

## HISTORY OF WEST GIPPSLAND COMMUNITY RADIO INC.

Two members of the Warragul Uniting Church first discussed the idea of establishing a small narrow cast Christian radio station in the Warragul area whilst on a boating holiday on the Gippsland Lakes. They then put together a group of knowledgeable people, and worked tirelessly towards gaining community support. Later, it was decided to work towards a full community radio licence.

A public meeting was held on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1993, chaired by Cr Ian Clark, then Mayor of Baw Baw Shire, at which it was decided to go ahead with the idea. At a subsequent meeting, the proposed Constitution was presented for approval, and a Committee of Management was elected.

West Gippsland Community Radio was incorporated in November of that year. Early plans were to broadcast as 3WGCR, from a caravan on the top of Camp Hill. Fortunately, the Baw Baw Shire came to the rescue, providing accommodation, and funding for equipment. It was decided to express gratitude to the shire by broadcasting as 3BBR (Baw Baw Radio). It was also decided to use the identifier 'The Voice of West Gippsland'.

At first, a transmitter was borrowed from the Community Broadcasting Association of Victoria. When it became apparent that a transmitter would need to be purchased, a member showed his trust in the future of 3BBR-FM by lending the necessary funds.

3BBR-FM went to air for the first time on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> May 1995. Broadcasts were held monthly in the first year; in the second year, every weekend. In August 1997, a new temporary licensing system came into effect, under which 3BBR-FM would be able to go to air full time, as the sole aspirant for the area.

So January 1998 3BBR-FM commenced broadcasting seven days a week. On June 1<sup>st</sup> 2000, the purchase of a 25 disc CD player enabled broadcasting to be extended to 24 hours a day.

An obvious area of need was a properly equipped Production Studio and Outside Broadcast Unit. A successful submission to the Centenary of Federation Grant Fund provided \$14,500 towards this, supplemented by a further grant from the Baw Baw Shire. The Year of Volunteers Grant Fund gave us \$4,000 towards a new console in the On-Air Studio.

In July 2002 applications for the community broadcast licence in the Warragul area were declared open, and 3BBR-FM's was the only application received. However, there were technical problems to overcome. Some previous licensing decisions had made the original frequency, 99.5, no longer feasible,

and the allocated frequency, 103.1, was subject to interference. At the request of the ABA, a temporary solution to the problem was put into place, and field testing carried out.

3BBR-FM commenced transmission as a fully licensed community radio station on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003. As the interference problem still existed, the ABA required West Gippsland Community Radio to upgrade transmission to the standards set in the LAP. A grant from the Community Broadcasting Fund enabled the purchase of a 500W transmitter, but further expenditure will be needed to purchase and install a multi-directional antenna to complete the project.

In 2003 and 2004, applications to the Community Broadcasting Fund for satellite reception equipment and a Digital Delivery Network computer for the pre-programmed download and storage of CBAA satellite programs were also successful. The overnight and emergency programs are in the process of being automated via computer. However, it is not planned to replace presenters by computer, as the principle of allowing presenters creative scope in their programming is an important aspect of 3BBR's operation.

In 2003, 3BBR-FM won both regional and State awards in the Radio Media section of the Keep Australia Beautiful / Tidy Towns Award for contribution to the life of the community. Two members have also been acknowledged by the Baw Baw Shire in the annual Australia Day Awards for their contribution to the community.