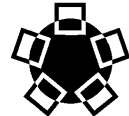


***ABORIGINAL BROADCASTERS'  
PERSPECTIVE ON BROADCAST  
POLICY***

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**Report to:  
Northern Native Broadcast Access Program (NNBAP)  
Department of Canadian Heritage**

**Prepared by Greg Smith**



**Consilium  
March 23, 2004**

## *List of Acronyms*

AMMSA	Aboriginal Multi-Media Society of Alberta
APTN	Aboriginal Peoples Television Network
CTF	Canadian Television Fund
CRTC	Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission
DND	Department of National Defence
GNWT	Government of the Northwest Territories
HRDC	Human Resources Development Canada
IBC	Inuit Broadcasting Corporation
ICS	Inuvialuit Communications Society
JBCCS	James Bay Cree Communications Society
MBC	Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation
NCI	Native Communications Incorporated
NCP	Native Communications Program
NCS-NWT	Native Communications Society of the Western Northwest Territories
NDP	Northern Distribution Program
NNBAP	Northern Native Broadcast Access Program
NNBT	Northern Native Broadcasting Terrace
NNBY	Northern Native Broadcasting Yukon
OKS	OKalaKatiget Society
PCH	Department of Canadian Heritage
psa	Public Service Announcement
SOCAM	Société de communication Atikamekw-Montagnaise
TNI	Taqramiut Nipingat Incorporated
TVNC	Television Northern Canada
VSI	Voluntary Sector Initiative

Throughout this report, the phrase ‘Aboriginal broadcasters’ refers to the thirteen NNBAP-funded organizations; the term ‘participants’ refers to representatives of these thirteen organizations, as well as APTN, who attended the stakeholders consultation meeting in November 2002.

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## *Executive Summary*

In 2002 the former Native Citizens Directorate (now the Aboriginal Programs Directorate) of the Department of Canadian Heritage received funding from the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) for a *Joint Process to Examine Program Policy Issues Related to the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program (NNBAP)*. A stakeholders meeting was held during November 2002. This report provides an analysis of the participants' policy perspectives related to NNBAP and Aboriginal broadcasting.

### **The Policy Context**

Canada's broadcasting system integrates commercial, revenue-generating services with "public" broadcasting funded from the public purse to address national needs that could not be met in a strictly market-driven system. Although all broadcasters rely to some extent on public funds, Canada's principal "public" broadcaster is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), the only public broadcaster defined in legislation.

Since March 1983, the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program (NNBAP), administered by the Department of Canadian Heritage (PCH), has provided funding support to 13 Aboriginal communications societies for the production and distribution of Aboriginal radio and television programming. The principal audience remains Aboriginal people, primarily in rural and remote communities. Canada's Aboriginal population in 2001 was 976,305 (3.3 percent of Canada's total population of 29,639,030).

The NNBAP-funded groups have had a considerable impact on broadcasting in Canada. Their need for a programming distribution system led to establishment of the Aboriginal Peoples' Television Network (APTN), the world's first national Aboriginal television network, in 1999. Today funding from the Northern Distribution Program (NDP) enables APTN to lease, operate and maintain the satellite channel by which Aboriginal television productions are broadcast over the air in 96 northern and remote communities. Advocacy led to recognition of Aboriginal needs in the *Broadcast Act* and national regulatory policies. Most importantly, they have produced thousands of hours of unique and distinctly Canadian programming in more than a dozen Aboriginal languages, and are the archivists, chroniclers and interpreters of a unique period in Aboriginal history.

Aboriginal broadcasters have always identified themselves firmly as public broadcasters. Like the CBC, they are publicly owned, not-for profit corporations; they rely on public funding for a significant portion of their overall revenue, provide a full spectrum of programming that might otherwise not be available, and contribute to a shared, diverse and inclusive national consciousness and identity. However their organizations lack the legislative recognition accorded to the CBC, the relative

security of CBC's funding, and the CBC's ability to approach the Federal government for special support when needed.

The evolution of Aboriginal broadcasting in Canada is the product of a unique and fruitful partnership between Aboriginal broadcasters and the Federal government. APTN and the Aboriginal broadcasters are meeting broader Canadian policy goals in areas such as the celebration of diversity, employment and training development for youth, the roll-out of new technologies, strengthening Canada's cultural infrastructure, capacity building in Aboriginal communities, the advancement of Canada's international reputation, the interpretation of Canada to Canadians, and the development of effective and accountable Aboriginal governments, as well as the promotion and protection of Aboriginal languages.

### **Concerns and Issues Identified by the Aboriginal Broadcasters**

The main issues and concerns of the Aboriginal broadcasters have changed little since the previous (1993) evaluation and two consultation and equipment studies in 2000. The broadcasters' view is that these concerns have been thoroughly documented and substantiated: they feel the Federal government should now act upon the recommendations made in these various reports and studies.

#### **1. The Role of Aboriginal Broadcasting**

Aboriginal broadcasters play a crucial role in their regions and communities, which deserves to be recognized. They are an integral part of the Canadian public broadcasting service, similar to the CBC.

#### **2. Equipment and Facilities**

Many are using outdated and unreliable production and distribution equipment. The 2000 equipment study identified an urgent need to upgrade and replace obsolete equipment. Aboriginal broadcasters want the recommendations in this report (and several prior reports) to be acted upon.

