

Macquarie Radio Network Limited ("MRN"), the owner of radio station 2GB, today announced a temporary suspension of all advertising in its top rating weekday Breakfast Show hosted by Alan Jones.

The move follows a week of unprecedented focus throughout mainstream and social media on Jones and remarks he made recently at a private function regarding Prime Minister Julia Gillard and the loss of her father. More specifically, the move has been prompted by actions being taken and threatened against companies advertising on the Alan Jones Breakfast Show.

Announcing the suspension of advertising, MRN Executive Chairman Russell Tate said, "the nature, tone and volume of the reaction to Jones' remarks, and in particular the threats being made through social media to companies advertising in Jones' program and the disruption being caused to their businesses, have made it necessary for MRN to call some 'time out'".

"Some simple facts need to be acknowledged.

"There is almost universal agreement that Jones' remarks were unacceptable, wrong and inexcusable. Alan himself acknowledged that from the moment he first advised me of them. He immediately arranged a media conference to state that publicly and apologise to the Prime Minister.

"Although the remarks were not made on 2GB, our position from the outset has been that a personal, unconditional apology was a necessary and appropriate response. I encouraged Alan to repeat the apology on 2GB when he first returned to air last Tuesday morning following his media conference. His apology was unambiguous and unconditional. He has revisited his apology many times in subsequent broadcasts.

"Alan Jones' audience, those who listen regularly to his program, also agree that his remarks were unacceptable. From research we have conducted over this weekend with them, it is also clear though the great majority acknowledge his apology and have not significantly changed their attitude towards the Alan Jones Breakfast Show.

"Importantly, nor is there any indication from regular listeners that their attitudes towards companies advertising in the program has changed adversely.

"Since we now know these things to be fact, we have to conclude that the avalanche of telephone, email and facebook demands to our advertisers to "boycott" the Alan Jones Breakfast Show, and the threats to destroy their businesses if they don't comply, are coming almost entirely from people who do not listen to Alan Jones or 2GB at all – probably never have done and never will.

"Now in Australia these people of course have the right to express their views to anybody who wants to listen, about any subject they want, including Alan Jones and his radio show. They also have the right and plenty of choice; freedom of choice, to listen to any of the hundreds, in this digital age, thousands of radio programs available to them.

"What they do not have the right to do is on the one hand decide for our listeners who and what they are going to hear on the radio station they choose to listen to, and on the other hand decide for Australian based companies which media outlets they will or won't use to advertise their products and services. They do not have the right to interfere with freedom of choice and they do not have the right to attempt to censor – not Alan Jones, not this radio network, not the people who choose to listen to it and not the companies who choose to advertise on it.

“What we are seeing here is 21st Century censorship, via cyber-bullying.

"As a talk-station we openly advocate debate. Talk radio is arguably the original form of social media. The difference between 2GB and some catchy URL is that MRN operates in a regulated media environment.

"We hold ourselves, and are held, to account on many levels. We operate within a long established regulatory guidelines and rules. We're accountable to the regulatory authorities for our license to operate; to our listeners who have the freedom to leave us any time they want; to our advertisers who will leave us if our listeners do; to our shareholders who will show staff and management the door when the advertisers disappear.

“We are happy to listen to any constructive criticism of what we are doing. We do it every day, often live on-air. But strangely we have heard very little on this issue from the same social media groups which are attempting to destroy the companies who have the hide to advertise with the highest rating radio station in Sydney. All of their focus is destructive. They are simply making life as difficult as possible for the staff of companies whose crime apparently is advertising on Sydney's highest rating breakfast radio show.

“How hard is it to work out that those companies do not choose to advertise in the Alan Jones Breakfast Show because they agree with all of his views and everything he says. They advertise in the Show only because they want to engage with the massive audience who listens to him – an audience which has dominated the ratings in the Sydney market for over a decade. An audience which chooses to listen and an audience which, if and when it decides it has had enough of Alan Jones and goes somewhere else, will be closely followed by those same companies.

“We have taken this unprecedented decision to suspend advertising in the Alan Jones Breakfast Show until further notice so that all of our advertisers are on an equal footing, can regroup and discuss with us the way forward and how we together deal with these attempts to damage great Australian businesses. We'll be doing that over the next week or so and I would personally also welcome discussion with representatives of the organisations behind the totally unwarranted pressure being put on our advertisers. But any discussion will need to be face to face, not hiding behind a keyboard.

“The decision obviously comes at a very significant short term cost to MRN. It is an insignificant price to pay for our audience to be able to listen to what they choose to listen to, and for Australian companies to advertise where they choose to advertise.”

