



Review of English- and French-Language Broadcasting Services in English and French Minority Communities in Canada

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**Presentation by
The Canadian Association of Broadcasters
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CAB Vision: The goal of the CAB is to represent and advance the interests of Canada's private broadcasters in the social, cultural and economic fabric of the country.

Thank you Chairman – good afternoon.

My name is Charlotte Bell, and I am Chair of the Board of Directors at the Canadian Association of Broadcasters as well as Senior Vice President for Regulatory Affairs at Canwest.

Joining me today from the CAB are

Pierre-Louis Smith, Vice President of Policy and Chief Regulatory Officer, and

Pamela Jones, Director of Research and Policy.

First and foremost, we'd like to thank the Commission for the opportunity to present our views in this important proceeding.

Let me state at the outset that Canada's private broadcasters share the Commission's desire to provide French- and English-language minority communities with access to the widest possible range of quality programming on the full spectrum of broadcast platforms and distribution systems.

Achievements to Date

We applaud the steps the Commission has already taken over the years in opening up new avenues and expanding the number of programming choices for minority language Canadians.

I think it's fair to say that for most residents of French- and English-language minority communities, the situation has improved significantly over the last 7 or 8 years: with the advent of new technologies and specific policies to support carriage of services, Canadians enjoy more access to more content in the language of their choice than ever before.

Some concrete steps taken by the Commission include the following:

- Granting mandatory carriage status to RDI in Anglophone markets and Newsworld in Francophone markets and carriage of CPAC services in both languages;
- Approving 12 new community radio licenses for francophone audiences in minority language communities from coast to coast;
- Requiring that all Class 1 and Class 2 cable systems as well as DTH operators carry the TVA network to ensure access across the country;
- Requiring additional distribution obligations on BDUs, including DTH providers; and,
- Requiring Class 1 and Class 2 cable distribution undertakings to maintain French-language services available on analog channels.

Canada's private broadcasters strongly believe that the Commission's minority language policies have had a tangible, positive effect on French- and English-speaking minority communities in virtually every part of the country.

It's also worth noting that Canadian entrepreneurs have successfully launched French-language radio stations in markets outside Quebec where frequencies have been available and where there is a critical mass of French-speaking residents. In Sudbury, for example, the francophone community has tuned in to CHYC-FM since 1957.

In many markets too small to make commercial radio viable, the Community Radio sector has provided much needed information and cultural services to communities. Today, there are 144 community radio stations operating in Canada - 84 of these stations are French-language community radio stations, while 51 are English-language community radio stations and 4 are bilingual radio stations. These stations play an important role in the Canadian broadcasting system.

While there have been many gains made in providing more choice for official language minorities, there is still work to be done. However, our ability to act is being deeply affected by circumstances largely beyond our control. As you know all too well, these are extremely difficult economic times, and all sectors of the economy are facing very real business challenges.

For broadcasters, as the Commission has recognized, there are also fundamental structural issues that must be addressed. As a result, tough decisions are being made; cut-backs are occurring.

New Technologies

We're also pleased to see in the Brynaert report that minority language communities are benefiting from access to new technologies and new platforms.

These platforms offer a window to the world of content that is available from Canadian private television and radio broadcasters as well as sources from around the world.

As I mentioned earlier, for most residents of French- and English-language minority communities, the situation has improved over time.

The majority of these communities enjoy cable or broadband Internet service which opens up virtually limitless access to print material of every kind along with radio signals and video programming from across Canada and around the world.

There are also more opportunities for community groups to share their stories and communicate through the Internet.

This also means that both domestic and foreign French-language radio stations, are now widely available to Francophones and Francophiles living outside of Quebec with access to high speed Internet.

CAB Recommendations

In order to build on our successes and continue to extend minority-language services to as many Canadians as possible, we recommend the following:

First, in recognizing the preeminent needs of French- and English-language minority communities, the CAB recommends that Canadian services offering services in minority official languages be given priority over non-Canadian, exempt, and non-programming services.

Second, to prevent a reduction in French-language services to minority communities outside Quebec, we recommend that the Commission grandfather French-language services currently being distributed on a discretionary basis by terrestrial BDUs and that these services be packaged together to facilitate take up by Francophone subscribers living in minority language communities.

Finally, as you know, Canwest has requested that the Commission mandate DTH carriage of Global Quebec in order to address the obvious deficiency in providing choice of television services to English-speaking residents of Quebec. This would provide those residents with an alternative news voice to what is offered by CBC and CFCF-TV in Quebec.

Conclusion

Commissioners, we believe that the Commission deserves credit for the leadership it has taken on increasing the diversity of programming choices for minority-language Canadians over the years.

At the same time, we all know that there remain lingering deficiencies in this area that can be addressed through further regulatory action.

Canadian private broadcasters are pleased to do their part in meeting our collective goal to see Canadians in French- and English-language minority communities enjoying as much diversity of programming as possible.

Again, please accept our thanks for the opportunity to appear before you today.

We would be pleased to take your questions.