#### **3. Finances, Funding and Revenue Generation**

Finances are a critical concern for most of the broadcasters. Depending on where they are located, opportunities for revenue generation may be very limited. Most cannot exist without government funding. In the meantime, expectations among audiences (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) continue to increase.

#### **4. Audience and other Research**

In the early years of NNBAP, the government required annual or bi-annual audience surveys, and shared the cost of these with the broadcasters. In the intervening years, few of the societies have been able to conduct regular, systematic audience research, crucial to understand and respond to audience needs.

#### **5. Development into Television Production**

Only 7 of the 13 societies are funded by NNBAP to produce television. Of the other six, most cannot afford to produce television programming, although their audiences want this.

## **6. Archiving Materials**

Over the years a large amount of unique materials has been created - yet these are in danger of disappearing as they are not properly archived, and are subject to degradation or even to destruction.

## **7. Human Resources Development**

Staff recruitment and retention is a constant concern. With a few exceptions they are unable to provide regular increases, to match the salaries and benefits of other broadcasters, governments and Aboriginal organizations in their regions, or to provide opportunities for professional development.

## **8. National Coordination and Collaboration**

The participants need enhanced opportunities to cooperate and collaborate with each other and potential partners, such as mainstream broadcasters, other government departments and Aboriginal organizations.

## **Conclusions**

Over more than two decades, Aboriginal broadcasters, supported by the Department of Canadian Heritage, have built a unique and highly effective cultural and technological infrastructure that distributes information, language, music, educational and entertainment programming to Aboriginal people. Their activities support broad Federal government objectives. The broadcasters feel this contribution to Canadian public broadcasting must be recognized, valued and protected.

The role of the Federal government in the continuing relationship with Aboriginal broadcasting can be broadly defined under three categories.

- Funding;
- Policy Development; and
- Heritage Preservation.

The Federal government could continue this relationship through a strategic framework that addresses all of these areas. During the first decade of the NNBAP, the Program incorporated several elements that helped ensure a sector-wide, strategic approach to the development of Aboriginal communications. Two important elements of this framework were:

- A National Liaison Committee, which included representation from federal government departments, the CRTC, the CBC, and representatives of the Aboriginal broadcasters; and
- Regional Liaison Committees.

A further element contributing to a strategic approach to management and planning was the existence of a National Aboriginal Communications Society (NACS), funded by the Native Communications Program (NCP), which dissolved with the elimination of the NCP. There is currently no structure through which all NNBAP funded

broadcasters and other government, public and private sector stakeholders can jointly plan, develop policy, or share information.

A new strategic framework for Aboriginal broadcasting would strengthen, expand and create partnerships between government, the private sector and the Aboriginal broadcasters. Aside from direct financial contributions through the programs, the Department of Canadian Heritage can promote the development of such a framework by providing opportunities for linkages, joint planning, and partnerships among Aboriginal broadcasters, government departments and the private sector.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Federal government:

- Recognize that Aboriginal broadcasting is an integral part of Canadian public broadcasting and strengthen and entrench the position of Aboriginal broadcasters in the *Broadcast Act*, Federal policies, and regulations;
- Continue to invest in the societies and provide adequate funding for:
  - Operations and production;
  - Upgrade of transmitting and production equipment;
  - Training and capacity development; and
  - Societies who wish to expand their broadcast service into television production.
- Modify the funding process to enable multi-year planning and improved cash flow at the beginning of each new fiscal year;
- Support the establishment of a central archiving system for Aboriginal broadcast materials and include Aboriginal broadcasters on the national liaison group;
- Support general audience research to ensure that broadcaster and Program goals are being met;
- Support and encourage the development of an Aboriginal broadcast development framework to encourage Federal partnerships (e.g. national interdepartmental linkages), provincial and territorial support, private sector linkages, and networking activities among the broadcasters, and to provide opportunities for Aboriginal broadcasters to participate in the policy development process.

# 1. Introduction

The Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) provides funding to strengthen the voluntary sector's capacity to meet the challenges of the future, and to enhance the relationship between the sector and the federal government.

In 2002 the former Native Citizens Directorate (now the Aboriginal Programs Directorate) of the Department of Canadian Heritage received VSI funding for a *Joint Process to Examine Program Policy Issues Related to the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program (NNBAP)*.

The Policy Project had two main purposes:

- To address the impact of new technology on the 13 Aboriginal broadcaster organizations funded by the NNBAP, and on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) funded by the Northern Distribution Program (NDP); and,
- To develop with the Aboriginal participants a mutually acceptable and beneficial approach towards the maintenance and growth of an Aboriginal broadcasting infrastructure within the larger federal cultural and communications policy framework.

A Program Evaluation of the NNBAP and NDP was being conducted concurrently with the Policy Project. Given that each initiative required stakeholder consultations with the same respondents, it was decided that a strategic planning and consultation meeting on the Policy Project and the Program Evaluation would be held during November 2002 in Ottawa.

At this meeting Aboriginal broadcasters and APTN were provided with the opportunity to:

- Respond to and discuss *Aboriginal and Public Broadcasting in Canada*, an October 2002 report prepared for the Directorate and circulated to participants prior to the meeting;
- Present their perspectives on policy needs and issues affecting them; and
- Discuss questions and issues arising from the Program Evaluation.

Two separate reports have been prepared on the Consultation Meeting. This report provides an analysis of the participants' policy perspectives related to NNBAP and Aboriginal broadcasting; the second summarizes stakeholder input to the NNBAP/NDP evaluation.

