



NAB
National Association of Broadcasters



**Celebrating 30 Years of
Community Broadcasting in South Africa**

Key highlights between 1993 and 2023

About the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB)

The NAB is a voluntary association formed in 1993 to foster and promote the development of a sustainable and robust broadcasting system in South Africa. It supports the principles of democracy, freedom of expression and the diversity of voices. As the leading representative of South Africa's regulated broadcasting industry, the NAB members comprise all three tiers of broadcasters (public, private and community) as well as signal providers and industry associates. It has, since the dawn of South Africa's democracy, engaged in policy and regulatory processes that affect the broadcasting sector. The NAB is funded entirely by its members and responds to a broad range of needs and developments to strengthen and create a favourable climate for a vibrant industry. The NAB established the BCCSA, which is recognised by the sector regulator, ICASA.

About the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA)

The BCCSA was established by the radio and television members of the NAB in 1993, as an independent tribunal that, without fear or favour, adjudicates complaints from the public against the broadcasters who are signatories to the BCCSA Codes of Conduct. As an independent tribunal, the BCCSA must reach its decisions on the Broadcasting Codes and Online Code independently, and in line with the precepts of administrative justice, as required by the Constitution of the Republic and legislation that governs fair administrative justice. Justice Johan Froneman (a retired Constitutional Court Judge) presides over appeals from any party aggrieved by a decision of the BCCSA Tribunal.

Celebrating 30 Years of Community Broadcasting and Democracy

To celebrate 30 years of the NAB and the BCCSA, the NAB engaged independent consultant, Jayshree Pather, to assist in developing this overview of key highlights of the community broadcasting sector – the first tier of broadcasting that was licensed in the lead-up to South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994. This document is intended to present key milestones across three decades. It is not a complete history of community broadcasting in the country – hopefully, that story will be told through the creativity and diversity of oral storytelling with, and by, communities. Our gratitude to the NAB community radio members (who held their first NAB meeting in 1998), and the hundreds of community broadcasting services across the country who have for the last 30 years amplified community needs and issues, and continue to keep communities informed, engaged and entertained.

Here’s to the next 30 years!

Nadia Bulbulia

NAB Executive Director

The National Association of Broadcasters and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa celebrate their 30th anniversary in 2023. This year also marks 30 years since the official start of community broadcasting, and 100 years of radio in South Africa.

This presents an opportunity to acknowledge the remarkable history of promoting participatory democracy through the airwaves that have unfolded over the past three decades and that have helped reshape and transform the contours of the broadcast industry.

The story of community broadcasting is closely interwoven with the evolution of South Africa’s democracy. It is characterised by adaptability, agility, resilience, and the ability to keep pace with a constantly changing landscape and context. It is also a story of persistent gaps and challenges.

This reflective piece traces the journey of community broadcasting in South Africa through some of its turning points and highlights.

Before democracy: A powerful legacy of struggle & resistance



Cartoon by Derek Bauer, 1985.

"I come to you from somewhere in South Africa... Never has the country, and our people, needed leadership as they do now, in this hour of crisis. Our house is on fire" – Oliver Tambo 1963.

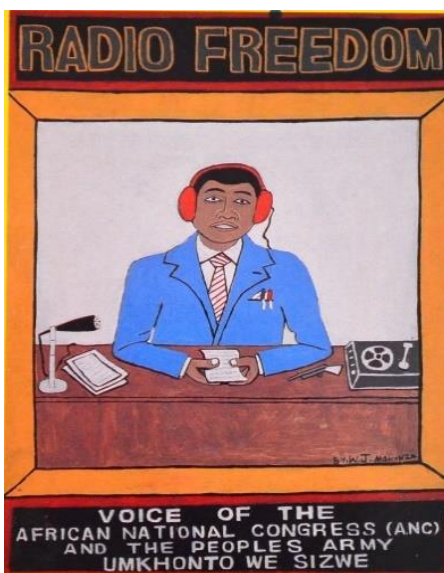
During apartheid, censorship was a deliberate strategy of the government to maintain its policy of oppression. The National Party government exercised tight control over the media, including over the South African Broadcast Corporation (**SABC**), and used laws such as the Publications Act and the Suppression of

Communism Act to regulate and restrict content and prevent criticism.

Despite this, a rich culture of alternative media emerged to provide a platform for dissenting voices, challenge government's propaganda and disseminate censored or suppressed information. These media platforms often worked under dangerous conditions underground or in exile to draw attention to the injustices of apartheid and mobilise resistance.

