



Sent via Intervention Form

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Canadian Radio-television and
Telecommunications Commission
Gatineau, Quebec
K1A 0N2

**Re: Final comments of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters with respect to
Broadcasting Notice of Consultation CRTC 2025-52**

The Path Forward: Supporting Canadian and Indigenous audio content

The Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) is the national voice of Canadian privately-owned and operated broadcasters. Representing small, medium and large radio and television stations across the country, and national discretionary services, the CAB advocates for a vibrant, diverse, and competitive broadcasting system that serves all Canadians.

Since its founding in 1926, the CAB has been a trusted leader in policy development, regulatory affairs, and public dialogue, working closely with government, regulators, and industry stakeholders. Our members are committed to delivering high-quality Canadian content, supporting local news and journalism, and reflecting the voices and stories of communities from coast to coast to coast.

As the broadcasting landscape evolves, the CAB advocates for fair and forward-looking policies that ensure Canadian broadcasters can thrive in a digital age, protecting the sustainability of local media, promoting innovation, and strengthening Canadian identity and culture.

With these broad objectives in mind, the CAB is pleased to provide its final comments on a modernized audio policy framework that preserves support for Canadian and Indigenous creators, while ensuring the survival and vitality of Canadian private radio.

Executive Summary/Overview

1. The record of this proceeding is unmistakably clear: **the status quo will not do.**
2. As emphasized by several radio groups in their written submissions and at the public hearing, Canadian private radio stations are operating under an outdated regulatory framework that no longer respects listener preferences or competitive realities. In the face of massive competition from foreign streaming platforms, commercial radio broadcasters urgently need greater flexibility to better serve the needs and interests of their listeners and compete on a level playing field.
3. Evidence provided at the hearing apply demonstrated how the combined weight of current regulatory obligations—particularly unrealistic music quotas, onerous reporting requirements, and outdated definitions—is accelerating the decline of Canadian radio. We heard several parties state that without meaningful change and greater flexibility, more stations will close, and with them, important sources of support for Canadian musicians, as well as Canadian news, information, and community connection.
4. Therefore, the CAB urges the Commission to seize this opportunity to modernize its framework in a way that supports radio’s sustainability, preserves local service, and strengthens the sector’s contribution to Canadian culture. To that end, we have recommended the following key changes:
 - Reset Canadian content (Cancon) and French vocal music (FVM) levels to better reflect listener preferences and align more closely with the natural level of consumption (approximately 10% for Cancon, less for FVM) – we recommend levels of 25% and 40% respectively.
 - Simplify the definition of a Canadian musical selection in a way that recognizes how listeners – and streaming platforms – define Canadian content, with the goal of expanding the pool of selections that qualify as Canadian.
 - Adjust ownership limits to improve investment potential and permit stations to take more advantage of ownership synergies.
 - Reduce regulatory burden by adjusting and simplifying obligations, streamlining reporting requirements, and ending over-zealous compliance monitoring.
5. Most importantly, the Commission must not *increase* regulatory (and associated administrative) burden. Therefore, we recommend against any obligations with respect to emerging or Indigenous artists or the broadcast of news programming. Instead of obligations, the Commission must consider incentives and the redirection of existing Canadian content development (CCD) spending to support this programming.
6. For their part, foreign streamers should be required to make meaningful and measurable commitments to the discoverability of Canadian programming and, at minimum, continue to devote 5% of their Canadian revenues in the manner set out in the Commission’s base contribution decision.¹

¹ Broadcasting Regulatory Policy CRTC 2024-121-1 and Broadcasting Order CRTC [2024-194](#).

7. This package of changes is designed to set an equitable, flexible and simple regulatory framework that will help to ensure the sustainability of commercial radio stations and their ability to continue to serve their listeners and support broadcasting policy objectives. Contrary to the arguments of music groups and representative, it is conceived not to diminish support for Canadian or Indigenous artists, but to ensure that radio remains viable and is able to continue to amplify those voices for decades to come. Closed radio stations will make no contributions.