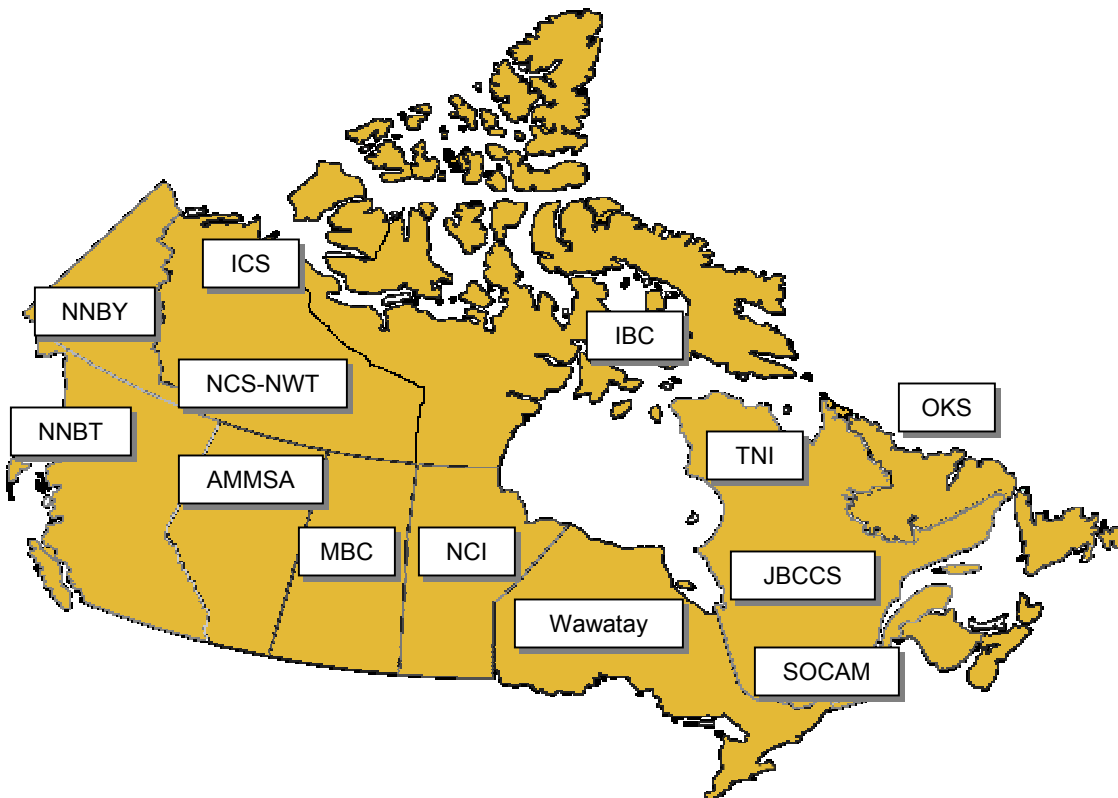


## 2. Background

### 2.1. The Northern Native Broadcast Access Program

Since March 1983, the NNBP, administered by the Department of Canadian Heritage (PCH), has provided funding support for the production and distribution of Aboriginal radio and television programming. The Program was created to address the critical need for culturally appropriate, indigenous-language broadcast services for Aboriginal audiences and communities in northern Canada.

Thirteen Aboriginal communications societies are funded under the program to serve status/non-status Indians, Inuit and Métis. These are shown on the map below.



Some of the NNBAP organizations receive funding for both radio and television programming, while some are funded to operate in one medium only, as illustrated in the table below.

**Table 1: NNBAP-Funded Organizations and Production Media**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Media Funded by NNBAP</b>
Aboriginal Multi Media Society of Alberta	Radio
Inuit Broadcasting Corporation	Television
Inuvialuit Communications Society	Television
James Bay Cree Communications Society	Radio
Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation	Radio
Native Communications Incorporated	Radio, Television
Native Communications Society of the Western Northwest Territories	Radio
Northern Native Broadcasting, Terrace	Radio
Northern Native Broadcasting, Yukon	Radio, Television
OKalaKatiget Society	Radio, Television
Société de communication Atikamekw-Montagnaise	Radio
Taqramiut Nipingat Incorporated	Radio, Television
Wawatay Native Communications Society	Radio, Television

Some organizations (e.g., Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation) have successfully generated revenues to provide service in a medium for which they do not receive NNBAP funding.

## **2.2. Northern Distribution Program (NDP)**

To address the need for distribution of programs produced by its funding recipients, the NNBAP has provided supplementary contributions to support the development of distribution systems. From 1983 to 1993, the Distribution Fund provided a total of up to \$900,000 per year. In 1988, the Minister of Communications committed \$10 million to the creation of Television Northern Canada (TVNC), a pan-northern network launched in 1991. This funding was provided under the NDP, and sustained TVNC for ten years.

Today NDP funding enables APTN (the sole funding recipient) to lease, operate and maintain the satellite channel by which Aboriginal television productions are broadcast over the air in 96 northern and remote communities. APTN is also available to an estimated 8 million homes via cable television, direct-to-home and wireless services: the cost of maintaining this distribution system is underwritten by a small monthly charge to service subscribers, under the terms of APTN's CRTC licence.

