

## President's Address

As many of you know, I started in Community Radio back in the early 1990s.

In trying to decide what I would talk about this evening I reflected on the recent CBAA conference held on the Gold Coast attended by myself and Hank Kreemers.

Very quickly I realised that it would be much more interesting to compare a conference I attended decades ago, with the recent conference.

So let's set the scene. Decades ago, the conditions in community broadcasting were very different from those of today.

Around the country, there were a large number of community broadcasters who were operating on Temporary Community Broadcasting Licences (*TCBLs*). A much lower number of community broadcasters had obtained a permanent licence.

There were many stations that were forced to participate in frequency sharing situations. This is where temporary stations take turns to broadcast on a single allocated frequency. This meant that -

- Attracting sponsors was more difficult.
- Sponsors were often approached by multiple stations – they got a bit pissed off.
- Income was fractured, it was only earned during the times on air.
- Rent, power, phone and other services still needed to be paid.

It was very much a survival of the fittest exercise.

At the time, community engagement or listening was at much lower levels than it is today.

However, at a 1990's conference, well attended by both temporary and permanent community broadcasters, the people were –

Optimistic, passionate, enthusiastic, willing, and very definitely committed to participating in everything that was community broadcasting.

Stepping forward to the recent conference, where most attendees were from stations who have a permanent licence, the people – not surprisingly, still upheld the same characteristics as their counterparts of decades ago. But, there is a different air of confidence, and talk about better programs and better content.

So what has changed?

When you talk to people there is one thing that becomes very apparent, but different to the past. The diversity of skills. Whereas we used to talk of disc jockeys, news readers and interviewers, there are several new skills that enter the lexicon. Words that were heard frequently are –

- Producers
- Writers
- Projects
- Packages, and many more.

You might scoff and say that these skills are beyond us, or that we are too small to take on such grandiose concepts, but you would be wrong.

There were many small, comparable stations like ourselves that had submitted entries for the CBAA Community Radio Awards, and which utilised many of the skills I've just mentioned.

I spoke with Paul Whitton who is the Station Manager at Noongar Radio in Perth. Noongar Radio received two awards at the recent CBAA conference for –

- Contribution to Australian Music, and
- Excellence in Indigenous Engagement.

He described his station as being relatively small and definitely in a niche market. But nonetheless, they have managed to attract volunteers and “adapt” their skillsets to that of a community broadcasting framework. The outcome is great programs and the awards to match.

A common theme for discussion by the people at the conference was production values. It has become very clear that while we don't purport ourselves to be professionals, we do aim to achieve production standards that are comparable to our commercial broadcasting counterparts.

The enthusiasm to take on projects that have a clearly defined purpose has become commonplace, and at times, prepared to be confronting. Such was the case with 8CCC (*Alice Springs/Tennant Creek*), with a series 'The Alice Birth Project', which addressed childbirth issues with 'mums, dads, and grandparents' in *The Alice (their words)*. The series won a CBAA award in the 'Best New Radio Program – Talks' category.

There can be no doubt that the media landscape has changed since my attendance at earlier conferences.

No longer are we concerned with only broadcasting. Many stations have embarked on using other media facilities, which include podcasting, web streaming, social media (*Facebook, Twitter*), and many more.

Quite often, the take up of other media forms is related to the level of engagement in station activities by youths and young adults. It is this group of people who have received training at school or in tertiary education that includes the skills necessary to extend activities beyond broadcasting.

More often than not, they already possess an enthusiasm for the skills they've learnt, and want to find opportunities in which to use them. As Paul from Noongar Radio said “... *you need to adapt them ...*”.

So it is obvious that we must embark on recruiting more volunteers and recognising the skills and ages of the people we want. But a cautionary note. When you look at our current premises, we find them confining, uninviting, and with not a single chair on which to sit, other than in a studio.

To a new volunteer, our premises are not a stimulating place in which to work, particularly for the preparation of programs. Respite facilities are essentially non-existent. Our work environment is an impediment to our growth, and our future. As a community in NSW recently experienced when their local radio station lost its licence, “.. *You don't know what you've got until its gone ..*”.

Seymour FM needs to move forward, and embrace the production values and technologies emerging in the community broadcasting sector, a sector which now attracts 5.1 million listeners every week. Part of that is recognising that we're not getting any younger, and our youth is our future.

**Ian McOwan**  
**President**