The Case for Urgent Reform

8. In the opening statement to the public hearing, the Vice-Chair of Broadcasting stated that the Commission's goal for this proceeding is to establish an effective and equitable regulatory framework—one that enables both traditional and digital audio services to adapt to profound change. More importantly, she acknowledged the reality the radio sector now faces:

[TRANSLATION] As we all know, the rise of audio streaming platforms has profoundly changed listening habits, fragmented audiences, and called into question the traditional economic foundations of this sector.

9. The CAB strongly agrees. Changes in the audio sector are indeed profound and the regulatory framework for radio must evolve to reflect the seismic transformation in how Canadians discover and consume audio content. As highlighted across the record of this proceeding, streaming platforms have fragmented audiences, diverted advertising revenues, and redefined success metrics for musicians. Yet, Canadian radio remains bound by regulations designed for a pre-digital era.
10. Today, Canadian radio broadcasters are competing against global, largely unregulated streaming giants with unlimited catalogues, algorithmic curation, and no Canadian content obligations. By contrast, radio continues to operate under a rigid set of quotas, definitions, and reporting requirements that constrain programming and undermine listener satisfaction. These regulatory constraints force stations to air music that audiences are less interested in – or to overplay the Canadian selections they do like.
11. Further, the Commission's focus on Canadian musical selections, while well-intentioned, has the unintended effect of diminishing radio's relevance and diverting resources away from other important programming and community initiatives – such as local news, community engagement, and emergency information. Worse, the Commission's notice of consultation suggests that it is considering *additional* obligations and even more stringent definitions. This is not appropriate at a time when radio's revenues are declining, and profitability has reached an all time and unsustainable low of 3%.
12. The record of this proceeding demonstrates that the commercial radio sector's regulatory obligations are now out of balance with its economic capacity and public value. Reform is both urgent and necessary.

Five ways the Commission can set radio – and the music industry - up for success

13. At the hearing, the music industry argued that radio plays an important role in supporting Canadian musicians, and we don't disagree. Radio has always been a key partner to musicians, but it is no longer the sole or even primary partner, and the music industry is now doing better than it ever has. The challenges faced by radio, however, are such that their ability to continue to sustain the same level of support is in question, so much so that radio stations are already having to make tough decisions to cut back, and several have closed.
14. As the Vice-Chair observed in her closing remarks, *“without content, there is no broadcasting. **But without broadcasting, even the best content will never be discovered.**”*
15. We agree – a strong radio sector is an important contributor to the ongoing discoverability and success of Canadian and Indigenous content. Therefore (echoing the Vice-Chair's closing comments), the best formula for these two sectors is one that supports the radio industry while still respecting the objectives of the *Broadcasting Act*.
16. Canadian radio loves Canadian music and wants to continue to support it. Resetting their obligations will permit radio stations to continue to operate, serving listeners, providing critical local and community news and information, and supporting Canadian and Indigenous musicians. Failure to support commercial radio stations will result in the opposite. Therefore, we put forward the following five recommendations to set the commercial radio sector – and therefore the music industry – up for success.

Recommendation 1: Reset music requirements

17. The CAB recommends that the Commission reset Cancon and FVM requirements to better reflect listener preferences and align with the natural rate of Canadian music consumption, which according to several sources is approximately 10%:
 - as reported in the undertaking submitted by The Ross Davies group, monthly streaming data shows that streaming of Canadian artists fluctuated between 9.3% and 6.4% from January to August 2025, with an average share of 8.1%;
 - the same source shows that Canadian sales averaged 7% over the same time period; and
 - as noted by the Commission in the initial notice of consultation:

Data from the Department of Canadian Heritage indicates that, among the top 10,000 songs streamed in Canada in 2023, the share of streams by Canadian artists was 10.2%. Data from the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada (SOCAN) for 2023 indicates that a similar proportion, i.e., 10% of royalties paid to it by online services are distributed to Canadian creators. 2023 data from the Observatoire de la culture et des communications du Québec indicates that, among the top 10,000 songs streamed in Quebec, 8.5% were French-language selections.