APTN is closely linked to the NNBAP-funded television broadcasters. It pays a license fee for their programming, and serves as their primary distribution vehicle, and nearly half of APTN's Directors are appointed to the Board by NNBAP-funded broadcasters.

### **2.3. The Audience: Aboriginal People In Canada**

Aboriginal broadcasting and distribution in Canada was created, and evolved, to meet the needs of audiences in a specific cultural and economic context. While a rapidly rising number of non-Aboriginal viewers are enjoying NNBAP-funded programming through APTN, the principal audience remains Aboriginal people, primarily in rural and remote communities. It is useful in any discussion of Aboriginal broadcasting policy to consider the context in which the Aboriginal broadcasters operate. Here are some highlights.

Canada's Aboriginal population in 2001 was 976,305, and constituted 3.3 percent of Canada's total population of 29,639,030. The 2001 census identifies a number of trends:

- The birth rate among Aboriginal peoples is approximately 1.5 times higher than that of the non-Aboriginal population.<sup>1</sup> The Aboriginal population is younger than the non-Aboriginal population. 33.2 percent of the Aboriginal population is 14 years old or younger, compared to 19 percent of the non-Aboriginal population.
- 49 percent of all people who self-identified as Aboriginal lived in metropolitan census areas in 2001, a 2 percent increase from the 1996 census. The Aboriginal populations of cities were consistently over-represented as a proportion of the cities' poor residents, even in cities with relatively large Aboriginal populations.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2001 the national unemployment rate for the non-Aboriginal population was 10.5 percent; the unemployment rate for the Aboriginal population is almost double that at 19.1 percent.<sup>3</sup>
- In some regions, the unemployment rate is even higher. The 1999 Nunavut Labour Force Survey indicated that the eight medium size communities in Nunavut had an unemployment rate of 29.0 percent while the 14 smallest communities had a rate of 23.8 percent.<sup>4</sup> Non-Inuit 15 years and over, had an

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, 'Aboriginal peoples of Canada: A demographic profile', 2001 Census of Canada, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Lee, Kevin K. April 2000, 'Urban Poverty in Canada: A Statistical Profile', Canadian Council on Social Development. Ottawa, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, DIAND Core Census Tabulations, 1996, Table 11.

<sup>4</sup> September 1999. Nunavut Bureau of Statistics, 1999 Nunavut Labour Force Survey, p.11.

unemployment rate of 2.7 percent, while Inuit in the same age category have an unemployment rate of 28 percent<sup>5</sup>

- Off-reserve Aboriginal workers took home only 69.7 percent of the earnings of all workers, a difference of \$8,000. Full time Aboriginal workers living off reserve earned only 82.2 percent of the earnings of all workers.<sup>6</sup>
- “Aboriginal youth ...are far more likely to run afoul of the law...youth are 12.4 times as likely to be admitted to a youth facility if they are Aboriginal (22.4 times as likely if female). Older youth aged 20-24 were calculated to be 11 times as likely to be admitted to a provincial correctional facility if Aboriginal”.<sup>7</sup>
- Suicide has been described as ‘endemic’ among Aboriginal youth, especially males between 15-24 years of age. The rate among this group in the period between 1989-93 was five times the national average.<sup>8</sup>
- While over 11 percent of non-Aboriginal Canadians are university graduates, only half that number of Aboriginal people have university degrees. This drops to less than 1 percent among those Aboriginal people living on-reserve.<sup>9</sup>

In summary, Aboriginal broadcasters serve a population that is younger, less well educated and less affluent than other Canadians. In many regions in which they operate, particularly the far north where communities lack road access, unemployment rates are high, there are fewer economic opportunities, and the cost of living and doing business is considerably greater.

This means that both the service provided by Aboriginal broadcasters and the policy framework underlying that service have evolved to meet social, cultural and communication needs that are fundamentally different from those of mainstream Canadian audiences.

This difference was explored in depth in the report entitled “Aboriginal and Public Broadcasting in Canada”, prepared by Terry Rudden (Consilium) for NNBP in October 2002 and distributed to participants prior to the consultation meetings.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 11

<sup>6</sup> Lee, Kevin, K. op cit., p. 40

<sup>7</sup> Hallett, B. *Aboriginal People in Manitoba 2000*, Winnipeg, p. 63

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 39

<sup>9</sup> Conference Board of Canada, p. 3

## **2.4. The Policy Context**

### ***2.4.1. Public Broadcasting in Canada***

Canada's broadcasting system integrates commercial, revenue-generating services with "public" broadcasting funded from the public purse to address national needs that could not be met in a strictly market-driven system.

Although all broadcasters rely to some extent on public funds, Canada's principal "public" broadcaster is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), mandated to provide programming of national interest, promoting national social and cultural goals. CBC's role is defined in the *Broadcast Act*; it is the only "public" broadcaster defined in legislation. Despite the challenges it faces, the CBC enjoys a level of stability, both in its funding and its regulatory foundation, that is unique in the industry.

### ***2.4.2. Aboriginal Broadcasting In Canada***

As satellite technology extended the reach of southern signals into the Arctic in the 1970s, northern settlements began to voice concerns about the potential impact of programming on their languages, cultures and lives. This led in 1983 to the creation of the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program, the Northern Broadcasting Policy and, in turn, to long-term Federal support for thirteen Aboriginal communications organizations.

The NNBAP represented a new and strategic approach to developing capacity in the Aboriginal community. Prior Federal support had focused on short-term training projects or specific productions; the NNBAP, however, built permanent organizations.

