

About WEST GIPPSLAND and 3BBR-FM

The Baw Baw Shire is an area of diverse and dynamic economic development, encompassing some of Australia's best agricultural land, but equally well positioned to support business. The shire combines a mix of high quality rural areas interspersed with residential villages and larger towns, and has areas of scenic and tourist significance. The center of the shire, Warragul, is located 100km east of Melbourne, and the shire covers approx. 4,000 square kilometers. It has strong transport links to the capital through rail and road, and a multi-skilled workforce drawn from a population of 40,309. A recent sharp rise in population has been experienced, due to the ease of traveling to the eastern suburbs, and the attraction of the semi-rural lifestyle, and a projected population of 41,000 by 2,011 will probably be achieved much earlier than expected.

The 1996 Census showed an age distribution break-up as follows:

0 – 14 years	10,132 (25%)
15 – 24 years	5,212 (12.9%)
25 – 39 years	8,671 (21.5%)
40 – 54 years	10,972 (27.2%)
55 - years or more	8,357 (20.7%)

It is a relatively homogeneous population in terms of ethnicity, with 0.9% persons of Aboriginal or Torres Island descent, and 12% born overseas, of whom 6% were born in countries where English is not the major language.

In terms of religious affiliation, the majority identify themselves as Christian (69.1%), and 0.5% identified as non-Christian.

West Gippsland Community Radio is keenly aware of its role in the community. The local focus encourages a sense of unity, affirms regional identity and pride, and rewards local initiatives.

West Gippsland Community Radio bases its programming policy on the following understanding of the needs of the community:

1. There is already a large group of older citizens (20.7%), most of whom are likely to be at home during the day. Given the general demographic trend, this group can only increase. Individuals in this group have turned away from modern commercial radio, with its emphasis on youth and the latest musical styles, and express a desire to hear music of an earlier era.
2. West Gippsland has a varied provision of volunteer services, many of which are provided by people in the older age group. There is no suggestion of this kind of provision lessening, and there is a need for publicizing these services. Reports of the activities of these groups are of great interest to their members, who are most likely to be at home during the day.
3. West Gippsland has a varied provision of sporting, cultural and other leisure activities, most of which are, and will continue to be, run by volunteers. Local sporting fixtures are not covered by commercial broadcasting, and in terms particularly of an ageing population, there is a need to be able to keep in touch with sporting events in other ways than by attending. These organizations also need to publicize their fund raising events and recruitment, and appreciate being able to air issues of concern in a public forum.
4. The local newspapers are published weekly, which gives limited scope for reminders of local activities. Community radio can provide free services on a daily basis to not-for-profit organizations.
5. Evening and weekend programming allows participation by young people and workers, who can then share their music with fellow enthusiasts. The training of young people is particularly important, as they may well go on to develop careers in media.
6. Listeners who enjoy particular kinds of music which are not often played on the commercial stations can find a couple of hours to their own taste, usually on evenings and weekends. Many

listeners, particularly those in older age groups, find the general high level of noise and excitement characteristic of commercial radio difficult to tolerate, and need a warmer, more restrained approach to the microphone and to sponsorship announcements.

7. Local politicians and councilors need a forum for reporting to the community on a regular basis. Listeners appreciate the opportunity to hear of other activities than those that are reported in the newspapers, and to hear details which have not been published in other media.

In 2000, West Gippsland Community Radio was a recipient of a Federation Community Projects Grant to provide publicity for events celebrating Federation in the electorate, and to undertake a project aimed at preserving the oral history of the area in a non-perishable form. Two 13 program series of 'Gippsland Heritage' were produced, presenting local oral history with folk and country music, poetry and prose contributions by local heritage organizations and schools and the assistance of members of other groups. Copies of the programs have been donated to local Historical Societies. 'Gippsland Heritage' was an entrant in the Victorian Country History Awards and National Bank Community Link Volunteer awards for 2002.

The programming policy is driven by identified community needs. Local organizations are invited to present their own programs, under the guidance of a trained presenter. Music content was determined after a consideration of the demographics of the area and the music styles played by those other radio stations which can be received in West Gippsland, together with a concern that all members of the family should be able to find some program to their individual taste. It is possible to program for small children ('Bumper Rumpus School'), and to include very young people on air on special occasions such as Christmas, and Schools' Open Week. Similarly, programs can be tailored to the tastes of older people ('Time Warp', 'Way Back When').

The Statement of Purpose of West Gippsland Community Radio Inc. emphasizes family values, and this is reinforced by the Programming Policy, which makes it clear that at no time should any member of the community be shocked or distressed by spoken word or lyrics.

West Gippsland Community Radio Inc. takes seriously its obligation to provide a minimum of one hour's religious broadcasting each week, and exceeds this requirement. Currently it is four and a quarter hours each week.

There is an emphasis on Australian content, and on encouraging local musicians and writers. West Gippsland Community Radio now provides an overnight music format which entertains travelers, workers and people unable to sleep.

West Gippsland Community Radio provides PA services to local fairs free of charge, and members assist in the publicity committees of a number of local organizations. In case of emergency, West Gippsland Community Radio is willing to provide their broadcasting facilities for the use of emergency services.

West Gippsland Community Radio is open to participation by a wide range of organizations. This participation took on a new direction during our Federation Celebrations project, which involved local schools and heritage organizations.

Station policy is to broadcast at least two free-to-air community service announcements every hour during the day and evening. Programs provide further opportunity for local organizations to publicize their causes and their needs.

Information received from outside West Gippsland is included if it is felt that there are West Gippslanders who would benefit from the information.

While Community Radio, particularly in the rural areas, employs very few people, it is a training

ground for commercial presenters. The commitment required to continue in Community Radio is well regarded by selection boards for professional training courses. The wide range of skills exercised in the running of a Community Radio station provides background experience for other jobs. 3BBR-FM provides opportunities for Work Experience and Work Observation, and is an approved organization for the voluntary employment of over-50s through CentreLink.

A service is offered free of charge to people who have difficulty tuning their radios in to FM, and many people have taken advantage of the service.

Small business finds the cost of advertising on commercial radio out of reach – Community Radio provides an affordable alternative through ‘sponsorship’.

Stories are told of people wishing to contact ‘their local radio station’, in a family emergency, only to find themselves speaking about their lost dog to someone in Darwin. Similarly, ringing in a lost dog notice on Thursday, and being assured it would be put to air the following Monday. In contrast, the 3BBR presenter put it to air immediately, and the dog was soon found. Now, in the national or international scheme of things, a lost dog is not important at all - but to a family, it’s a tragedy. The human scale can be retained in the local community radio service, while it can easily be lost through networking.

27 November 2004

3BBR-FM