

The Future for Community Radio in the Hutt Valley

The Hutt Community Radio and Audio Archives Charitable Trust has been broadcasting in the Hutt Valley on the 106.1 FM frequency since 2010.

This frequency is one of a number of non-commercial radio frequencies allocated without a resource charge by the government to community radio stations throughout New Zealand to ensure people in their communities have access to programmes and information relevant to them.

With the expiry of the licence occurring in April 2016, a decision was taken to review the licence in order to ensure the current broadcaster was fulfilling community needs with its programming. This includes providing listeners with an alternative service to those offered in the area by other stations operating on a 'for profit' basis.

In November 2015 the Ministry for Culture and Heritage called for expressions of interest in the frequency. These closed in December 2015 and an independent panel met on 26 January to consider the proposals received.

All the applications were considered on their merits against the criteria established by the policy for awarding these frequencies, in other words did they:

- promote local broadcasting services which support local and regional character, as well as identity and democratic and civic participation among regional and local groups
- promote innovation and a diverse range of content and formats reflecting audience diversity and cater for their interests
- facilitate wide access to technical, cultural and social broadcasting
- provide for long-term broadcasting developments.

As a result of these assessments, the radio frequency has now been allocated to Wellington Access Radio Society Incorporated.

There were four applicants for the frequency, including the incumbent broadcaster, but the Wellington Access Radio Society was considered the strongest applicant having broadcast in the greater Wellington area on an AM frequency for 34 years and with the capability to strengthen its community reach into the Hutt Valley region.

Wellington Access Radio is a professional operation, providing a reliable and strongly community-based service, inclusive of many ethnic groups. In the panel's view it offers a broader mix of programming to that which has been offered by the Hutt Community Radio and Audio Archives Charitable Trust over the last five years.

The Hutt Community Radio Trust will now need to cease broadcasting on or before 2 April 2016 when its licence expires and the Wellington Access Radio Society will begin using the radio frequency once it has established its FM transmission arrangements. In the meantime it will continue to broadcast on its current licence on 783AM.

As a condition of the granting of the licence Wellington Access Radio has been reminded that it is now expected to serve a wider Hutt Valley community, and is required to advise how it intends to cater for these interests, including whether this might include the provision of a local office or studio facilities in the Hutt Valley.

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