18. Further, as discussed during the hearing, this level of consumption has remained fairly consistent despite increasing quotas on Canadian radio from 25% to 30% in the early 90s, and to 35% in 1998/99. Further, maintaining unrealistically high quotas on radio stations has not and will not increase the level of consumption on streaming platforms. Nor will unrealistically high Cancon levels on private Canadian radio stations compensate for the low royalties received by musicians from streaming platforms.
19. Resetting the Cancon and FVM thresholds would give broadcasters back greater control over their programming (particularly in the Francophone markets), allowing programming experts respond to listeners rather than having the Commission dictate programming. It would also help restore balance between the Commission's cultural objectives and broadcasters' operational realities since unrealistic and unsustainably high quotas alienate listeners and accelerate the shift toward unregulated platforms.

Recommendation 2: Expand the pool of Canadian music with a simplified “CA” definition

20. As put forward during our hearing appearance, the CAB recommends adopting a simplified definition of a Canadian musical selection, shifting from “MAPL” to “CA.” Under our CA proposal, a selection would count as Canadian if either the artist (A) or the composer and/or songwriter (C) is Canadian. We note this is also effectively what Music Canada has recommended. In collaborations, we recommend that if even one of the artists or composer/songwriters is Canadian, the selection should qualify.
21. This modernized definition would simplify eligibility and expand the range of works that qualify as Canadian. It will reflect the important role played by artists and the fact that listeners identify songs by their performers. And it will better reflect today's diverse, collaborative creative environment and ensure that successful Canadian artists working internationally are not excluded from recognition. This simpler definition will also reduce administrative burden and enhance compliance clarity for all broadcasting undertakings and the Commission, including streaming undertakings.
22. Importantly, this adjustment will not harm Canadian songwriters or performers—their works will continue to qualify as Canadian and will continue to receive meaningful airplay.
23. We are concerned that the Commission's “MAL proposal” would continue to disadvantage artists in favour of songwriters/composers and that it fails to recognize the importance of the artist in terms of listener preferences.

Recommendation 3: Add no additional regulatory burden

24. The CAB urges the Commission not to add any additional regulatory burden to already over-extended commercial radio broadcasters. In this highly competitive environment, marked by steep declines in advertising revenue and profitability, additional and increased obligations could result in stations shutting down, and barring that, will contribute to increased reductions in other areas such as news or community support. As you heard at the hearing, now is not the time to layer on additional obligations.

Maintain existing CCD levels

25. We would be in favour of the elimination of CCD requirements altogether, since they limit the flexibility of commercial radio stations to invest where it makes most sense for their individual needs, however, we recognize that the current CCD obligations play an important role in supporting cultural objectives and, therefore, support maintaining existing levels – in terms of the existing 0.5% of revenue requirement and in terms of the exemption of smaller stations. We also recommend that the exemption threshold be increased to \$2 million and apply to stations even if they are part of a group that earns over \$25 million. We elaborated on this position in response to the Commission's requests for information.

Support Indigenous and emerging artists through redirected CCD

26. In lieu of quotas, the CAB supports enhanced funding for Indigenous and emerging artists through the reallocation of existing CCD contributions. As recommended in our initial submission, we believe portions of CCD spending should be directed to the Indigenous Music Office, Canadian Starmaker Fund, and Fonds Radiostar, as proposed by the Commission in the *Revised Commercial Radio Policy*.² We believe this approach will provide real, measurable support for Indigenous and emerging artists without imposing rigid broadcast quotas or relying on incomplete metadata systems.

27. In terms of support for Indigenous music, we were very interested to hear about the work of the Indigenous Music Office and other parties on the development of a definition of Indigenous artist and a national database of Indigenous artists. These are meaningful developments which would support the greater availability of Indigenous music and help radio stations find genre-appropriate selections. The Commission must not consider any Indigenous programming obligations in the absence of clear definitions or a functioning database.