NNBAP-funded broadcasters have had a considerable impact on broadcasting in Canada. Their need for a programming distribution system led to establishment of the APTN in 1999. Advocacy by Aboriginal broadcasters led to recognition of Aboriginal needs in the *Broadcast Act* and national regulatory policies.

Most importantly, they have produced thousands of hours of unique and distinctly Canadian programming in more than a dozen Aboriginal languages, and are the archivists, chroniclers and interpreters of a unique period in Aboriginal history.

Despite their success, the Aboriginal broadcasters face the same challenges as the CBC and other public sector broadcasters. These include declining government

support for public broadcasting, the proliferation of viewing options, and the cost of introducing new production and distribution technologies. These challenges are exacerbated by other factors, including the loss of Aboriginal languages among viewers and regional economies too weak to support alternative revenue generation strategies.

## **2.5. Aboriginal Broadcasting as Public Broadcasting**

The term “public” has never been used to describe or justify the existence of Aboriginal broadcasting in policy or legislation. Aboriginal broadcasters, however, have always identified themselves firmly as “public” broadcasters. While acknowledging that there are differences in mandate, structure and accountability, they note that, like the CBC, they are publicly owned, not-for profit corporations; they rely on public funding for a significant portion of their overall revenue, provide a full spectrum of programming that might otherwise not be available, and contribute to a shared, diverse and inclusive national consciousness and identity. However, the Aboriginal broadcasters note that their organizations lack the legislative recognition accorded to the CBC, the relative security of CBC’s funding, and the CBC’s ability to approach the Federal government for special support when needed.

## **2.6. Canadian Policy Goals**

The Federal government has set out broad policy goals and agendas for Aboriginal peoples, communications and culture in a number of fora. As noted in prior studies, NNBAP-funded broadcasting addresses a number of those broader policy goals.

- Aboriginal broadcasting has been singularly successful in creating a vast archive of radio and television programming;
- NNBAP-funded broadcasters have established an important cultural industry that provides employment and training to hundreds of Aboriginal people;
- A recent evaluation of the Aboriginal Languages Initiative suggests that Aboriginal broadcasters play a critical role in the preservation and promotion of Aboriginal languages in Canada;
- Through APTN’s potential domestic audience of eight million Canadians, and even larger potential international viewership, the broadcasters help to advance Canada’s international reputation, and promote the interpretation of Canada to Canadians;

- As a unique and important two-way conduit, APTN helps government and the private sector, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to reach a traditionally isolated audience with their messages.

APTN and the Aboriginal broadcasters are also meeting broader Canadian policy goals in such areas as the celebration of diversity, employment and training development for youth, the roll-out of new technologies, strengthening Canada's cultural infrastructure, capacity building in Aboriginal communities, and the development of effective and accountable Aboriginal governments.

## **2.7. Canadian Heritage Support**

The steady increase in the volume and quality of Aboriginal language programming in Canada is linked directly to support provided by the Department of Canadian Heritage (PCH), and by its precursor, the Department of the Secretary of State. Broadcasting in Aboriginal languages in many regions can only exist with the support of the Federal government.

By providing long term funding, the NNBAP has helped to create a network of organizations with the governance, management, and production capacity to produce high volumes of Aboriginal language television and radio programming on an ongoing basis, to provide effective training, and to impact significantly on the communities they serve.

## **2.8. Conclusions**

The evolution of Aboriginal broadcasting in Canada is the product of a unique and fruitful partnership between Aboriginal broadcasters and the Federal government. The long-term results include the establishment of APTN, Canada's third national television network (and the world's only full-service Aboriginal television network), the creation of careers and employment in economically marginal regions, revisions in the regulatory, policy, and funding framework of the Canadian broadcasting system, the promotion of Aboriginal languages and culture, and the production of a significant body of unique and distinctly Canadian programming.

The benefits to Aboriginal Canadians, and to Canada as a whole, have been substantial, tangible, and far-reaching.

## ***3. Stakeholders Consultation Meeting***

### **3.1. Purpose of the Stakeholders Meeting**

A three-day consultation meeting was convened by PCH to provide an opportunity for Aboriginal broadcasters to discuss issues relating to the funding programs and the future of Aboriginal broadcasting, and to provide input into Federal government policy-making. This was the first national consultation meeting involving all thirteen NNBAP-funded organizations in several years. Representatives of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) were also in attendance. Key areas for discussion were:

- Current status of the groups;
- Policy and operational issues and concerns;
- The respective roles of Aboriginal broadcasters, governments and the private sector;
- The upcoming evaluation of the NNBAP and the NDP;
- The report on *Aboriginal and Public Broadcasting in Canada*, and key policy issues relating to Aboriginal broadcasting; and
- Options and recommendations from the participants to strengthen Aboriginal broadcasting.

This consultation marked the first face-to-face meeting between PCH and the Aboriginal broadcasters in several years. NNBAP-funded television broadcasters serve on the APTN Board of Directors, and thus meet with colleagues from other regions on a regular basis. For radio-only groups, however, there are few such opportunities.



## **3.2. Participants**

Participants included representatives of all thirteen NNBAP-funded societies (with OKalaKatiget joining in by teleconference due to bad weather in Labrador), representatives of APTN, NNBAP and NDP program officials, and other PCH managers. Francine Whiteduck and Greg Smith facilitated the sessions. A full list of participants is included in this report as Appendix One.

