process of editing before the material was broadcast, or alternatively, if the interchange had been broadcast directly, that the extemporaneous nature of the interaction was ameliorated by a prior selection of speakers. In this view, the choice of noted public figures and personalities for interview reinforced the authority or status of the speaker, justifying the value of the broadcast and anticipating audience interest in

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<sup>22</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, ABCB notes, May 1961. See also *The Melbourne Herald*, "Messages Ban in DB Programme", May 17 1961, p.3.

<sup>23</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, ABCB memo, 20 July 1961.

<sup>24</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, PMG memo, 12 Aug 1960. See also same file, PMG memo, 11 Sep 1958.

<sup>25</sup> ABCB, *Broadcasting Programme Standards*, Melbourne, 1960.

<sup>26</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, ABCB internal correspondence, 28 April 1964.

the ensuing conversation. Conversely, as Munson notes, a direct form of listener participation programme could instead serve to mitigate a modernist 'culture of expertise'.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, as radio stations were no longer bound by the condition that they initiate a telephone call for recording purposes, the prospect of lending air-time to an unknown, unseen, and unscreened caller, 'whose bona fides had little chance of being properly assessed',<sup>28</sup> was, in the Board's view, far from satisfactory. The ABCB learned of the new beep-a-phone device on April 20, only three days before station 3AK took it to air on *The Malcolm Searle Programme*. An anxious ABCB programme monitoring report cited the example of one caller to this show, who was later found to be known to the police, and who considered her 'unbalanced'.<sup>29</sup> The offending station was later held to be in breach of various sections in the Programme Standards, including broadcasting matter considered injurious to 'community well-being or morality' and to the 'serious presentation of moral and social issues'.<sup>30</sup>

During a Control Board meeting in May it was decided that if 3AK made a formal application to use the beep a phone, then untendered, the request would be favourably viewed only if each conversation was recorded in full and examined and approved by a 'responsible' officer of the station.<sup>31</sup> However, the ABCB almost immediately retracted this statement<sup>32</sup>, citing recently acquired knowledge of two new developments. The ABCB alleged it had only just learned of the Post Office request for Melbourne station 3DB to withdraw the programme *What do you think?* in 1961. Additionally, in March 1962, in response to a television station proposing use of a tape-loop delay system for a variety programme quiz, the Post Office had issued directives for the use of normal telephone facilities:

- a) the telecasting of two-way conversations is not permitted;
- b) a called party may be pre-recorded for a news interview type of programme only if normal landline facilities cannot be provided at the time required. It may not be broadcast simultaneously;
- c) for studio entertainment purposes, the calling part (in studio) may be simultaneously broadcast through normal microphones and may repeat a called party's reply. But the called party's voice must not be broadcast by means of normal telephone service facilities.<sup>33</sup>

Certainly, the timing of the ABCB response to this 'new' knowledge was opportune. Nonetheless, just as in 1956 when an announcement was made that the Television Programming Standards would be drafted across to radio,<sup>34</sup> television could be seen to exercise influence on decisions relating to the regulation of radio broadcasting. With the introduction and subsequent popularity of television, radio broadcasters had to face competition for audiences from the newer, visually engaging medium. The popular new form of listener participation via telephone offered lucrative possibilities for attracting radio audiences. In recognition of this, television producers had begun to incorporate viewer participation with similar programming techniques.

<sup>27</sup> Munson, Wayne, *All Talk: the talkshow in media culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993, p37.

<sup>28</sup> NAA: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, ABCB Agendum no. 1964/81, 5 May 1964.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> ABCB, *Broadcasting Programme Standards*, Melbourne, 1960.

<sup>31</sup> NAA: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, ABCB Agendum no 1964/81, 5 May 1964.

<sup>32</sup> In a supplement to the main agendum

<sup>33</sup> NAA: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, supplement to ABCB agendum no. 1964/81, 5 May 1964.

<sup>34</sup> Miller & Turner, 'Radio' in Cunningham, S. & Turner, G. (eds.), *The Media & Communications in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2002, p.138.

In light of the Post Office rulings for television, the ABCB withdrew the recommendation in the main agendum, and 3AK was informed by the PMG that as the programme was not specifically a news or news-reel session approval could not be given, and that broadcasting of the programme should cease.<sup>35</sup>

In the midst of the deliberations over telephonic programming, Hobart station 7HO began a new programme called *Ringalong*, which invited listener discussion of controversial topics.<sup>36</sup> Three days later, Melbourne's 3AW inaugurated a similar programme *The Norman Banks Show*. Meanwhile, 3AK continued to broadcast *The Malcolm Searle Programme*, but in the attempt to appease the ABCB had introduced several 'safety' mechanisms including the vetting of callers, delaying the rebroadcast of recorded conversations, and restricting the subject of discussions to news items broadcast that day.<sup>37</sup> However, the day after *The Norman Banks Show* was aired, far from seeking a reprieve, 3AK requested permission to revert to a 3-4 second rebroadcast delay, alleging that station 3AW had rebroadcast callers immediately.<sup>38</sup>

With the advent of the new technological device, a handful of commercial stations had chosen to ignore conditions in the Broadcasting Programme Standards, reactive rulings from the ABCB, and orders from the PMG, leading the ABCB to sum up the recent situation as 'confused & unsatisfactory'.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the quandary raised further questions about the efficacy of the communication between the ABCB and the various state offices of the PMG; only a month earlier the PMG had asked an ABCB Programme officer what jurisdiction the ABCB had over the broadcasting of telephone conversations.<sup>40</sup> The May negotiations between the two bodies did not improve the situation. Despite the ABCB's adversity, it did not appear that the Post Office would take action in order to force the initial offender, 3AK, to discontinue the programme<sup>41</sup>. Finally, full PMG and ABCB discussions were held in June 1964. In July 1964, an unequivocal 'no' enforced the 1960 ruling in the Programme Standards, prohibiting the broadcasting of recorded telephone conversations unless for news or news-reel content.