One example is Radio Freedom, Africa's oldest liberation radio station, operated by the African National Congress (ANC) in exile from Zambia, which started its first formal broadcast in 1963.

Radio Freedom played a crucial role in informing and inspiring South Africans during the apartheid era and contributed to the success of the world-wide anti-apartheid movement.



1985 Anti-apartheid movement radio poster.

Bush Radio (a member of the NAB) was formed in 1992 following two years of community consultations. After repeatedly applying for a licence from the apartheid government, Bush Radio decided to start broadcasting illegally in 1992.

<https://bushradio.wordpress.com/tag/oldest-community-radio-station-in-africa/> - Partial Eclipse by Richard Wicksteed in 1993. It features the illegal broadcast and the police raid on the station.

Radio Zibonele in Khayelitsha followed suit in 1993.

South Africa's media policy reform process came about as the result of broader political changes in the country. The unbanning of the ANC and other political formations, the suspension of the state of emergency and the release of political prisoners in 1990 were among the first formal steps to dismantle apartheid.

Two more NAB members started broadcasting in the early 1990s - **VOW FM 88.1** at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and **Trinity Broadcasting Network**.

The Windhoek Declaration in Namibia and the Jabulani! Freedom of the Airwaves conference in the Netherlands in 1991, together with other local initiatives, identified critical principles of community broadcasting that shaped and influenced existing policy and regulations.

Civil society also played an important role in exerting pressure on the government through campaigns like the Campaign for Open Media (COM) and the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting (CIB).

The CIB sought to transform the SABC from a state broadcaster to a public broadcaster by establishing an independently elected, representative board to run the SABC during the transition period. The second objective was to ensure an independent and democratically elected regulator was established.

Radio with a difference

Community radio stations are springing up everywhere. Radio Zibonele in Khayelitsha is different. It is run mainly by women. *Gail Reagan* visited the station

The Zibonele Health Project lies in the crowded and dusty Griffiths extension in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. The health centre could pass for one of the tiny houses around it, were it not for its big aerial and Shaverco truck outside it.

For the past three years, this modest building has been a community health clinic serving about 20 000 people who live in Griffiths and surrounding areas. But, in the past 18 months, Zibonele Health Project has become more than just a health centre. The project now houses one of the most successful community radio stations in the country — Radio Zibonele. Minor changes have been made to accommodate equipment for the radio station.

In a cupboard below the bed where patients are examined, you won't find medical equipment. Instead, there is a transmitter and battery used to run the community's very own radio station. "We used to broadcast every Tuesday, from 9am to 11.00am, but stopped at the end of March because we didn't have a license," Radio Zibonele's Snosy Mchiza explains. "We applied for a temporary broadcasting license and the community signed a petition in support of our application."

The radio station was born from the vision of community health care. The aim was that it should focus on education about how to prevent illness.

The project employs 13 people, most of them women. Each one does at least 125 home visits a month to educate and inform people about health issues.

"With radio," said Miriam Hlabe, "we are able to do a lot more education work around health. We can reach more people."

"Members of the community also use the radio to broadcast messages about meetings and community events," added Purita Ngwenkwa.

The setting up of the station was supported by the National Progressive Primary Health Care Network's (NPPHC) Media and Training Centre.

Health workers at the community health centre in Khayelitsha run Radio Zibonele



Radio with A Difference by SPEAK (1994).

The first decade (1993 - 2003): The pioneering phase



*Delegates at the Jabulani! Conference:
Michael Markovitz, Solly Mokoetle and Raymond Louw*



*Radio Freedom worker G.Mqwebu reports on a
Soweto commemoration in Lusaka, Zambia,
1966 (International Institute of Social History)*

The groundwork for South Africa’s unique architecture for community broadcasting was laid in the early 1990s and the formulation of policy and regulatory frameworks were crucial building blocks in this process.

The SABC was transformed into a public broadcaster. Private commercial broadcasting was also provided for, and community broadcasting was introduced as the third tier - as independent, non-profit community-based organisations, owned and run by diverse local communities who actively participate in the development of programming and oversight.

The NAB: Industry Body for all tiers of broadcasting in a new South Africa

The NAB was established toward the end of 1992 and began its work in 1993 as a voluntary, member-funded association working to nurture and promote a sustainable and robust broadcasting system in South Africa. The NAB champions the values of democracy, freedom of expression, and promoting diverse voices.

