



ROD BARTON MP

Member for Eastern Metropolitan Region
Parliament of Victoria | Legislative Council



24 June 2020

The Hon Michael O'Brien MP
Level 1, 157 Spring Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

by email: michael.obrien@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Mr O'Brien

Re: Channel 31 broadcasting licence

I am writing on behalf of a group of legislative council cross bench members to appeal for your intervention to save Melbourne's local television station, Channel 31.

This week Federal Communications Minister Paul Fletcher agreed to extend the licence of Adelaide's community station, Channel 44, but has excluded Channel 31 from this deal.

The station will be switched off on June 30 and replaced with white noise.

It seems unfair that these licences are ended at all, but it is grossly unfair that one channel be given a 12 month stay of execution and the other excluded from the deal.

Community television has never been taxpayer funded and there is no planned alternative use for the broadcast spectrum these stations use. According to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), there is no planned use for at least the next five years.

There appears to be no reasonable argument to withdraw licences other than a decision made in 2014 for testing on the spectrum, which was completed some time ago.

In the chamber this month I tabled a document containing almost 4000 signatures collected through a petition on my website and another from change.org. Signatures on these petitions are now approaching 7,500. Liberal member Hon. Bruce Atkinson has also run a petition asking for Senate support in saving Channel 31.

I have appealed directly to Minister Fletcher, to our state Minister for Creative Industries Martin Foley and our Minister for Multicultural Affairs Ros Spence asking them all to intervene. It appears our Labor Government has no interest or influence here, so I appeal to you as leader of Victoria's Liberal Party to urge the Federal Minister to reconsider Channel 31.

I am sure you are aware of the importance of free to air community television to our multicultural communities.

During this coronavirus pandemic C31 has been able to nimbly adjust their programming to get crucial information out to our multicultural communities in their own languages - producing more than 40 hours of targeted programming to support these communities.

They assisted with religious broadcasting over the Easter period when isolation requirements meant people were unable to attend services in person. They continue to produce new content for groups unable to meet due to Covid-19 restrictions, broadcasting alongside specialty lifestyle shows for

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Electorate Office:
128 Ayr St, Doncaster VIC 3108

Phone: +61 3 9850 8600

Email: Rod.Barton@parliament.vic.gov.au

fishing, hunting and 4WD. They also offer an affordable and targeted platform for small businesses in our regions.

So I ask that you intervene and support these communities in retaining community television in Victoria. I would be happy to assist in any way or provide more detailed information about the multicultural and community programming provided by Channel 31 in Victoria.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rod Barton', with a horizontal line underneath.

Rod Barton MP
Member for Eastern Metropolitan

on behalf of:

Cliff Hayes
South Eastern Metropolitan

Ellen Sandell
Acting Leader Victorian Greens

Andy Meddick
Western Region

Tania Maxwell
Northern Region

Stuart Grimley
Western Region

Catherine Cummings
Western Metropolitan

Fiona Patten
Northern Metropolitan