



FILED ELECTRONICALLY

May 7, 2008

Robert A. Morin
Secretary General
Canadian Radio-television and
Telecommunications Commission
1 Promenade du Portage
Gatineau, Quebec
J8X 4B1

Dear Mr. Morin:

**Re: Broadcasting Notice of Public Hearing CRTC 2008-3
Native Communications Inc. Winnipeg, Manitoba
Application No. 2007-1163-1**

1. Aboriginal Peoples Television Network Incorporated ("APTN") **strongly supports** the application by Native Communications Inc. ("NCI") for a new Type B Native radio station to serve Winnipeg, Manitoba. **We wish to appear at the public hearing to intervene in support of this application.**
2. Our support for this application is based on the following:
 - (1) NCI is an experienced Aboriginal communications company with the resources, management team and drive to make urban-Aboriginal radio a success;
 - (2) in Winnipeg, the Aboriginal community is still significantly underserved in the radio sector, especially among the younger Aboriginal population – NCI's proposed station addresses this very real problem;
 - (3) NCI's proposed format, programming plans and commitments will make a significant contribution to enhancing the presence of Aboriginal Peoples, in general terms, and more specifically of Aboriginal talent in Winnipeg; just as importantly, NCI's track record shows that it will also operate a popular service that reaches the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population alike; and
 - (4) looking beyond the specifics of NCI's application, it is important for the Commission to support the growth of successful Aboriginal broadcasting companies like NCI; these companies represent the future of Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian broadcasting system.

We will elaborate on these points in this intervention.

NCI's History and Capabilities

3. As the CRTC is no doubt aware, NCI started broadcasting in Northern Manitoba in 1971. NCI now reaches across almost all of Manitoba with its extensive network of 59 transmitters. NCI's existing, core radio service provides a blend of Aboriginal-oriented spoken word programming, Aboriginal-language programming, and "popular" music programming (based on a country music format). This format has proven to be popular with Aboriginal Peoples and a wider audience, as demonstrated by NCI's continuing growth and financial success.
4. APTN believes that NCI's existing format and success in serving a large Aboriginal population, widely dispersed across the entire province of Manitoba, demonstrates that NCI has skillfully blended a commercial programming format (country) with programming intended for Aboriginal Peoples. This is not an easy task. It requires an "ear" for what is likely to succeed in terms of music, presentation and spoken word programming, good marketing and promotion skills and, just as importantly, integrity in reflecting and representing Aboriginal Peoples.
5. APTN has reviewed NCI's application and supplementary brief. NCI has significantly understated its success in building a dynamic and representative Aboriginal communications company. Among other achievements, NCI:

Pioneered the National Aboriginal Top 30 National Countdown, which is now syndicated for broadcast by five other Aboriginal provincial broadcasters in Western Canada;

Operates a network consisting of 59 transmitters across all of Manitoba – a tremendous technical challenge and achievement;

Organizes and extensively promotes the NCI Jam which highlights the vocal singing talent of 25 people from all regions of Manitoba. The NCI Jam began in 1987 with 170 people in attendance at a community hall. The talent show now attracts 2,300 people to a world class venue, the Manitoba Centennial Concert Hall;

NCI currently broadcasts twenty one hours of Aboriginal language programming (Cree and Ojibway) each week. This initiative enables important messages and news highlights to be shared with Elders and listeners whose first language is either Cree or Ojibway;

NCI has a long history of promoting and being present at cultural events like pow-wow's and festivals that highlight culture through storytelling, language festivals, theatre and music events;

NCI has a provincial audience that enjoys programming that is simply unavailable anywhere else. Several examples include the live broadcast of the Aboriginal Peoples Choice Music Awards (an event that draws 6000 people). Live concerts featuring Aboriginal musicians (NCI aired over twenty recorded acts in 2007). NCI is also planning to feature spoken word talent in the stand-up comedy genre. Committed to advancing talent within the community, NCI will be recoding and upcoming comedy event for APTN.

6. As significant as these achievements and contributions have been, NCI has done this while maintaining a healthy financial balance sheet. NCI does receive some support through the federal government's Northern Native Broadcast Access Program, but NCI is largely self-supporting. Close to 80% of NCI's more than \$2 million annual budget is generated by NCI itself.
7. NCI is a force in Aboriginal communications, in Manitoba radio, in supporting and developing Aboriginal musicians (especially youth), and, just as important as these achievements, in the protection of Aboriginal language and advancement of Aboriginal cultures.

The Need for an Aboriginal Station in Winnipeg

8. APTN fully supports NCI's conclusions regarding the need for an Aboriginal radio station focused on the needs and interests of the urban Aboriginal population in Winnipeg.
9. Currently, Winnipeg's radio stations – with the exception of NCI's country-based service broadcasting out of Selkirk – do not focus on an Aboriginal listener. We estimate that, without reference to NCI FM (CICY-FM), which is not a Winnipeg station, as such, the Winnipeg radio market currently provides very little content of Aboriginal-oriented radio programming each week. There are currently no Winnipeg stations that specifically support Aboriginal languages on a consistent basis. The campus community radio stations are stretched in terms of their resources and have limited ability in serving a large Aboriginal audience.
10. We find this surprising since, as NCI notes in its application, Winnipeg has the largest single Aboriginal population of any Canadian city and also the largest proportion of Aboriginal Peoples of any of Canada's largest urban centres.
11. Based on 2006 data, which was not available when NCI filed its application, the Aboriginal population in Winnipeg is now at least in excess of 68,000 persons¹. We note, however, that the total Aboriginal ancestry population for Winnipeg is stated by

¹ Statistics Canada. 2008. *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census*.