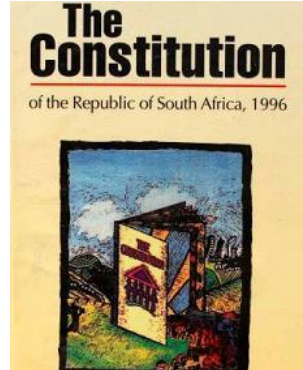
NAB members include public, commercial and community broadcasters as well as signal providers and industry associates. NAB members are also significant annual contributors to the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), who in turn fund the community media sector.



Key milestones

Interim Constitution – an independent regulator for broadcasting

The interim constitution of South Africa, promulgated in 1993, governed South Africa until the adoption of the final Constitution and Bill of Rights in 1997. The Final Constitution provides for the independent regulation of broadcasting. In this respect, section 192 states: National legislation must establish an independent authority to regulate broadcasting in the public interest, and to ensure fairness and a diversity of views broadly representing South African society.



The Independent Broadcasting Authority Act (IBA Act)

The Independent Broadcasting Authority Act 153 of 1993 was signed into law in October 1993 (pre-1994 elections), to establish the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA). The IBA Act provided for geographic stations and community of interest stations (such as campus-based stations, language stations, religious and cultural stations, and other communities of interest).

Independent self-regulating body: The BCCSA

An NAB milestone in 1993 was setting up the BCCSA, an independent self-regulatory body to administer the Broadcasting Codes of Conduct and address public complaints regarding broadcasting content.

Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa

The BCCSA's role is to balance freedom of expression with the need to ensure that broadcast content is responsible, respectful, and complies with the law. NAB members adhere to the BCCSA Codes of Conduct for Free-to-Air, Subscription and Online Content Services, as enforced by the BCCSA. The services of the BCCSA are free to the community broadcasting members of the NAB.

The BCCSA is an important mechanism for addressing public complaints and resolving disputes, as well as maintaining broadcasting standards and accountability within the industry.



1993: Radio Tygerberg was licensed on a temporary basis by the newly formed IBA

Industry body for the Community Radio sector

In December 1993, the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF) was launched in Orlando, Soweto as a national, member-based association of community stations and support service organizations.



Victory: An independent regulator with constitutional guarantees

In March 1994, IBA was formally established to regulate the broadcasting sector in the public interest. This role was previously in the hands of the Department of Home Affairs.

27 April 1994: First free, fair, and democratic elections in South Africa – the Independent Media Commission regulated the media during the elections, The Broadcasting Monitoring and Complaints Committee (BMCC) was established by the IBA.

An important first milestone of the IBA was the Triple Inquiry Report of 1995 - focusing on SA local content, cross-media ownership and control, and the sustainability and viability of public broadcasting. It determined policy positions that resulted in regulation making processes.



By the time the Triple Inquiry was concluded, the IBA had licensed a total of eighty-two stations, cutting across cultural, religious, ethnic and political interests. These stations broadcasted in 15 languages across the country.

The inaugural IBA Council was headed by co-chairpersons, Dr. Sebileto Makone-Matabane and Mr. Peter de Klerk.

The pioneering years of independent broadcasting regulation also ushered in an inter-generational cohort of emerging regulators, with Councillors Felleng Sekha, 'Lumko Mtimde and Nadia Bulbulia referred to as "young blood".

Read more here:

[https://mg.co.za/article/1998-04-09-young-bloods-join-iba/.](https://mg.co.za/article/1998-04-09-young-bloods-join-iba/)



Cover of the Triple Inquiry Report with illustrations by acclaimed artist, William Kentridge



The first Radio Maritzburg team (Picture from the Natal Witness)

David Hotchkiss, a NAB member, recounts the early days of Radio Maritzburg:

"The community station was initially called Radio Peace as its mission was to bring peace to the warring political factions around the city in the lead-up to the 1994 election. The team in Pietermaritzburg received training by a volunteer from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The station changed its name to Radio Maritzburg following surveys in the community. The IBA was impressed by the inclusiveness, the community response, and community representation, and awarded the station one of the first 'one-year temporary' community radio licences in the country on 23 November 1994."

In 1994 temporary licences were issued to (amongst others):

Soweto Buwa Radio (now Jozi FM), Bush Radio, Radio Maritzburg, Mafisa FM, Radio Zibonele and Rosestad 100.6 FM.