28. For emerging artists, we reiterate that no specific quotas are required. Where it makes sense to play emerging artists, radio stations already do, and often to a greater extent than the Commission's proposed 5% requirement. The challenge with emerging artists lies more in identifying them for regulatory purposes (i.e. the definition) and reporting on them in the absence of an agreed-upon definition and a functioning database. The responses to the Commission's requests for information demonstrates that there is no simple, workable, agreed-upon definition of an emerging artist. The amount of administrative burden associated with an emerging artist quota is disproportionate to its purported advantages. Radio plays emerging artists as a normal course of business.

29. The fact that broadcasters are not reporting Indigenous or emerging artist airplay (or lower airplay than expected) is not indicative of their lack of interest or willingness to play such artists, just the lack of resources to identify and track such selections.

² Broadcasting Regulatory Policy CRTC [2022-332](#), at para 144.

Adopt incentives in lieu of quotas

30. The CAB believes that incentives—not additional quotas—are another and better way to support emerging and Indigenous artists. For example, a spin of an Indigenous or emerging artist should count as two spins for the purposes of Cancon/FVM compliance.
31. At minimum, any new obligations must not be imposed in addition to existing quotas, which are already excessive and unsustainable – i.e. if the Commission chooses to impose obligations with respect to emerging and/or Indigenous artists, this must not be over-and-above Canadian/FVM content quotas. Our recommendation of 25% for Cancon and 40% for FVM must encompass all musical selection obligations imposed by regulation, leaving the other 75% and 60% of music programming to the discretion of programming experts.

Recognize radio's support for other types of programming, including news

32. We urge the Commission to keep in mind that radio stations' commitment to Canadian programming goes beyond just the playing of music. While it is music that the Commission regulates, the reality is that the vast majority of the programming offered by radio stations is Canadian, including the all important connection provided by on-air talent and the consistent offering of community news and information programming.
33. The critical importance of radio stations in their local communities must not be overlooked or hampered by additional regulatory and administrative burden.
34. Though we want the Commission to acknowledge and recognize radio's ongoing commitment to Canadian programming, including local news and information programming, this is not the time to layer on new obligations or definitions that would further constrain broadcasters' flexibility or resources.
35. Reducing unnecessary regulatory and administrative burden will enable stations to direct resources to the areas Canadians value most—including news and community information. Such investment is also a priority for radio stations, as it is a key differentiator in distinguishing their audio services from foreign audio competitors.

Recommendation 4: Introduce greater ownership flexibility

36. Another important way the Commission can support the continued viability of commercial radio, ensure sustained investment in the sector, and improve operational efficiency is to further relax the common ownership restrictions.
37. The Commission can no longer rely on the massively outdated *Diversity of Voices* policy, which was developed and published *sixteen years ago*, before the launch of Spotify and the explosive growth of the Internet as an advertising behemoth.
38. Although the Commission's *Revised Commercial Radio Policy* introduced a degree of flexibility, it did not go far enough, citing concerns about diversity. To the contrary, relaxing the common ownership will encourage diversity in three significant ways.

- First, owners will want to maximize their reach in any given market, meeting different audiences with different content.
- Second, increased ownership flexibility will permit radio stations to realize greater synergies and economies of scale and better compete in today's transforming audio market – only a viable radio industry can continue to support cultural objectives.
- Third, greater consolidation will ensure that radio groups can thrive and grow, rather than face constant cutbacks and even closures.

39. Therefore, the CAB recommends that the Commission adopt the following common ownership thresholds:

- In markets with eight (8) or fewer commercial stations operating in a given language, a person may be permitted to own or control as many as four (4) stations operating in that language.
- In markets with between nine (9) and sixteen (16) commercial stations operating in a given language, a person may be permitted to own or control as many as six (6) stations operating in that language, provided that the person does not own or control more than 50 percent of all stations operating in that language.
- In markets with sixteen (16) commercial stations or more operating in a given language, a person may be permitted to own or control as many as eight (8) stations operating in that language.

