

SUBMISSION BY HUON FM 95.3 INTO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES INQUIRY INTO COMMUNITY BROADCASTING.

Introduction

Huon FM broadcasts from Geeveston (60 kilometres south of Hobart) in the Huon Valley and we identify ourselves as "the southernmost station in the nation". Huon FM 95.3 commenced operations as a narrow opportunity to gain additional skills. The station retains a strong youth involvement.

Scope and Role

Huon FM serves the Huon Valley and Kingborough areas. The Huon Valley is a rural area of 13,500 people whose main industries are fishing, apples, cherries, logging and soft fruits. There is also a strong arts and crafts sector. Kingborough is a fast growing center of population of 28,000 with a strong retailing sector and extensive light industries.

- Huon FM has 30 on air presents in the following age groups:
 - 10-15 three
 - 16-25 three
 - 26-35 three
 - 36-45 six
 - 46-55 four
 - 56-65 seven
 - 66-75 four

Our volunteers have a wide range of experience from newly trained to very experienced. We have two volunteers with experience with the ABC, including one with senior management experience. Among our volunteers are retired professional people, schoolteachers, public servants, rural workers and students. Members are encouraged to become actively involved in the station. We run a regular on air invitation for listeners to become involved as volunteers.

- Huon FM is run on a voluntary basis, no member is paid for their services
- Huon FM is managed by a committee that comprises a President, Vice-President, Secretary and treasurer and five general committee members. Over the past five years the general committee has been increased from two to five to enable more people to get involved in running the station. All members are encouraged to attend committee meetings in a non-voting capacity. We also hold volunteers' meetings to enable members to raise concerns, issues and suggestions. A sub-committee structure is also being established to enable increased participation in the management and operation of the station.
- Huon FM welcomes the involvement of minority groups and encourages the broadcasting of programs by members of groups and organisations excluded by commercial and/or public broadcasters. The production of these programs is dependent on interested volunteers to present them. Huon FM offers full training and

technical assistance to individuals and groups to present programs. We have two religious programs on a Sunday morning

- Schools, sporting clubs, charities, community festivals, local government. All use Huon FM to publicise and promote their activities. Local schools have involvement in Huon FM Geeveston High, Huon High, Sacred Heart Primary School and Dover High School have all had input into the station. . Last year the Tasmanian Christian Academy used the station facilities to record a program it submitted to a nationwide competition. The Huon Channel Cricket Association and AFL Southern Tasmania have regular segments in our Saturday Morning Sports Program while individual Clubs, sporting organisations and individuals are regularly interviewed. There is an emphasis on local sport and sports people particularly younger people.
- Huon FM is a registered emergency service and during floods, fires and other disasters and emergencies the station's priority is to broadcast emergency information, if necessary staffing the station 24 hours a day. This provides an essential service for the community. We have a close liaison with local police, fire service, local councils and forestry but there is no coordinating or planning group.
- Along with all community stations Huon FM has been active in training members of the community to present radio programs. In the past six years two of our announcers have gone on to work in commercial radio while others are involved in radio production. We have two ex-ABC staff members including one involved in senior management who assist in training volunteers. Training is provided in the areas of presentation, production, interviewing, script writing and current affairs presentation. Because the station lacks adequate training facilities we have a structured training program that utilises the on air studio. While not ideal this has proved to be effective and produces strong skill levels.
- We train an average of 30 volunteers each year and since the inception of the station estimate that approximately 500 people have been trained to go on air.

Content and Programming

Huon FM pursues a program policy that reflects its licence conditions, encouraging community participation in all aspects of its operations, pursuing diversity, independence, concentrating on local issues, providing a complementary and supplementary broadcasting service and support for local musicians, artists and culture.