In 1995, the IBA recognised the BCCSA as a formal tribunal in terms of section 56(2) of the IBA Act 153 of 1993.

Licenses to community radio stations

By August 1995, 82 community radio stations were licensed including MFM 92.6, Fine Music Radio, Voice of the Cape, Impact Radio, and East Rand Stereo (now Ekurhuleni FM).

Recommended establishment of the GCIS and MDDA

Key recommendations from the Communications Task Team report, *Communications 2000*, included the establishment of the Government Communications and Information Services (GCIS) (to replace the old South African Communications Service) and the Media Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA.

The Sentech Act 63 of 1996

The Sentech Act 63 of 1996 created an independent signal distributor as a common carrier to licensed television and radio broadcasters. Also in 1996, Rainbow FM was licensed.

The White Paper on Broadcasting Policy was published in 1998, followed by the 1999 Broadcasting Act

The 1999 Broadcasting Act dealt with issues not covered in the IBA Act: universal access, diversity, nation-building, education, and strengthening societal values. It also served as a foundation for policy goals such as migrating from analogue to digital networks and regulating converged networks.

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA)



ICASA was established in July 2000 through the merger of the IBA and the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA). The ICASA Act 13 of 2000 governs its functioning. Mandla Langa, a renowned writer and novelist, served as the first ICASA chairperson.



An unintended consequence of the merger was a delay in licensing for four-year community radio licences in KwaZulu Natal, Gauteng, and the Western Cape.

Also in 2000, a further 33 temporary community radio broadcasting licences were issued and a Draft Position Paper on the MDDA was developed. In 2001, the NAB hosted community radio workshops on regulatory issues, attracting advertising, and achieving excellence in community radio.

First evaluation of community radio

In 2001, the first evaluation of community radio was undertaken by researchers Nell and Shapiro. Key findings from the *First Footprints of the African Renaissance: An Evaluation of Training Provision in the Community Radio Sector in South Africa* were that the sector had a lack of key skills including organisational and management skills and insufficient financial resources at community station level.



Soweto TV, Cue TV, Bush TV, Greater Durban TV, and the Cape Town Community Television Collective (CT CTVC) started broadcasting on an ad hoc basis, supported by temporary licences.

The Media Development & Diversity Agency (MDDA)



In 2002, the MDDA was founded through Media Development and Diversity Agency Act 14 of 2002, as a public-private partnership to foster media development and to facilitate access to the media for historically disadvantaged and underserved communities and individuals.



Former Minister in the Presidency, Dr Essop Pahad, encouraged private/commercial broadcasters to contribute financially to the MDDA to support the development of community media. Funding is directed to community media and small commercial media initiatives. Initial estimates for this media support initiative were R500 million over five years or (R100 million a year). It took close to 16 years for the MDDA to reach this target.

The second decade (2003 – 2013): Learning, refining, adapting, & fine-tuning

The second decade of community broadcasting was driven by the changes brought about by the Electronic Communications Act 36 of 2005 (ECA) and the mushrooming of powerful social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

In 2003, the MDDA regulations were passed and in January 2004 the MDDA started providing grant funding to community media projects. Within two years, the disbursements for projects increased from R2 million in March 2005 to R20 million.

MDDA Inaugural board members

Ms. Felleng Sekha, represented the NAB as the broadcast representative on the inaugural MDDA board, succeeding Ms. Nomhle Canca in this role. Subsequently, a representative from the NAB has consistently held a seat on the MDDA Board.

MDDA’s first CEO was Ms. Libby Lloyd (a former IBA and ICASA Councillor, and author of several policy documents for government and the governing party). Lumko Mtimde, also a former IBA and ICASA Councillor, succeeded Ms. Lloyd as MDDA CEO.



Ms. Libby Lloyd, first MDDA CEO



Lumko Mtimde and others circa 1990

The Community Television Broadcasting Services Position Paper published in 2004 questioned the sustainability of community television. The first set of licences, except TBN and Soweto TV, were issued on a test basis for a one-year period - 1KZN (Richards Bay), Tshwane TV, Bay TV (Port Elizabeth) and Cape Town TV. In 2004, Tshwane FM was licensed.



First MDDA Board members

A key shift in licensing community broadcasters and funding the MDDA

In 2005, the ECA was passed. Most noteworthy for community broadcasting was that it simplified the licensing process and set tight time-periods for ICASA to issue licences in attempt to deal with the backlog of applications. NAB members elect to pay their contributions to the MDDA.