## 4. *Analysis of Broadcasters' Concerns*

### 4.1. **Prior Consultation and Research**

The most recent previous evaluation of the NNBAP was conducted in 1993. Other formal consultations since that date have included:

- A 1995 review by Consilium of Federal and Territorial policy impacting on Aboriginal broadcasters;
- Discussions with the broadcasters in 1996, related to possible transfer of control of the program to an Aboriginal-controlled entity;
- A consultation with NNBAP-funded broadcasters by Gaspé Tarbell Associates and Consilium in 2000 on issues and concerns affecting them;
- A study of equipment needs of NNBAP-funded broadcasters by Alex MacGregor, undertaken in 2000.<sup>10</sup>

### 4.2. **Concerns and Issues faced by Participants**

Over the years the concerns and issues facing Aboriginal broadcasters have remained consistent. Those identified at the most recent consultation meetings were similar to the findings of the previous evaluations (1986, 1993), and are virtually identical to those identified during the 2000 consultation study and the study of equipment requirements. The broadcasters have repeatedly and clearly conveyed their concerns. Their view is that these concerns have been thoroughly documented and substantiated: they feel the Federal government should now act upon the recommendations made in these various reports and studies.

These concerns can be grouped into eight broad categories.

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<sup>10</sup> Consilium. *Northern Native Broadcasting: a Policy Survey*. Prepared for the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program, Native Citizens' Directorate, Department of Canadian Heritage, January 1995; Aboriginal Broadcasters Working Group: Various proceedings and correspondence relating to transfer of the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program (NNBAP) and the Northern Distribution Program (NDP) to an Aboriginal controlled entity, Ottawa, 1996; Gaspé Tarbell and Associates in Association With Consilium, "Study on the Needs and Interests of Broadcasters Funded Under the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program", for the Department of Canadian Heritage, Ottawa, January 2000 and MacGregor, Alex. *Report to PCH on Equipment Requirements*, June 2000.

### **1. The Role of Aboriginal Broadcasting**

Aboriginal broadcasters play a crucial role in their regions and communities, which deserves to be recognized. Although they are an integral part of the Canadian broadcasting system, and provide service similar to that of the CBC, they feel that governments underestimate the value of their contribution to both Aboriginal and Canadian culture and society, and that they lack the statutory protection and recognition provided to the CBC.

### **2. Equipment and Facilities**

Many of the broadcasters are using outdated equipment, and operating from older, substandard buildings not designed or wired for production. Their inability to upgrade or, in some cases maintain, their current obsolete inventory, affects their ability to maintain consistent quantity and quality of programming. The 2000 equipment study conducted by Alex MacGregor for NNBAP identified replacement and upgrading as an urgent need. The Aboriginal broadcasters want the recommendations in this report (and several prior reports) to be acted upon in order to provide catch-up funding to modernize equipment and facilities.

### **3. Finances, Funding and Revenue Generation**

Finances are a critical concern for most of the broadcasters. Depending on where they are located and the regions they serve, opportunities to increase self-sufficiency through revenue generation from other sources may be very limited. Some have road access to an entire province and offices located in a provincial capital city: many, however, are based in and serve mainly small, remote, fly-in communities. In regions characterized by high unemployment, a high cost of living, and with limited opportunities for fundraising, program sponsorship or advertising sales, broadcasters cannot exist without government funding.

Most of the broadcasters are struggling to simply maintain current levels of service, while facing rising expectations among audiences (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) for programming competitive in technical quality and content with that provided by other networks, as well as growing demand for new services, including television in areas now served only by radio.

### **4. Audience and other Research**

In the early years of NNBAP, the government required annual or bi-annual audience surveys, and shared the cost of these with the broadcasters. In the intervening years, few of the societies have been able to conduct regular, systematic audience research.

This information is crucial if broadcasters are to understand and respond to audience needs and preferences.

## **5. Development into Television Production**

Only 7 of the 13 Aboriginal broadcasters are funded by NNBAP to produce television. They are members of APTN, which broadcasts their programming in their regions and nationally.

Of the remaining six organizations, two have successfully developed resources to permit development of basic television service in their regions. The remaining four cannot afford to produce television programming without NNBAP support.

## **6. Archiving Materials**

For twenty years the Aboriginal broadcasters have produced radio and/or television programming from their regions in a variety of Aboriginal languages, many of which are endangered. Over the years they have created a significant archive of unique materials chronicling their cultures, lives and languages at a critical stage in Aboriginal and Canadian history. However, broadcasters have neither the facilities, the resources nor the personnel to preserve and archive this resource. As a result this legacy of recorded material is subject to degradation over time or destruction through fire or other causes.

## **7. Human Resources Development**

Staff recruitment and retention is a constant concern. With a few exceptions the broadcasters are unable to match the salaries and benefits paid by other employers in their regions, or to provide opportunities for professional development. Despite the loyalty of many staff members, turnover is a growing issue. New and current staff require training on an annual basis, yet there is limited funding for this purpose.

## **8. National Coordination and Collaboration**

Aboriginal broadcasters need opportunities to share experiences, knowledge and ideas, and to cooperate and collaborate with each other and potential partners, including mainstream broadcasters and the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, for their continued development. They are interested in establishing relationships with other government departments and agencies, with Aboriginal organizations and with the private sector. Areas of potential collaboration include training, production, advertising and revenue generation, information exchange on new technologies and equipment, and consultation on new policies, regulations and programs that affect them.

