



## Upper Goulburn Community Radio Inc.

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16th March, 2006

**Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA**

**Re: Submission by Upper Goulburn Community Radio Inc. to Inquiry into  
Community Broadcasting.**

**Dear Sir/Madam**

Please find herewith our response to the terms of reference in relation to the Governments inquiry into Community Broadcasting.

As a volunteer, with limited time to make this submission, our report will be brief.

UGFM - Upper Goulburn Community Radio Inc. (3UGE) based in Alexandra, services the towns of Yea, Eildon, Lake Eildon, Marysville, Buxton, Taggerty, Molesworth, Yarck, Narbethong, Thornton and Lake Mountain. All within the Shire of Murrindindi, 120km North East of Melbourne in a mountainous area north of the Great Dividing Range in Victoria.

If you need more information or would like to contact me please call my mobile on 0418 576666.

Yours Faithfully,

**Peter Weeks  
UGFM President**

**To Secretary of Committee**

**Submission into Community Broadcasting from UGFM - Upper Goulburn  
Community Radio Inc. (3UGE) Alexandra, Victoria.**

**Terms of Reference**

- *The Scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across, radio, television, the internet and other technologies*

As a community radio station serving a mountainous remote area of NE Victoria being primarily the Murrindindi Shire, we provide a diverse range of programs and services to meet our community's needs.

Our station survives on 40 unpaid volunteers with no paid staff, we have open access to all sectors and provide diversity, localism and independence for our community, providing around 16 hours of live programs each day. From our last survey on average our audience was 35-40% of the local radio audience.

We have in the past survived on primarily Sponsorship and to a lesser degree Membership to the station, with some minimal funding by government. Recently this has changed through Federal funding with Transmission Equipment Grants, and some General Grants through the CBF.

This has and will greatly assist us and many other stations to replace expensive and tired and some unreliable equipment and to meet new standards required by ACMA.

Funding has also allowed us to gain better access to programs on demand sourced via the CBAA Satellite Delivery System being the Community Radio Network (CRN) live programs and the Digital Delivery Network (DDN) automated pre recorded programs.

This system provides us with an even more diverse range of programs and up to date news in addition to our locally produced programs. Many programs supplied are beyond the resources and abilities of smaller stations. Plus the CRN service also provides national sustaining programs overnight for stations without volunteer resources to provide 24 hours a day programs.

The internet also provides a valuable resource for media releases, severe weather warnings plus fire and other emergency information, along with access to information on music and much more.

- *Content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity;*

We are licenced by the ACMA as a General Community licence and have been broadcasting for nearly 12 years, 8 as a fully licenced station.

Under our licence we provide content and programming for all communities of interest within the community, such as general music programs for people at work and play during the day with specialist programs in the evenings.

Programs include local News, Interviews & Sport, Outside Broadcasts (10-12 /year), Religious, Print Handicapped, Health, Blues, Folk, Country, Pop, Rock, Dance and Electronic, along with Snow and Boating (Lake) reports

Our Shire very diverse is extremely prone to flooding & bushfire with 40% being bush land with Timber, Agriculture, Outdoor Education, Tourism - Cross Country Skiing (Lake Mountain) and Water Sports (Lake Eildon) being the major industries year round.

During times of Emergencies such as road accidents, flood and bushfire, we have a second studio dedicated to the provision of regular accurate local information that breaks into our normal programming to keep the community up to date as required by the emergency services. We are actively involved with the Shire Emergency management plan. This has been used many times during recent large bushfires.

With Alexandra & Yea Shire amalgamation in 1994, UGFM has helped enormously to bond the Shire together and bridge many cultural gaps and friction created by the formation of the Murrindindi Shire.

Adjacent to the UGFM licence area on the other side of Lake Eildon (5 times the size of Sydney Harbor) is the Mansfield Shire and MCRFM whom we also share programs thus bringing even more cultural diversity to both stations and communities served.

We have open and balanced access to all groups within the community and Local, State and Federal Govt. have regular spots providing up to date information for all.

UGFM also adheres to the Community Broadcasting Codes of Practice and actively encourages members of the community to become involved with the station both in operations and programming.

Our only difficulty in servicing our diverse community is to provide better radio coverage of the Murrindindi Shire, which has been actively encourage by listeners, residents and the Murrindindi Shire Council, especially for local emergency information.

UGFM (3UGE) licence area abuts the Melbourne licence area to the North of the Great Dividing Range. The Mountains produce a large shadow and very poor signals

from Melbourne creating a very poor reception area within the Murrindindi Shire, which we are not allowed to transmit in due to the line in the sand called a boundary.

We have been given a temporary Out of Area licence by ACMA for part of this poor signal zone to service the Flowerdale & Hazeldene area in the Melbourne Licence Area north of the Great Divide but areas such as Glenburn still have poor or no radio reception.

- ***Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks;***

UGFM with the provision of a transmitter for the Flowerdale & Hazeldene areas now has a total of four (4) transmitters to maintain and operate. We are able to sustain this with the support of the community and local and federal govt. We are also installing generators to provide back up power during emergencies and funding through Emergency Management Australia (EMA) is helping to provide this vital ability.

Digital Radio services will be interesting for us, to say the least. Our licence area is very hilly and mountainous, thus our four FM transmitters. The cost of one digital transmitter will more than stretch our resources, let alone four or even more.

Obviously one Digital Radio Transmitter Ensemble can provide multiple services such as Community, Commercial and National services and the costs would be shared in some way between all concerned.

Currently UGFM has an annual gross income of around \$80,000 and from costs we have seen, the migration for us to Digital without significant injection of funds for both infrastructure and ongoing transmission costs, such as linking transmitters and possible site rental/access for digital would be horrific.

A lot of testing in hilly area's such as our needs to be conducted, especially if even higher frequencies are used in the UHF 1,500MHz band rather than VHF as is being tested. Higher UHF frequencies don't bend around hills and valleys as well as VHF does meaning even more transmitters and sites would have to be established to provide similar coverage currently provided by UGFM.

If other services, Commercial & National were able to migrate to digital and not Community this would provide an unfair advantage for those services and Community Radio would suffer and may disappear, being a great loss to all.

Digital Radio may be something we only see in large metro or cities and not so in the more remote areas leaving FM Radio as is. Much thought and money needs put into providing this new technology if a level playing field is to be established for Digital.

- ***Opportunities and threats to achieving a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters.***

We have a few opportunities and threats that can be seen to affect the community broadcasting sector.

Opportunities are as follows:-

- Ongoing support for the Australian Music and Artists with continuation of funding for the Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (Amrap)
- Support from Government through sponsorship from Govt. Information Campaigns, currently we receive none.
- Ongoing support for New Innovations, Program Delivery and Infrastructure
- Support for National Training of community sector, standardizing.
- Explore Digital Radio & TV, its impact and viability in regional and rural areas, along with support as required to implement if so.
- Support for provision of Digital in Metropolitan areas.
- General ongoing support for the sector

Threats:-

- Reduction or limited Government support for community sector
- Further pressure on the community sector by commercial forces to limit transmission site access for the community sector.
- Segmentation of audiences and community support by proliferation of alternative program delivery means to community broadcasting.
- Having new technology thrust upon us or forced to change for technology sake.
- Poor coverage or reduced coverage from digital
- Limited spectrum for digital services in VHF band.

Peter Weeks  
UGFM President/Technical Officer  
16-3-06