The BCCSA's recognition by the former IBA, was carried forward by ICASA, and the BCCSA is regarded as a formal tribunal in terms of section 54(3) of the ECA.

In 2003 the Association of Christian Broadcasters (ACB), a member of the NAB, held a conference on the future of community radio, and in 2005, Chai FM was licensed.

In 2006, the ICASA Amendment Act introduced holistic enforcement and compliance structures to reflect convergence between networks and enhanced the regulator's investigation, inspection, complaints handling, dispute resolution, adjudication, regulation, and market review functions. 2006 is also the year in which Facebook and Twitter (now X) made their debut.

By 2007, 152 of South Africa's 191 licensed radio stations were classified as community services, reaching about 6.5 million listeners.¹ Soweto TV's first broadcast under a one-year licence was on 1 July 2007 and the MDDA hosted a Community Television Workshop in Durban.



In 2008, the Broadcasting Digital Migration Policy allocated 15% of space for community television on Multiplex 1. Cape Town TV starts broadcasting under a one-year licence. Mahikeng FM and Radio Pulpit were licensed in 2008.

¹https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337817758_Assessing_the_Social_Media_Maturity_of_a_Community_Radio_Station_The_Case_of_Rhodes_Music_Radio_in_South_Africa

By 2009, the MDDA board approved more than 229 different projects, and provided more than R73 million in grants. Mix 93.8 was licensed in this year. In 2010, Sentech reports that it is owed R27 million in transmission costs by community radio and TV stations.²

In 2011, Tshwane TV started broadcasting and the Department of Communications (DoC) commissioned a study to investigate the impact of the community broadcast support programme. The findings from Pygma Consulting were that 48% of community radio stations interviewed had governance problems. Bok Radio was licensed in 2011.

In 2012, 133 community radio stations were licensed cumulatively since 1994. Of these, 100 were operational. Also in 2012, the Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership at Rhodes University undertook an analysis of the community television environment to develop a sustainable business model and to locate this sub-sector within the country's policy framework. This set the tone for a provincial model for community television which influences ICASA's approach going forward.



² In 2010 <https://ewn.co.za/2010/09/14/Millions-owed-to-Sentech-by-community-radio-and-tv-stations>

The third decade (2013 – 2023): Pivoting amidst disruption

This decade of community broadcasting is best characterised by multiple disruptions and the need for faster evolution and adaptation. Significant changes include new regulations from ICASA governing community broadcasting, the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing load-shedding.

In 2013, the offices of Karabo FM, a community radio station in the Free State, were destroyed in a case of arson, with the mayor of the town implicated in the case. Groot FM was licensed in this year. In 2014, there were a total of 204 community radio licences issued by ICASA. Gateway Radio was licensed in 2014.

Unscrambling convergence

A significant shift during President Jacob Zuma's administration was the creation of the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services (DTPS) and the DoC, separating broadcasting, and telecoms. Furthermore, MDDA and the GCIS were moved from reporting to the Presidency to reporting to the DoC.

The NAB engaged PwC to develop a State of the Broadcasting Industry Report. Community broadcasting members of the NAB participated in the PwC research survey. This report is referenced in various academic studies and policy development processes.

By 2014, there were six licensed community television stations in South Africa: Soweto TV, Cape Town TV, Bay TV, One KZN, Tshwane TV, North West TV and this sub-sector had an estimated six million viewers.³

A 2014 study found community radio stations were generally aware of the importance of the internet, but



**State of the
Broadcasting Industry
Report
2014**



Research contributed by 

Access the report here:

[https://www.nab.org.za/uploads/files/NAB_State_of_the_Broadcasting_Industry_Report_2014_-_November_2014_\(Final\).pdf](https://www.nab.org.za/uploads/files/NAB_State_of_the_Broadcasting_Industry_Report_2014_-_November_2014_(Final).pdf)

“This is probably the most brutal attack on community radio that I’m aware of in South Africa, and it’s a reflection of the intolerance of media freedom at local level.” – Franz Kruger, WRA.

³ Bizcommunity, 2013

social media usage was constrained by limited access to the internet and relatively low levels of mobile phone penetration, especially in low-income and rural communities.⁴

In 2015, the NAB made a submission on the Draft Community Broadcasting Subsidy Scheme.

The MDDA commissioned Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) to undertake an Impact Study on the effectiveness of the MDDA. Key findings echo earlier community radio evaluation studies.