- Programs are designed to cater for the needs of the local community. The station regularly talks to listeners to ascertain their views on programs. We keep a request book, listener feedback book and complaints register.
- We have youth programs presented by younger presenters (our two youngest are aged 10 and 11). Seniors are provided with musical programs that cater for their tastes. One popular program focuses on music from the 1920s to the 1950s.
- At the present time Huon FM does not have a formal news service because the community is primarily interested in local news and we do not have sufficient resources or trained journalists to produce a regular news service. Local news items are presented in our early morning programs and in our current affairs program, Grapevine.
 - M & M Early Brekky Show weekdays 6am-8pm covers news items.

- Country Brunch includes news items of interest.
 - Grapevine highlights current affairs covering local issues and interviews. The Monday Grapevine features local musicians, the Wednesday program focuses on the arts in its second hour. Tuesday and Friday cover general news items of particular reference to our broadcast area.
 - Interviews and regular community announcements cover community causes and fund raising events.
- We have one Dutch language program presented weekly. While there are a number of people within our listening area with English as a second language the groups are diverse which makes it difficult to present programs specifically for these audiences. Huon FM encourages these groups to become involved in the station. We have regularly presented an indigenous program until recently but this is in recess at the present time as the presenter has other commitments and we have been unable to obtain the services of another announcer. Approaches have been made and will continue to be made to the indigenous community to become involved in presenting a program.
 - Our sports program involves a large number of clubs and organisations. The program concentrates on local sport and individuals but also covers state, national and international sport particularly those involving Tasmanian and local participants. Junior sport is highlighted.
 - 150 hours local program. Our priority is to focus on locally generated programs.
 - The station has broadcast from the Huon Show, Taste of the Huon, Geeveston Forest Festival, Glen Huon School Flower Festival and other community events. The station runs youth discos and has presented country music and other concerts. Huon FM publicises and has been involved in the organisation of the Cygnet Folk Festival.
 - Huon FM has broadcast the local football live to air in the past on a regular basis but cannot resume this popular service until we acquire tie lines and other essential equipment.
 - Huon FM provided extensive production and technical assistance for the Huon Valley Cross-Generations program.
 - For a number of years Huon FM has been involved in Work For The Dole programs (currently two a year). These programs have provided the station with invaluable expertise in computers and technical assistance. The participants have generally been committed to the station and have learned a wide range of production, on air and other skills. It is common for these participants to continue their involvement in Huon FM as volunteers.
 - Huon FM is the only radio or television station based in the Huon Valley-Kingborough areas. In some places within the Huon Valley and Kingborough Huon FM is the only radio station that can be received by residents. These include Verona Sands and parts of Arve Road at Geeveston.
 - The doors of Huon FM are always open to local musicians. While our facilities are limited we regularly put to air live solo artists and small groups. The station has also recorded and produced or part produced CDs by local artists. Local musicians are encouraged to provide a copy of their CDs for airplay. One program features more than 50 per cent local (Huon Valley, Kingborough or Hobart) music. Local

musicians are interviewed regularly and invited as studio guests to co-present programs. Huon FM plays a minimum of 30% Australian content. Of our specialist programs jazz has an Australian content level of 85%, Blues 35% Nostalgia 20%, Country Music 50% Folk 20% and we have a three-hour Oz Rock program with 100% Australian content. Visiting musicians are regularly interviewed on air. Huon FM sees the promotion of Australian artists, particularly local musicians as a priority

- Huon FM provides opportunities for local writers, painters, sculptors, filmmakers, songwriters and others to publicise their achievements. Through our community announcements Huon FM publicises a wide range of local arts and cultural activities including art exhibitions, book launches, University of the Third Age, music festivals, plays and local food festivals and arts and crafts markets. We have a regular two-hour program that provides local arts information.