40. In addition, the CAB recommends greater flexibility with respect to local management agreements (LMAs) and local sales agreements (LSAs) which permit radio stations to benefit from increased synergies and reduced costs by sharing certain (non-programming) resources. A more flexible approach to LMAs and LSAs – for example, eliminating the requirement for pre-approval – would permit stations to find efficiencies in lieu of cutting programming, and thus support public policy objectives.

41. Specifically, we recommend that the Commission eliminate the requirement for pre-approval of LSAs and for LMAs³ up to the same levels noted above (LMAs exceeding the thresholds identified above could still be subject to prior approval), subject to the criteria spelled out by the Commission in paragraphs 71 and 78 of the *Revised Commercial Radio Policy*. We note that this would have little to no impact on programming diversity given those criteria; further, as acknowledged by the Commission, the public interest is better served by LMAs and LSAs than by service cutbacks or worse, closures.

³ Stations entering into LMAs and LSAs would continue to respect the criteria identified by the Commission at paras 71 and 78 of the *Revised Commercial Radio Policy* respectively.

Recommendation 5: Reduce regulatory and associated administrative burden

42. A number of radio stations and The Davies Company group made other proposals for regulatory change which we support, namely:
- revise the measurement window for Canadian content airplay to 5am-7pm Monday to Friday and 5am to midnight all week, measured over 30 days, rather than a week;
 - eliminate all category 3 conditions for category 2 music stations; and
 - update the 5% Cancon relief policy for oldies formats – by adopting a revolving 20-year time limit for gold-based (“oldies”) formats.
43. In fact, the CAB recommends that the CRTC make a concerted effort to simplify the provisions in section 2.2 of the *Radio Regulations, 1986* to the greatest extent possible.
44. In addition to simplifying regulatory obligations, the CAB also recommends that the Commission make every possible effort to reduce *administrative* burden for commercial radio stations. While the Commission’s recent *Modernization of radio processes* decision⁴ was a step in the right direction, it did not go far enough. Commercial broadcasters still face an extreme reporting load and over-zealous compliance processes.
45. The CAB urges the Commission to move forward with its modernization work as outlined in its *Red Tape Reduction Progress Report* and as described in *Modernization of radio processes*. Specifically, the CAB calls upon the Commission to eliminate legacy reports, streamline data (annual return) submissions, and reduce duplication across filings, as described in more detail in a letter filed by the CAB on 13 November 2025 and filed as an attachment to this submission.
46. A meaningful reduction in administrative burden would free resources for investment in programming, talent, and digital transformation—directly benefiting Canadian audiences.

Conclusion

47. In closing, we wish to emphasize that our recommendations should be adopted as a package. Different stations and formats face distinct challenges, and flexibility across multiple regulatory areas is essential – no single proposal can achieve the necessary reform alone.
48. Together, the measures outlined by the CAB in this submission will strengthen the sustainability of commercial radio stations and help to ensure their ongoing contributions to the Canadian broadcasting system and to the achievement of the objectives of the Act.

⁴ Broadcasting Regulatory Policy CRTC [2025-265](#).

49. Radio remains an essential, trusted and in demand medium—connecting Canadians to their communities, culture, and country. But it cannot continue to do so under a regulatory framework that fails to recognize today’s market realities.
50. As the Vice-Chair observed, without broadcasting, even the best content will never be discovered. A strong and flexible radio sector is vital to the discoverability and success of Canadian and Indigenous content.
51. The CAB urges the Commission to adopt a modernized, balanced, and flexible audio policy framework that will ensure Canadian radio continues to inform, entertain, and connect Canadians in the years ahead.

Yours sincerely,

[Original signed by]

Kevin Desjardins

President | Canadian Association of Broadcasters

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