

Richard Longman, ABA Manager Radio Planning, represented the ABA at the South Australian Community Broadcasting Association conference, held in Coober Pedy 10 - 12 August 2001. This is his report on the conference.

Community radio goes underground

The coach drove through the dark deserted roads. Ahead, we halted outside an entrance carved into the hillside. Down the rock passageway, which opened out into the cavernous hall of the Serbian Club, the band Irish Albert was playing *The Girl from Ipanema*. Local indigenous artist, Mindi, joined the band to serenade the conference diners and locals, before the annual 'Bilby' awards were handed out and things got livelier to rock standards from the 1970s.

Just another gathering of the South Australian Community Broadcasting Association (SACBA). This year, SACBA had gone underground in the opal mining town of Coober Pedy.

Many of the sixty or so delegates of the state's thirty or so licensed and aspirant stations, Irish Albert and I had travelled up from Adelaide by coach the previous day, across the desolate but unusually green terrain. They promised not to throw me off in the middle of nowhere (and there was plenty of it).

Our ebullient hosts, Ian Gordon and Bob Pryce of the local aspirant station, Dusty FM, welcomed us, along with

state representative, Julian Stefani MLC and Kym Green of SACBA's marketing arm, Active Radio Network.

Appropriately titled 'Diggin' In', the conference provided workshops on all aspects of consolidating community radio's presence in South Australia.

In addition to the annual general meeting, Active Radio's upbeat annual report and workshops on statewide accredited training advances and improving on-air presentation from within SACBA's 22 member stations, there were a number of interstate presenters, including myself.

Ian Stanistreet, of the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF), reacquainted many with the CBF's funding role and outlined the work of the sector's peak bodies to argue a case for increased funding ahead of the federal election.

Barry Melville, the Community Broadcasting Association's (CBAA) new General Manager, discussed the sector's Code of Practice and the networking of programs via the satellite service Comratsat.

Paul Mason, also of the CBAA, outlined developments in the promotion of new Australian music and musicians through the Commonwealth-funded Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (AMRAP).

Michelle Vlatkovic, of the Ethnic Radio Training Project, led a workshop on grant applications.



Dusty Radio FM (Bob Pryce) wins a SACBA Bilby award. Photo: Regional Times.

For me, the task was to outline and discuss not only the ABA's regulatory role but also the many imminent changes expected in South Australia.

The ABA's analog radio licence area planning process is drawing to a conclusion and with it the finalisation of the plans for the Adelaide, Mount Gambier, Murray Bridge, Port Pirie, Port Augusta and Port Lincoln markets. With these changes, there are both short and longer-term challenges. Many stations face changes of frequency and/or operating conditions and, for the aspirant groups, the licence allocation process. However, there are also longer-term issues related to viability, continuing to represent communities of interest and new technological developments, notably digital radio.

'Diggin' In' in Coober Pedy: the SACBA members could not have chosen a more appropriate place to both examine the foundations of community broadcasting and address the occasionally harsh and uncompromising realities of their situation, and also to celebrate their diversity and assert their potential to unearth a rich vein of gems.



SACBA conference participants at Dusty Radio FM