Technical and Technological

- The local geography presents a challenge to the station. There are a number of pockets where reception is marginal or non-existent. After years of work we have just received funds to enable a new transmitter to be sited in an area that will enable us to properly service the Kingborough area.
- Huon FM is the only locally based radio station and carries a far higher percentage of local current affairs and news items. While we don't have sufficient facilities to produce a full news service this is being considered. Huon FM is the only radio station that can be received
- One recurring problem is the quality and consistency of our air signal to the transmitter. Three years ago a local landholder cut the telephone line with a backhoe putting us off air for 72 hours. Since mid-January 2006 the station air signal has been affected by a constant ticking. Telstra has spent three days in isolating and repairing the fault. This problem could be overcome by the installation of a micro link between the station and the Doodys Hill transmitter.
- The existing antenna on Doodys Hill is in poor condition and an expert appraisal has indicated that it must be replaced within two year
- Our ability to cover community events has been restricted by a lack of tie lines and other outside broadcast equipment. This has also prevented the station from the live broadcast of sporting events.
- The station needs to develop a second on-air/training studio. At the present time we can go to air from our second studio under extremely cramped and technically inferior conditions.

Opportunities and Threats

- The annual budget of Huon FM is \$26,000, which is raised from sponsorship income (48%), Work for the Dole 30% Grants 11% donations and fundraising, loans and membership (10%). Work for the Dole funds cannot be used for general running expenses of the station. Over the past five years the station has received one grant from the CBF for equipment \$10,000, a DDN grant and a transmission support grant of \$1700. This year the station has received a CBF grant for \$17,000 for the Herringback Ridge transmitter. The station is provided with rent-free premises by the Huon Valley Council but pays for maintenance and improvements. The building

formerly occupied as a fire station is poorly ventilated and not soundproof but is adequate. We have looked at relocating in Huonville, a larger centre but such a move is not a priority.

- In view of the invaluable service provided by community radio stations (including Huon FM) there is an arguable case for increased government funding for the sector. I am aware that there have been suggestions of a cross-subsidy from commercial stations and the ABC to recognise the substantial contribution made by community radio stations to training people who are later employed by other broadcasting sectors. While such training may be regarded as an intangible it is nonetheless and significant contribution made by community broadcasters.
- While the 1992 changes to the Broadcasting Services Act allowing sponsorship announcements to be “more commercial” in style have assisted Huon FM in obtaining increased income the market is extremely competitive. The relatively poor reception in many areas is a further factor that threatens the ability of Huon FM to generate income.
- There is strong case for some of the Government’s advertising expenditure to be allocated to community stations that reach markets not covered by other media. Government information and advertising should be allocated to community broadcasters given the range, demographics, and interests of listeners to community radio. Community stations should be placed on the Government’s list of advertising outlets.
- Our main area of expenditure (annual basis) is:

Electricity	\$1,500
Telephone and line costs	\$4,100
Insurance	\$2,850
Licence Fees (APRA and AMCOS)	\$1,800
- The station would like to see income doubled to enable a number of improvements, initiatives and development to take place. The doubling of our income would enable improved training, facilities and resources to be implemented or acquired. Realistically most of the major acquisitions will require grants or a major fundraising effort to achieve. The inclusion of Kingston and Blackmans Bay in our licence area will increase income opportunities but also raise expenditure.

Essential improvements include:

The replacement of our existing aerial at Doody’s Hill, which has deteriorated and requires replacement with the next two years.

The development of a small satellite studio in Kingston to enable volunteers from that area to get involved in programs.

Replacement of the existing on-air desk which is deteriorating.

The acquisition of tie lines to enable the coverage of community, sporting and social events and the live broadcast of local council meetings.

Necessary Improvements:

Construction and outfitting of a second on-air studio.

Recording equipment to enable the greater involvement of local bands and individual musicians.

- Compared to other stations in the area Huon FM has inferior coverage from Doody's Hill. Even in Huonville (the main centre in the Huon Valley located 20 kilometres from the transmitter site) there are areas including in the main street where reception is too poor for comfortable listening or non-existent. The signal from commercial stations based in Hobart and even from community stations outside the area (Tasman FM and 106.2) are clearer than the Huon FM signal in some areas. While it is expected that the transmitter on Herringback Ridge will overcome most reception problem we will be broadcasting on reasonably low outputs (250 watts from Herringback and 150 watts from Doodys Hill).

David Milne
President
15/3/06