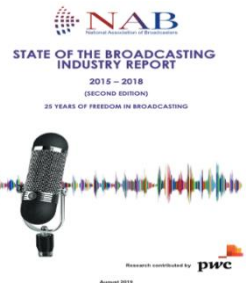
In 2016, ICASA declared a moratorium on the granting of new community radio licences. The United Nations declares online freedom as a human right.

In 2018, the NAB produced the Future-Proofing Community Radio Guide to catalyse sector engagement on digital disruption, technology convergence and new content platforms. The guide was presented at MDDA community outreach workshops.

Back to convergence

The Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT) was established in June 2019 by the merging of the DoC and DTSP under President Cyril Ramaphosa’s administration. The reporting lines of the MDDA and GCIS reverted to the Presidency (from the DoC).

The NAB published its second edition of the State of the Broadcasting Industry Report in August 2019 (available here: https://www.nab.org.za/uploads/files/NAB_Report_2019.pdf)



In 2019, updated regulations governing community radio were introduced and the moratorium on community licences was lifted and MegaZone Bollywood was licensed. Also in 2019, ICASA identified approximately 29 community radio stations without the necessary licences to operate.⁵

⁴ FXI study, 2014

⁵ <https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/59/196909.html>

An unprecedented COVID 19 pandemic

In March 2020, a national state of disaster was declared in South Africa, followed by a nation-wide lockdown in response to the global outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. The broadcasting sector was designated as an essential service in recognition of its critical role in keeping the public informed and engaged.

NAB members swiftly pivoted to respond to listeners' changing information, entertainment and lifestyle needs and to actively support government's awareness and information campaign efforts to contain the virus. The power of radio was affirmed as more than 38% of South Africans tuned into their radio during the lockdown period.

The Solidarity Fund, a public-private partnership developed to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, supported 15 community radio stations to share syndicated content on the most critical health messages during October/November 2020 to educate their audiences on social distancing, sanitisation, and risk groups through these vital broadcasts.

In March 2020, ICASA imposed a licence moratorium until after the analogue switch-off, informed by the scarcity of the radio frequency spectrum according to the regulator.

In 2021 ICASA published the final regulations on Digital Sound Broadcasting Services. Also in 2021, community radio 919 was licensed.

In July 2021, Alex FM, Ntokozo FM, Mams FM, and Westside FM had equipment damaged or looted during the wave of civil unrest that occurred in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. ICASA also received reports of vandalism of communications infrastructure, including 113 network towers.⁶



Takalane Nemangowe, Alex FM's station manager said: *"The community of Alexandra is robbed of its radio station and platform of engagement,"* he said it took them 27 years to build the radio station and buy equipment to serve their community.⁷

Commercial radio members of NAB rallied to assist Alex FM through donations, allocation of equipment and technical support.

⁶<https://mybroadband.co.za/news/telecoms/405910-radio-stations-go-down-as-looters-strike.html>

⁷<https://mybroadband.co.za/news/broadcasting/406068-alex-fm-27-years-of-hard-work-destroyed-in-hours.html>

Individuals also pledged financial assistance on social media, using the hashtag #RebuildAlexFM.⁸



In March 2022, the NAB, with NEMISA and the MDDA, hosted two Future-proofing Community Radio Workshops in Johannesburg and Cape Town. These dynamic workshops brought together a diverse group of about 200 participants from community radio stations, along with key broadcasting stakeholders and industry experts. NAB members contributed their expertise, both as industry experts and workshop participants.

NAB Community Radio Members of the BCCSA

The BCCSA received 19 complaints for the period 2020 to 2023 for its community radio signatories. The complaints range from racism to false vaccine information. These cases demonstrate the value

and importance of a complaints' directorate like the BCCSA and the opportunities it provides for citizens to lodge complaints and hold broadcasters accountable.

The next 30 years: compelling stories, keeping communities engaged and informed.

In 2023, community broadcasting in numbers:

- Licensed community radio stations in South Africa: 285
- Licensed community television stations in South Africa: 5
- Community radio listenership in South Africa: 8 million
- Number of community radio stations on air in South Africa: 212

⁸ <https://ewn.co.za/2021/07/14/r50-000-pledge-to-help-alex-fm-rebuild-temp-premises-offered-for-broadcasting>

The progression of community broadcasting licensing

Licensing of community broadcasters has shifted over the past three decades in response to lessons learned and new developments. At first, the IBA (and later ICASA) allowed for three types of community radio licences: special event licences (for no longer than 30 days and not consecutive months); temporary licences (no more than 1 year) and four-year licences.