The following month, the issue was taken up as part of a broader platform, temporarily relieving the pressure on the ABCB and PMG, who deferred any further action subject to a firm decision regarding changes to the broader Commonwealth legislation. However, it was only after the Australian Post Office inquired into the corresponding practice of the British Post Office that legislative change was progressed. The B.P.O. reported that telephone recorders were in widespread use in Britain, and that this approval had been given more than 30 years earlier.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in the U.S. the taping and airing of telephone calls had been permitted from 1947 onward.<sup>43</sup> Subject to Prime Minister Menzies's approval, a Cabinet submission in March 1965 rubber-stamped the proposed changes to the telephone regulations in the *Post and Telegraph Act*. These conditions were modelled on the British conditions, with one exception. The Australian standards specified the incorporation of a tone signal, or 'verbal warning

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<sup>35</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, PMG memo, 14 May 1964.

<sup>36</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, ABCB internal correspondence, 15 May 1964.

<sup>37</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, ABCB Minute paper, 18 May 1964, & PMG letter to ABCB, 19 May 1964.

<sup>38</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, PMG letter to ABCB, 19 May 1964.

<sup>39</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, ABCB Minute paper, 18 May 1964

<sup>40</sup> NAA/VIC: MP1170/3, BT/2/1 PART 1, ABCB internal correspondence, 8 April 1964.

<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, stations were persisting or initiating new programming strategies. 3AK had dropped *The Malcolm Searle show*, while station 3AW undertook negotiations with the PMG.

<sup>42</sup> NAA/ACT: A4940, C4132, letter from PMG to PM, 25 Nov 64.

<sup>43</sup> Bick in Munson, Wayne, *All Talk: the talkshow in media culture*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1993, p166.

announcement' in the recording equipment, to indicate that the conversation was being recorded.<sup>44</sup>

Between 1965 and 1967, incorporating both regulatory antecedents and technological developments, the PMG and ABCB set about establishing technical standards and standardising equipment, prior to formally revoking the telephonic condition in the Programme Standards. A device called the 'Recorder Connector Type 1', of a similar design to the 'beep-a-phone' was leased by the ABCB, as mandatory equipment for broadcasters wishing to record telephone conversations. As with the beep-a-phone, the device emitted an intermittent beep, and produced a time delay of 7 seconds before the call was put to air. It also included an 'emergency' cut-out button to be operated by the programming host.<sup>45</sup> In April 1967, the Broadcasting Programme Standards were formally amended, removing all content-based restrictions, allowing radio proprietors to record and rebroadcast telephone calls, according to their own discretion.

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<sup>44</sup> NAA/ACT: A463, 1972/4124, letter from D.G., PMG, to the Secretary, PM's Dept, 18 Jan 1965.

<sup>45</sup> B & T, *Phone-to-air Success*, April 27, 1967, p1.

## Conclusion

Regulatory change was central to many of the programming developments which occurred prior to the formal introduction of what is now referred to as 'talk-back' radio in Australia. Certainly, restrictions placed on the use of the enabling technology – the telephone – sought to curb use of the facility by broadcasters. Yet, restrictions on the recording of telephone conversations were lifted in Britain more than 3 decades earlier, and in the U.S., early experimentation with the technique saw two-way radio established as a highly popular form of programming by the 1960s.<sup>46</sup>

Substantial regulatory change between the period leading up to the 1960s and the present broadcasting environment, has seen the remit of the broadcasting regulator dramatically altered; a shift which has moreover reflected broader social and economic change. The challenges seen to be facing the then regulatory body, the ABCB, reflected different social and cultural values as well as differently mandated responsibilities. The role of the ABCB had been informally prescribed, not least by the conservative body itself, and as implied by the name, as a mechanism for controlling and monitoring radio broadcasting. All broadcasting programmes aired were to be to the satisfaction of the Board, which was given the power to prohibit the broadcasting of material that it deemed unsuitable, or additionally, to place temporary restrictions on licensees in breach of broadcasting conditions.<sup>47</sup> However, the nature of this control in 'real' or productive terms was another matter entirely: the body was often all bark and no bite. None of the radio stations found to be in breach of the telephonic conditions in the Programme Standards were penalised. Armstrong's 1979 examination of the ABCB suggests "...perhaps the Board should be crudely analysed in terms of the regulated controlling the regulators..."<sup>48</sup>

Successively cast into the role of advocate, the ABCB's defence of privacy issues, technical quality, and attempted control of those who were allowed access to the airwaves, was strained by the unclear delineation of responsibility between the Board and the PMG. This administrative tension was further heightened by the adoption of a collective approach which was reactive and retroactive in the face of commercial pressure.

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<sup>46</sup> 'Two-way radio boom in US' in *B & T: Broadcasting and Television*. May 18, 1967. Vol 17 no 629. Sydney: Greater Publications, 1961-1967, p4.

<sup>47</sup> ABCB, *Annual Report of the Australian Broadcasting Control Board*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1949.

<sup>48</sup> Armstrong, Mark "The Broadcasting and Television Act, 1948-1976: A case study of the Australian Broadcasting Control Board" in Roman Tomasic (ed) *Legislation & Society in Australia*. Sydney: The Law Foundation of New South Wales, 1979, p143.

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