The contribution that community broadcasters make to the social fabric of Australia should never be underestimated!

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Mr Christopher Roberts
Revised Draft Variation No 1 of 2009 to LAP for Bendigo Radio
Broadcast Planning Section
Australian Communications & Media Authority
PO Box 78
BELCONNEN ACT 2617

Dear Mr Roberts

We refer to the Revised Draft Variation to Bendigo Radio Licence Area Plan.

Goldfields Community Radio Cooperative LTD (Fresh FM) supports the provision for two additional community radio services in Bendigo. However, we do have issues with the maximum effective radiated power of 150 W (omni-directional). We believe the power would not be strong enough to service Greater Bendigo to its current standards that are currently provided.

In the ACMA media release it is stated that community feedback showed strong demand and support for additional community radio broadcasting services in Bendigo. This being the case reducing the high powered frequencies by 1 and increasing low powered frequencies by 2 seems inadequate to the needs that the ACMA has suggested is required. If anything an extra high powered community frequency should be added to the existing 2 to service the area going by demand and responses to the draft plans.

We also believe that these 2 new low powered frequencies would struggle to cover the urban sprawl of Bendigo with the areas of Bendigo’s fastest growing suburbs Strathfieldsaye and Eaglehawk having no guarantees of coverage which says that low powered output is an issue.

Goldfields Community Radio Co-Operative Ltd.
The region has had 2 long term community stations broadcasting for over twenty years, Fresh FM for over 25 years on a full time licence and Gospel Radio. Fresh FM’s concern is that the underpowered new services will not reach the people in need of previous and current long term sport and wider community programming ran by these 2 stations. This disadvantages the people that live outside the immediate Bendigo area which once again is another shot to already struggling country communities.

For example thousands of rural people participate in sport every day, 12 months of the year. Bendigo and Central Victoria is steeped in history regarding sports excellence from players playing in the elite AFL competition through cricket, tennis, rowing, sailing, soccer and many more sports. The promotion that community radio provides at the local level should never be underestimated. There are many small towns that unite every weekend with under 10’s to over 50’s participating in sport at some level. Without community radio support in promotion through live broadcasts and programming these sports and towns would find it difficult to attract and keep local participants.

There has been massive support in the community for Fresh FM. This was shown in the petition presented to ACMA with over 4,000 signatures on behalf of Central Victorian listeners regarding the 89.5 frequency staying community. The huge response in a short time period reflected the community’s concerns about losing the 89.5 frequency to News Radio.

The Fresh FM’s belief is that News Radio in Bendigo should be operating on one of the proposed new frequencies or exploring the options of digital radio and leaving the 2 current community frequencies to the community.

In conclusion we support any additional community services in the Bendigo area but not at the expense of the existing long term services and we believe that any new services need to be at a power output that can serve the entire Greater Bendigo area and not just the CBD as people outside these areas should be afforded the access of community radio just like their city counterparts. We also would like to mention that earlier in this process it was said that there was no further frequencies available in this area due to spectrum congestion. Further investigation has revealed 2 more available at a lower power and we ask that more investigation is undertaken to discover frequencies available at high power or what can be done to increase the power of the new found frequencies.
Yours sincerely

Dale Alexander  
Chairman  
Goldfields Community Radio Cooperative Ltd

Wallace Teasdale  
General Manager  
Goldfields Community Radio Cooperative Ltd