The one-year temporary licenses (from 1993 onward) were intended as a temporary measure to put community radio on air before a policy was developed. At the onset, technological constraints resulted in two stations having to share one frequency until a single frequency approach was adopted.

The IBA held licence hearings around the country between 1998 and 2002 to assess applications.

Applicants had to prove that the proposed community station had the support of their community through signed petitions, could demonstrate feasibility and had to participate in an oral hearing. The demand, need and support of a station was assessed by the regulator. A consequence of this, thorough but time-consuming, process was a significant backlog of applications.

By mid-1997 ICASA announced the end of one-year temporary licences. Existing one-year stations were allowed to continue broadcasting and to continue re-applying for licences until such time as the four-year licences in those provinces were issued.

The ECA in 2005 simplified the community broadcasting licensing process but an unintended consequence was the granting of about 200 new licences without sufficient due diligence. This led to many community stations competing for listeners and advertisers in the same communities.

ICASA introduced updated regulations in 2019 to address this and other shortcomings in the regulatory and operating environment of community broadcasters and to streamline the sector.

New requirements imposed by the Community Broadcasting Services Regulations included a pre-registration process that required potential applicants to have managed a non-profit organisation for at least two years before applying for a community broadcast licence; penalties for non-compliance, more local content sourced from the station's coverage area and assessing a station's track ahead when renewing licences.

To address long-standing governance problems including nepotism in community broadcasting, ICASA also included an extensive list of family relations that were precluded from board membership.

Key metrics for assessing applications include how it proposes to meet the diverse needs of the community and how the station is distinct from other broadcasters serving the same coverage area.

Key processes in 2023

In February 2023, the BCCSA Online Content Services Code of Conduct (“Online Content Code”) became operational. Ensuring credibility and trust in information on online platforms is crucial in an era where misinformation and disinformation spreads like wildfire on such platforms.

The Online Code can be viewed here: <https://www.bccsa.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Online-code-of-conduct.pdf>

In 2023, the MDDA marks its 20th anniversary. It engaged an independent consultancy firm, Redflank, to conduct research into a sustainability model for community and small commercial media.

In September 2023, the DCDT called for public comments on the Draft White Paper on Audio and Audiovisual Media Service Online Content Safety: A New Vision for South Africa. Maintaining the three-tier broadcasting system, simplifying licensing, and allowing community broadcasters to register for both individual and class licences and ensuring community-based content is available across platforms are considerations for community broadcasting.

The White Paper called for a broadcasting school to be established to address the training needs of previously disadvantaged individuals and rural communities. In 1998, the National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa (NEMISA) was created.



Future-casting... to a vibrant community broadcasting sector

In a constantly changing digital and socio-economic landscape, filled with fierce competition for audiences and advertising revenue, community broadcasting can carve out its niche by focusing on creating unique, captivating, locally relevant content. And the fundamental principles of community broadcasting as a vital tier of the broadcasting and communications industry in South Africa’s democracy will no doubt endure.

By embracing diverse perspectives and voices, and with a strong 30-year history, the sector can further enhance its reputation as a reliable and credible platform. Community broadcasting is ideally positioned to meet the growing demand for content that actively involves and empowers citizens and to showcase our uniquely South African stories.

The NAB and BCCSA remain committed to supporting a vibrant and robust community broadcasting sector well into the future.

CHRONOLOGY OF LICENSING: A FEW NAB COMMUNITY RADIO MEMBERS



Acknowledgement

Thanks to the NAB Community Radio Committee members for their helpful input in developing this overview of the community broadcasting sector, and in particular,

Ms. Wilma van Schalkwyk and Mr. Dave Hotchkiss.

With gratitude to Ms. Jayshree Pather and to the NAB Team:

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Communications and Research Specialist, Mr. Ofentse Mboweni

Office Manager, Ms. Lois Motta-Marques



Notable websites:

DCDT - <https://www.dcdt.gov.za/>

MDDA - <https://www.mdda.org.za/>

GCIS - <https://www.gcis.gov.za/>

BRC - <https://brcsa.org.za/>

ICASA - <https://www.icasa.org.za/>

NEMISA - <https://www.nemisa.co.za/>

NCRF - <https://ncrf.org.za/>



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