

# Community Broadcasting in Australia

**Submission by Yarra Valley FM Inc to the House Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts: March 2006**

Submission 55

## **Scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across radio, television, the Internet and other broadcasting technologies:**

Yarra Valley FM 99.1 (3VYV) provides a local radio service to the communities of the Yarra Valley and surrounding areas, particularly in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne. The bulk of the population of the Shire of Yarra Ranges, our primary broadcast target, lives on the outer fringes of the Melbourne suburban area. A feature of the semi-rural part of our coverage area is the number of separate towns, situated only a few kilometres apart, but each with their own identity. Yarra Valley FM 99.1 broadcasts from Woori Yallock, one of these such towns, located in the Highway between Lilydale and Warburton, 55 km east of Melbourne.

Yarra Valley FM 99.1 broadcasts continuously with “live and local” programs from early morning (0600 Monday to Saturday and 0700 Sunday) until midnight Sunday to Friday and 1900 Saturday.. Overnight programs come from the CBAA (Community Broadcasting Association of Australia) satellite on Mondays to Fridays and from computer automation at the weekends.

We hold the view that community radio is professional. It is not commercial but it is professional. Our presenters are encouraged to put to air the highest quality programming and to always be “lifting the bar”.

All our presenters and support people are volunteers. We have no paid staff. We do engage contractors from time to time for maintenance and specialised tasks. Our sponsorship co-ordinator receives a commission on receipt of sponsorship income. However, all our programs, management and administration is performed by volunteers. Our volunteers come from a diverse background with an age range from mid teens to the 80s. Nearly half our volunteers are women. We also provide opportunities for disadvantaged people to help Yarra Valley FM 99.1. New volunteers are encouraged and we welcome them to become involved in different activities around the station. Yarra Valley FM 99.1 regularly broadcasts announcements encouraging people to participate in our quarterly training programs. Our on air program grid rotates on a quarterly basis and it is our aim to introduce some newly-trained volunteers at each seasonal changeover.

Yarra Valley FM Inc is the incorporated Association that holds the licence for 3VYV. Membership of Yarra Valley FM Inc maintains constant at about 150. About 60 members are actively involved in the station and a further 10 or so offer occasional assistance. The remainder are people whose primary aim is to support the station without becoming actively involved.

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Management of the station is a Committee of Management elected annually by members of Yarra Valley FM Inc. There are six positions; Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and two general committee members.

Yarra Valley FM 99.1 conforms to the community radio code of practice at all times and has in place grievance and conflict resolution procedures. We are also diligent in the areas of Occupational Health and Safety, equal opportunity, merit and equity, etc.

Most of the people who seek access to air time on Yarra Valley FM 99.1 are individual members who have been trained and accredited as presenters. One of our “stand out” programs is “School’s In” that gives children from local schools the opportunity to present a half-hour morning program on Mondays to Fridays during school terms. The segment is produced and presented live by the children, under the supervision of their teacher. Yarra Valley FM 99.1 has a long-running Friday night Sports program that provides access to various codes from the Yarra Valley and surrounding areas with “live” representation most weeks.

Yarra Valley FM 99.1 provides access to non-profit organisations through our Community Service announcements read live, at least once per hour during daytime programs.

We have an ongoing association with the local council, the Shire of Yarra Ranges, utilises access during the weekly “Shire Show” on Thursdays. The station receives a small annual grant from the Shire of Yarra Ranges.

Our local MHR is Fran Bailey, Member for McEwen and Minister for Small Business and Tourism. Ms Bailey appears on Yarra Valley FM 99.1 from time to time to discuss electorate matters. She is a long-time supporter of the station.

Yarra Valley FM 99.1 has a “day parting” program policy that offers a general blend of easy listening music and community information during the day Mondays to Fridays with specialist programs at night and weekends. The specialist programs are mostly music with many genres, e.g. blues, comedy, country, nostalgia and punk that are not regularly heard on mainstream media.

We play a vital role in the Victorian emergency plan and have a dedicated facsimile service from the Country Fire Authority and weather bureau for the receipt in the studio of forecasts and bushfire information, etc.

Until now, all our training has been done “in house”. We are looking at an expansion of our training program, hopefully with the assistance of a grant from the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF). Training sessions are held quarterly and are aimed to provide new presenters for the following seasonal program quarter. An area that needs to be developed is “refresher” training of existing presenters, many who have been

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volunteers at Yarra Valley FM 99.1 for many years. During this time, new technology and upgraded facilities have been added to the station.

### **Content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity:**

Yarra Valley FM 99.1 serves a population that is mainly from an Anglo-Saxon background. We have a weekly “Going Continental” program that caters for people from the Netherlands and other parts of Europe. Community information is provided in Dutch and English. We have a local news service that is prepared at the station and its broadcast three times a day Mondays to Fridays. In the past, we have mounted outside broadcasts from different community festivals and fundraising activities but at present we are constrained by the lack of suitable facilities. We are hopeful that this deficiency will be overcome with the purchase of a fully-equipped self-contained outside broadcast van. This would need to be externally funded.

