

**We The People**  
Program 82  
Community Radio



Over many years the media has been a powerful force around Australia and the world informing and influencing people everywhere. The mainstay was the newspaper and it has played a very important role in news and holding to account the government, business and society depending on your view of course. As with all mankind's carriages it's open to corruption but overall Press has served us well as a nation and the importance of the so called free Press is not to be underestimated. Then in the 1920's along came radio and the golden age of radio broadcasting right through until the 1970's when Television really hit its straps and news delivery and entertainment changed forever. TV never did kill the radio star but it sure changed the media landscape. For all television offers it has not dealt well with localism because its revenue base was state based or national. For decades however the local commercial radio stations struggled on until the government of the day introduced FM and charged existing AM operators a fee for the changeover which was up to \$30 million dollars. It was a selfish grab for money and had the effect of near bankrupting stations and as a result took away the responsibility from commercial radio to be accountable to the audience. You had to be deemed a fit and proper person originally to run a station but not after that and understandably it became a simple commercial money making operation. That ill-conceived change was thanks to Paul Keating.

The inevitable effect was that radio morphed into networks almost devoid of localism and local content let alone timely fresh news. It took on a federal flavor and left local communities adrift. The loss of that social cohesion has had serious adverse effects on many communities in town and country alike. Now enter community or public radio and in fact today they number about 360 across the nation. These special interest community stations cater for those community interests that are not provided for by the ABC or Commercial entities and without true localism there is a real need for some of these services. Special programs and special interest including music styles, local news, regional events, religious, ethnicity, language, print handicap and so on. It's the domain of the community radio station now but that fragmentation suits the various levels of government as the media influence is diluted.

Community radio stations are mainly staffed by volunteers and they number about 20,000 across Australia. Of course the station still has to raise money to pay the bills we all face and government provides little support so it's up to we the people if we value the programs of our local community radio station. I like to think of community stations as the real voice of the people and they should not be afraid to develop opinions and hold those in power to account just as the Press used to do so very well. Today of course media is much more diverse with traditional media plus the internet and now wireless internet providing services on demand. So the media landscape is changing again and the people have a say and a voice in real time which I believe is a good thing. It's called social media. The speed at which communication takes place now is astonishing and it can originate in a news sense from an individual with a mobile phone or simply a blog on a web site about an in train current event. That brings new meaning to localism and to local radio as an important partner in society.

Not every community station is a success and much depends on management, good governance and dedicated volunteers. This is where 4CRB needs an accolade because it's one of the most open and approachable stations I've been involved with and that includes the commercial regime. The station sits precariously between its principles and its desire to effectively serve its loyal audience and that's a balancing act of athletic proportions at times. For my own part I'm either an asset or liability depending on what I speak about and I guess that's life and democracy but with good guidance and courage we do make a positive difference by informing and holding our representatives to account otherwise you may not know what's really going on. This week you can support 4CRB and I encourage you to do so because this station provides we the people with a unique voice and that's a courageous thing to do.

**Until next time this is Kent Bayley**