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TVNZ charter for the people

By Todd Symons

TVNZ recently invited the public to help shape the future of New Zealand broadcasting by reviewing the TVNZ Charter.

Public submissions for the review closed on August 3 and TVNZ's Head of Corporate Affairs, Peter Parussini, says the company is pleased with the response.

"We have received over 180 submissions from a variety of people and various interest groups."

"The Charter should be a work in progress."

Jim Tully, Head of Journalism at Canterbury University, says this is a fairly substantial response and thinks the review is very important.

"I think things like the charter should be a work in progress. Otherwise they become documents set in stone which don't recognise developments."

Parussini agrees and says the charter needs to be adjusted to recognise the move into digital television and online content.

"We believe new technology will help deliver more community and public service value to the public, and to ignore new technologies in the charter wouldn't be a good thing."

He says TVNZ wants to simplify the language in the charter.

"One of the biggest complaints we get from the public is that the charter is hard to read and seems convoluted."

However, Parussini says the substance of the charter will remain the same and TVNZ has no intentions of changing its treatment of minority programming.

Tully says he hoped minority programming would be extended.

"I would have thought the new news channel would include more Maori news.

"They do their best within the existing programmes, but I think they could do a lot more."

Tully says the digital platform and the new channels TVNZ is launching have always been seen as a way to deliver minority programming that better fulfils the charter.

But according to Parussini TVNZ will not use just the new channels to fulfil the charter.

"We have always seen TVNZ Six and Seven as extending our coverage of the charter from what is already happening on channels One and Two, not replacing it."

Under the TVNZ Act 2003 a review of its role had to be completed after five years.

Mr Parussini says from here the submissions will be collated and forwarded to the Minister of Broadcasting, Steve Maharey, in early October.

NZ subs, Aussie boss

Subediting of the *New Zealand Herald* is no longer an in-house operation.

By Sophie Finnemore

Australian company Pagemasters began subediting of APN's publications, including the *Herald* and the *Listener* on August 13.

The subediting facility at APN's printing press in Ellerslie is up and running, awaiting new staff as redundancies are rolled out across APN's titles.

Around 20 sub-editors are working at the plant, with about 30 more starting later.

All but five of the 50 positions Pagemasters advertised have been filled.

Pagemasters' sub-editing office is more like a modern office than a traditional newsroom, with its three rows of desks, plasma screens and designer kitchen.

Antony Phillips, Pagemasters New Zealand's managing editor, says despite superficial differences nothing will change in terms of workflow back at the masthead.

"Really nothing's different except that it's here."

The quality of the publications and the news they produce will not suffer as a result of the move either, says Phillips.

"The expectation is that quality is as high if not higher than [the publications] are achieving at the moment."

Phillips says Pagemasters' aim is to become a centre of excellence for editing and design in Australasia.

New Zealand Herald union delegate Simon Collins says he hopes this will be the case, but it will not be long before the publications' news quality and appearance will suffer.

"The value of subeditors is institutional knowledge - being familiar with people and places."

He is concerned a decline in accuracy will occur and some stories may be left untold.

Experienced sub-editors with publication knowledge will be removed from newsrooms and replaced by less experienced subeditors in a "factory in Ellerslie" under intensified deadline pressures, he says.

However, Philips says Pagemasters has implemented training programmes and mentoring to retain a high level of editing skill.

Collins does not believe this will be enough to combat the effects of the dislocation: "They can train people technically but the value of sub-editors is institutional knowledge – being familiar with people and places."

He also believes the move will be bad news for journalists themselves.

"For journalists, there will be change from a sense of involvement in a paper they can be proud of, to a factory-like environment where there is little job satisfaction."

APN and Pagemasters have faced heavy criticism, with commentators seeing the move as a chance to cut costs.

Phillips says Pagemasters had been significantly resourced in its setting-up process and that "a majority of staff are earning more than they were previously".

Collins says although Pagemasters are paying similar base rates to the Herald, they are cutting back on conditions.

"It's about a 20 per cent net loss in salary."

Production will run from 5am until 1am, seeking to eliminate the "dead time" between one paper "going to bed" and the other "waking up".

During this time sub-editors will work on another paper such as a weekly regional.

Collins says this shows the focus is on cutting cost, not improving news quality and he is eagerly waiting the collapse of Pagemasters' Ellerslie facility.

"They tried a similar thing in New South Wales, but they found every paper had to hire more local subs to fix the mistakes made by the sube-ditors at the sub hub."

"I hope they recognise it won't work here either and disband it."

However, Phillips is confident the venture will work.

"We have the technology and expertise…I have every confidence it will work extremely well."

The EPMU held a media summit on August 11 to look at how to counter the effect of foreign ownership and increasing commercial pressures on New Zealand's media.

Full coverage of the EPMU Journalism Matters Summit - pages six and seven.

Kiwis fade on ethical trade

PHOTO: Amy Campbell

By Jomine Neethling

Most people in New Zealand oppose bonded labour, child slavery and injustice, but support for fair trade has been slow.

New Zealanders need to think seriously about how their actions and purchases support unethical labouring practices with Third World countries, says Michelia Ward of Trade Aid.

But Rosser Johnson, a media studies and political economy academic, says it is important to realise price is a factor in individuals' decisions.

"It's very easy to say people should pay more and buy fair trade products, but there has to be a realisation that not everyone can do this.

"For example, it is much easier for people who are better-off to make this stand than for those of a lower socio-economic environment," says Dr Johnson.

Ward agrees, but says it would be a "cop-out" just to leave it at that.

"Take for example chocolate. Chocolate is a luxury item. So instead of buying a big block you can just buy a small bar.

"Or buying NZ made. Although it would cost more, it would also last 10 times longer," says Ward.

There are other things people can do to push for ethical and fair trade, says Ward.

Dr Johnson says a cultural shift is key.

"It should be about helping people make the choice they want to make, instead of just saying 'bad person' if you can't afford to buy fair trade products," he says .

Trade Aid and others are working to create this cultural change.

"Apart from buying fair trade where or when possible, putting the hard questions to other retailers is important," says Ward.

"Say to them: 'I want to know I'm not supporting child or bonded labour'."

Retailers need to know this accountability is expected of them, says Ward.

If customers keep their pressure on vendors, they would realise they need to know what economic and social conditions their products are produced.

The fair trade movement here is far behind that of some countries, says Ward.

"In the USA and UK there is a big consumer movement already, so you get magazines rating retailers so the public can know."

Dr Johnson says the difference is those countries have much more robust charity and opposition sectors.

"In New Zealand there hasn't been the same shift in trade opposition as there has been in the nuclear, environment stance."

Trade Aid says if more people buy fair trade products, the items will become cheaper because greater quantities could be imported.