We believe that most of our general listeners are in the 40-plus age group and much of our programming is aimed at this demographic through our weekday easy listening music policy. Our Saturday afternoon and evening programs are aimed at a youth audience but we have had difficulty in recent times attracting young people to present programs for this audience. We are actively aiming to increase youth representation in our on air programming. Sunday programming is a “memories” format aimed at the “baby boomer” audience (i.e. people in the 40-60 age group).

On Sundays we have morning and evening Christian programs. These sessions are aimed at a general Christian audience rather than a particular ideology. There is a Sunday morning children’s session prepared, produced and presented by one of our volunteers. This program is one of the few on Australian radio that caters for children up to eight years of age.

We are the only station in that provides information particular to the Yarra Valley and surrounding areas. There are other community stations in the general area (3ECB and 3MDR) that cater for their local communities of interest and we believe there is little, if any overlap, between the services provided. All of the Melbourne metropolitan commercial, ABC and other radio stations are clearly audible in our broadcast area.

Yarra Valley FM 99.1 supports Australian music and aims for a 20% local content. We have several country music program that actively promote local artists. The AMRAP local CDs that are distributed to community radio stations are often played on Yarra Valley FM 99.1.

### **Technical opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks:**

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Yarra Valley FM 99.1 transmits from Briarty Hill near Healesville. The transmission site and facilities are leased from a local contractor who is responsible for maintenance at Briarty Hill. Our technical equipment at the station is in generally good condition but being in use continuously 24 hours a day seven days a week, the Committee of Management is mindful of the need to plan for regular equipment maintenance and replacement. An ongoing difficulty for Yarra Valley FM 99.1 has been the availability of volunteer technical expertise. We rely, increasingly, on contractors and some “friends” of the station who are involved in community radio elsewhere and who are prepared to assist us on a voluntary basis from time to time.

We are in the process of introducing the MJM player software (purchased with a CBF grant) to assistance with on air presentation (music and announcement selection) and overnight automation.

### **Opportunities and threats to achieving a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters:**

Yarra Valley FM 99.1 operates on a “shoestring” budget of approximately \$50,000 per annum. Our main source of revenue is sponsorship. We are presently (March 2006) looking for a sponsorship representative to build our client base. Other revenue comes from presenter levies (currently \$32.50 per quarter for each presenter) and occasional grants, mostly from the Community Broadcasting Foundation. Other grant sources in recent times are the Bendigo Bank and Shire of Yarra Ranges.

Our main item of expenditure is rent on our station premises at Woori Yallock. We enjoy a good relationship with our landlord, a local private resident, and the premises are well maintained. The station offers a welcoming environment for visitors. Our other areas of expenditure are insurance and industry fees. Equipment improvement is mainly from grants.

In late 2005, Yarra Valley FM 99.1 opened an “op shop” at Woori Yallock. The start-up costs were met from a loan from a friend of the station. Two-thirds of the loan had been paid by March 2006. The aim of the op shop is to raise money for Yarra Valley FM 99.1. It operates as a “stand alone” business. All work at the op shop is done by volunteers. The mission of the op shop is to offer the highest quality, clean, merchandise at the lowest possible prices.

Yarra Valley FM 99.1 is fortunate in having a small number of members who are in “active” retirement. These people are the backbone of the necessary “behind the scenes” workload. We are experiencing a general reluctance of people wanting to volunteer and we can see this as a problem for the station in the future. We are also concerned at the ageing of our volunteers. However, the “sound” of the station is relatively “modern” considering the age of many of our volunteers.

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It is only time before it will be necessary to employ a paid office administrator or station manager.

In March 2006, we advertised for a commission-based representative to expand the sponsorship support of Yarra Valley FM 99.1. An appointment has yet to be made.

We need to have a second fully equipped on air studio. Currently, we have a main studio with a second room that is used as a production booth. The equipment in this production booth needs to be upgraded so that it can operate not only as an alternative on air studio but as a production facility and training room. At present, we do not have the financial resources to do this.

There is a general lack of computer expertise at Yarra Valley FM 99.1. This needs to be attended to by training or re-training of existing volunteers. New equipment is required and we need support for our computer network. In the past, we have relied on “enthusiastic volunteers” often students who can quickly find other interests and take their expertise with them. Increasingly, we are relying on contractors for this sort of work but we are constrained by a lack of money.

We do not have a back up transmitter. In 2004, our transmitter failed and it was only through the generosity of a kindred community radio station who loaned us a standby unit that we were able to remain on air while we raised more than \$10,000 in the local community to replace the defective equipment.

The current licence allows us to broadcast adequately to most parts of our area. However, there are several “black spots” where reception is difficult. Listener feedback suggests that people find it easier to locate Yarra Valley FM 99.1 on their car radios.

Yarra Valley FM 99.1 is strong on networking in the community radio sector. We are members of the CBAA, the CBAV (Community Broadcasting Association of Victoria) and SCMA (Southern Community Media Association). We believe that no problem or situation has not been faced previously, and are always ready to seek advice from other stations.

The Committee of Management of Yarra Valley FM 99.1 welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and would be pleased to elaborate on any matter raised above. We would also be happy to make a personal representation.

**Paul Nicholson**  
**Secretary**