Statistics Canada to be in excess of 76,000 persons.² It is important, we believe, for the CRTC to have regard to this more up to date information in its consideration of NCI's application. We have enclosed a copy of Statistics Canada 2008 review of the 2006 census data with this intervention.

12. It is also now a well-known phenomenon that the Aboriginal population is, by and large, a younger population than the non-Aboriginal population. In Manitoba, according to Statistics Canada, the median population for the Aboriginal population is only 24 years of age, whereas the median age of the entire Canadian population of Canada is 40!³ This is a significant difference in age between the Aboriginal population and the non-Aboriginal population.
13. Even while the Aboriginal population includes a significant youth component, there is a tendency for commercial radio stations to gravitate to serving an older demographic, given the apparent resistance of that older market to the same technological changes that now make radio a "harder sell" to younger listeners. Within the Winnipeg market, for example, we note that there is little radio on offer directed to a younger audience (12-34), which could be expected to capture a significant proportion of the Aboriginal population.
14. Increasingly, we are pleased to note, Aboriginal youth see opportunities for themselves within a more "mainstream" Canadian Arts scene – including broadcasting and popular music. It is critically important to continue to build opportunities for Aboriginal youth and to demonstrate, by what we do with our broadcasting system, that the system speaks to them, serves their needs and interests, and is fully open for them to participate in.
15. It is shocking to think that until APTN was licensed as a national television service, there was not even a local television service across Southern Canada that had any significant Aboriginal presence. In rural Manitoba, there is today, fortunately, at least a radio station serving the rural areas that does have Aboriginal ownership and real Aboriginal participation – that is NCI's existing service. We need, as a priority, to make the same connection in urban Manitoba, starting with Winnipeg.

NCI's Programming Format and Plans

16. APTN believes that NCI has presented a strong programming strategy as a part of its application. NCI will focus on youth-oriented music and meaningful spoken word programming that is directly relevant to the urban Aboriginal population. Of course, APTN would expect that this programming format will prove to be popular with a much wider audience. NCI has already demonstrated its ability to attract Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal listeners with its existing radio service.

² Statistics Canada. 2008. *Aboriginal Ancestry (10), Sex (3) and Age Groups (12) for the Population of Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2006 Census*. (See data for Winnipeg).

³ Statistics Canada. 2008. *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census*, 14.

17. By its very nature, the mass media represents a potential bridge to build understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. A deeper level of understanding will, we believe, become even more important in the future within our shared urban setting. We fully endorse the "mainstream" component of NCI's programming format, which will provide the "girders and spans" of the bridge between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population. There is no doubt, we believe, that this is exactly the approach that should be taken to reach an urban Aboriginal audience and to build understanding among different cultures.
18. We are especially pleased by NCI's unequivocal commitment to showcase Aboriginal musical talent – especially younger and emerging artists. NCI already has a very strong track record in this area. NCI notes in its application that a number of Aboriginal hip-hop artists have already broken into the Aboriginal music scene. Hip-hop has become a key form of youth expression in Canada, and Aboriginal youth are no different in this regard. NCI's urban-oriented format will help to build audiences for these emerging artists and provide them with welcome exposure in a large market.
19. NCI has proposed specific commitments to help develop the Aboriginal music scene for youth. These initiatives include a live concert series (NCI 2 Live Concert Services), which builds on NCI's existing success with broadcasting concerts on its existing service. The new live concert series will focus on youth-oriented bands. NCI Album Premiere will harness the power of radio to "show and tell" about new and emerging artists. NCI is further committed to linking to Aboriginal youth through a dynamic and content-heavy website. Any youth initiative today has to have a meaningful web component – NCI obviously understands this.
20. APTN believes that NCI's programming format will be popular with its principal Aboriginal audience – the younger Aboriginal Winnipegger – as well as with a wider youth audience. NCI's proposal is directly "on target" to reach out and capture the younger, urban Aboriginal audience.

Supporting Success in Broadcasting

21. NCI's application presents the Commission with an opportunity to support a clear success in the Aboriginal broadcasting sector. NCI has for many years operated a large radio network. NCI now has transmitters located throughout Manitoba and reaches most of the population with a popular country-oriented format. NCI also provides many hours of Aboriginal-language programming and serves as a principal form of cultural expression in the communications sector for many Aboriginal communities in Manitoba.
22. It is not a simple task to blend together popular programming with programming that is directed primarily to achieving a social mandate, or programming that is targeted at specific Aboriginal-language audiences. NCI is succeeding admirably at this task, as shown by its long-standing presence as the leading Aboriginal voice in Manitoba radio, and its continuing growth to serve even more communities.

23. Notwithstanding NCI's particular situation as an Aboriginal broadcaster, NCI is in many ways similar to other radio broadcasters from a business perspective. It is important for all businesses (including non-profit enterprises like NCI's) to grow and diversify to remain relevant and to remain strong in a changing communications environment. There is a real concern that NCI could become less relevant, and less successful, if it did not reach out to a large Aboriginal population in Manitoba – the younger, urban Aboriginal audience that is targeted by this application. At the same time, NCI understands fully that it should not abandon its faithful listeners in more rural areas – who have been the mainstay of NCI for so many years. The answer to this dilemma is exactly what NCI has proposed – a new, urban Aboriginal radio service in Winnipeg.
24. We believe, therefore, that the CRTC should support NCI's continued growth. This support would secure NCI's position in Manitoba. It would also send a strong message to Aboriginal Peoples that their participation is valued, and that their successes will lead to greater and even more meaningful participation.

* * *

25. We thank the Commission for this opportunity to present our views in this important proceeding for Aboriginal Peoples in Winnipeg.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jean LaRose", is written over a thin red vertical line.

Jean LaRose
Chief Executive Officer

c.c. David McLeod
Native Communications Incorporated

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