## **5. Conclusions**

Over more than two decades, Aboriginal broadcasters, supported by the Department of Canadian Heritage, have built a unique and highly effective cultural and technological infrastructure that distributes information, language, music, educational and entertainment programming to Aboriginal people. Their activities support broad Federal government objectives for the creation of a more cohesive and creative Canada, the promotion of Canadian content, the enhancement of cultural participation and engagement, fostering of connections between Canadians, and the encouragement of active citizenship and civic participation. Aboriginal broadcasters feel this contribution to Canadian public broadcasting must be recognized, valued and protected.

Following recognition and acknowledgement of the value of their service, issues which must be addressed include funding stability, human resources development, television production capacity for radio-only groups, equipment and facility upgrades and maintenance, archiving of valuable materials, audience and other research, and collaboration on a national basis.

### **5.1. Recognition of the Role of Aboriginal Broadcasting in Canada**

The 13 NNBAP organizations and APTN have contributed to the creation of an Aboriginal broadcasting industry that provides an essential service to Canada's growing Aboriginal population. Their services contribute to the awareness, well being and development of Aboriginal people, foster Aboriginal talent and the creation of Canadian content, and provide an information bridge between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. They also ensure essential services in their regions, including emergency preparedness and response.

Furthermore, the Aboriginal broadcasters and their activities support the goals and priorities of the Federal government in a wide number of areas, including the promotion of diversity and understanding by bringing Aboriginal people and their heritage into Canadian homes. They help to strengthen Canada's economic and cultural infrastructure through capacity building in Aboriginal communities, and contributing to Canada's cultural expression. They help to promote Canada's

international reputation, particularly for the protection of Aboriginal languages. In Aboriginal communities, they help to ensure accountability among Aboriginal governments and organizations. They provide a unique vehicle for government to communicate with Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal broadcasters feel that it is in the Federal government's best interest to recognize their place in the Canadian public broadcasting system, and to continue and expand support to Aboriginal broadcasters as a crucial element of the Federal communications, Aboriginal and cultural agenda.

## **5.2. Role of the Federal Government**

Aboriginal broadcasters recognize the essential contribution the Federal government has made to their creation and development over the past twenty or more years. They also note that their work enables the Federal Government to achieve its own policy objectives for Aboriginal people in a number of areas in a way no other broadcast service could.

The role of the Federal government in the continuing relationship with Aboriginal broadcasting can be broadly defined under three categories.

### ***5.2.1. Funding***

The primary role played by the Federal government in support of Aboriginal broadcasting is that of funder, through the NNBAP and NDP. The broadcasters' ability to generate revenues from other sources varies widely depending on their resources, geography and location, but is generally severely constrained by low levels of population and economic activity in their target communities. Given that this has been the case for the past two decades, it is safe to predict that in most regions economic conditions will limit opportunities for significant degrees of alternative revenue generation in the foreseeable future. This reality leaves broadcasters struggling with diminishing resources to compete with salaries and benefits paid by other employers in their regions, to upgrade and maintain essential production and distribution equipment, and to maintain their facilities.

The Federal government has provided a funding base for Aboriginal broadcasting through the NNBAP and NDP. These programs are critical for the survival of Aboriginal broadcasting. Given the absence of alternative funding options, the broadcasters urge that the programs be enhanced address shortfalls identified over the past twenty years, to provide catch-up funding for equipment replacement and maintenance, and to permit the radio-only broadcasters to initiate television production in their regions.

The funding needs of the Aboriginal broadcasters may be summarized as follows:

- Enhanced support required for ongoing operations and production, including competitive salaries and benefits for staff, regular audience research, and a supplement reflecting the higher costs of carrying on business in the north;
- Support for capacity building, including training and professional development;
- Capital funding for equipment upgrades and replacement as technology evolves, and to bring facilities up to standard; and
- Service equalization funding to enable all of the Aboriginal broadcasters to meet the needs of their audiences for television production in their region.

### **5.2.2. Policy Development**

The main policy document defining Aboriginal broadcasting and its role within the broadcasting system is the CRTC's Native Broadcasting Policy. The Commission has been consistently supportive of Aboriginal broadcasting, from the introduction of its Native Broadcasting Policy to the licensing of APTN. The two other key policy documents defining Aboriginal broadcasting are the 1983 Northern Broadcasting Policy and the *Broadcast Act*, which includes specific references to the Aboriginal broadcasting.

The policy development needs of the Aboriginal broadcasters may be summarized as follows:

- Ongoing consultation with Aboriginal broadcasters on policies, legislation and regulation affecting them;
- Appointing Aboriginal representatives to Boards that have a role in the broadcast industry, such as Telefilm, CBC, CRTC and other agencies; and
- Strengthening the place of Aboriginal broadcasting in the *Broadcast Act*.

### **5.2.3. Heritage Preservation**

As noted above, broadcasters are concerned that two decades of valuable archival and historical material in the form of videotapes, audiotapes, photographic and text archives, are rapidly deteriorating and will soon be irrecoverable.

The Heritage Preservation needs of the Aboriginal broadcasters may be summarized as follows:

- Coordinating with other Federal agencies such as National Archives, the implementation of an archiving, materials storage and retrieval process to safeguard invaluable recorded materials while ensuring the ownership remains with the Aboriginal broadcasters.

### **5.3. Strategic Framework for Aboriginal Broadcasting**

The Federal government has invested in Aboriginal broadcasting for more than two decades. The result has been the creation of an important sector of Canadian public broadcasting that supports Federal goals and plays an irreplaceable role in portraying and preserving Aboriginal languages, cultures and heritage. The further development of this sector has been hindered by lack of funding, the economic limitations of the regions in which many Aboriginal broadcasters operate, and the requirement to keep up with the continuing evolution of broadcasting technology.

During the first decade of the NNBAP, the Program incorporated several elements that helped ensure a sector-wide, strategic approach to the development of Aboriginal communications through a management framework that linked Program Personnel, broadcast regulators, distribution providers, and other stakeholders. Two important elements of this framework were:

- A National Liaison Committee, which included representation from the federal government (Department of the Secretary of State and Department of Communications), the CRTC, the CBC, and representatives of the Aboriginal broadcasters. In this quarterly forum, these parties had the opportunity to exchange information on a wide range of programming, policy, regulatory, funding and technological matters, and address emerging sectoral needs from a multi-stakeholder perspective.
- Regional Liaison Committees, which also met quarterly, achieved similar goals at the regional level, engaging program delivery personnel, local broadcasters, and often representatives of provincial or territorial governments in the development of Aboriginal broadcasting in their respective regions.

The work of the National and Regional Liaison Committees was discontinued during the 1990s as part of the overall reduction in funding to the programs. The existence of these fora for information sharing on planning and policy development contributed significantly to the consolidation of Aboriginal broadcasting in its initial years.

A further element contributing to a strategic approach to management and planning was the existence of a National Aboriginal Communications Society (NACS), funded by the Native Communications Program (NCP) and comprising of the NNBAP-funded broadcasters. NACS provided an opportunity for the Aboriginal broadcasters to meet and formulate collective approaches and strategies for the development of their services. This organization dissolved with the elimination of the NCP. Since then, several shorter-term initiatives have provided the broadcasters with occasional



opportunities to meet, including consultation meetings to discuss the creation of an Aboriginally-controlled entity to manage NNBAP program funding. Television-producing broadcasters have also used their joint membership on the board of APTN as an opportunity to meet and plan jointly. However, there is currently no structure through which all NNBAP funded broadcasters and other government, public and private sector stakeholders can jointly plan, develop policy, or share information.

There is little interest in or prospect of resurrecting the strategic framework established to support the Program through its early years. However, a new strategic framework for Aboriginal broadcasting would strengthen, expand and create new partnerships between government, the private sector and the Aboriginal broadcasters.

Aside from direct financial contributions through the programs, the Department of Canadian Heritage can promote the development of such a framework by:

- Assisting the broadcasters to meet annually in order to exchange information, develop revenue generating joint ventures;
- Providing an annual forum for input into joint planning with the Federal government of ongoing strategies for the continued development of Aboriginal broadcasting;
- Assisting the broadcasters in establishing linkages and partnerships with other federal departments and programs, in order to foster:
  - Greater use of Aboriginal broadcasters to promote federal programs, services, and initiatives, both generally and to Aboriginal-specific audiences;
  - Consideration of the needs of Aboriginal broadcasters when federal initiatives to support Aboriginal training, business and economic development, emergency preparedness, health information and telehealth (Health Canada), film and media production (Telefilm and CTF), and connectivity (Industry Canada) are being developed;
- Initiate a dialogue with provincial and territorial governments to identify measures and strategies for providing support to Aboriginal broadcasters in their regions;
- Foster linkages with potential the private sector partners (through both specific organizations/corporations, and through broader sector councils such as the Canadian Association of Broadcasters) to seek measures and strategies for enhanced collaboration with Aboriginal broadcasters;
- Entering into multi-year funding agreements with the broadcasters and improving administrative efficiency to help their cash flow, a measure which would permit the development of longer term strategic plans beyond a one-year planning horizon; and

- Investigating other potential funding models established to foster sectoral growth (e.g. the Canadian Magazine Fund), and exploring their possible application to the NNBAP-funded broadcasters.

The partnerships formed between broadcasters, program personnel, regulators and other stakeholders in the early days of the NNBAP resulted in the successful creation of an entire new service and employment sector. As the broadcasters enter their third decade, measures to facilitate new strategic partnerships and linkages are required to ensure the same degree of success in a changing environment.

## 6. *Recommendations*

It is recommended that the Federal government:

- Recognize that Aboriginal broadcasting is an integral part of Canadian public broadcasting and strengthen and entrench the position of Aboriginal broadcasters in the *Broadcast Act*, Federal policies, and regulations;
- Continue to invest in the societies and provide adequate funding for:
  - Operations and production;
  - Upgrade of transmitting and production equipment;
  - Training and capacity development; and
  - Societies who wish to expand their broadcast service into television production.
- Modify the funding process to enable multi-year planning and improved cash flow at the beginning of each new fiscal year;
- Support the establishment of a central archiving system for Aboriginal broadcast materials and include Aboriginal broadcasters on the national liaison group;
- Support general audience research to ensure that broadcaster and Program goals are being met;
- Support and encourage the development of an Aboriginal broadcast development framework to encourage Federal partnerships (e.g. national interdepartmental linkages), provincial and territorial support, private sector linkages, and networking activities among the broadcasters, and to provide opportunities for Aboriginal broadcasters to participate in the policy development process.

## ***7. Appendix One: List of Participants***

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