

Making waves in Port Broughton

Radio broadcaster Chris Jeremy took advantage of the ACMA's Low Power Open Narrowcasting (LPON) service to launch and operate a niche radio station in the small South Australian town of Port Broughton. Here, he reflects on his experiences at the helm of Easy FM 87.6.

I got on to the idea of LPON early in 2004 while living and working on the other side of the world. I was investigating ways to occupy my time when my contract with Olympic Broadcasting in Athens finished later in the year and I was to move back to Australia. But by that time, all available frequencies where I was living were already spoken for.

So I searched for a town where I would like to live and which had an available LPON frequency. This led me to Port Broughton, a small fishing township popular with tourists on the coast, 170 kilometres north of Adelaide with a population of around 750.

The town was serviced by a commercial AM/FM combo based to the north in Port Augusta, and the local ABC in Port Pirie. The service areas of the community stations in Port Pirie and Kadina in the south did not cover Port Broughton.

The challenge was to create a format of 'limited appeal' that would find its niche in this little town. The commercial stations followed the fairly standard pairing of an FM station for the youth and an AM station for the 25–55 demographic, whereas Port Broughton was predominantly retiree territory. I had read everything I could on s.21 and other decisions made in the past about the validity of various LPON formats and decided to develop programming based around a mixture of country music, adult standards and nostalgia that aimed to appeal to the older age group of the town, while complementing the other available radio services.

The other main feature of the format was that it was local. Having enlisted the help of a TV antenna installer, the one watt signal was up and running by the end of July 2006 and on 1 August, Easy FM 87.6 started 24-hour transmission. Several local businesses helped by displaying notices promoting the new radio station, but it was a front page story in local monthly newspaper

In keeping with the requirements of the LPON licence, nothing on the station was broadcast live, but whenever there was an event in town, particularly on the foreshore, it was only a short walk with a portable digital recorder to provide regular 'vox pops' from the activity. I also tried all the local radio stalwarts—birthday calls, gardening tips and the ubiquitous Doctor Wright.

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The music was supplemented by a steady stream of local information with community service announcements and even some advertising and sponsorship from local businesses. One success was the local golf club which was overrun with patrons following promotion of their monthly fundraising 'Family Tea'. Similar success was reported by the nearby township of Mundoorra (population around 50) when one of their fundraising events was promoted and attracted more than double the population.

After three years the station had a good following in the local community and also received many good reports from visitors, particularly those staying in the caravan parks. I would often answer the front door to find someone visiting the area wanting to congratulate the station. I remember one couple from Sydney in particular. They listened to the nostalgia music one Saturday evening and then dropped by on Sunday morning to say how much they had enjoyed it as there was 'nothing like that in Sydney'.

LPON gives a great opportunity for niche broadcasters to provide a service to a local community and I'm glad that I was able to take advantage of that opportunity in Port Broughton, albeit for a short time, with Easy FM 87.6. 📻



Chris Jeremy broadcasting to the residents of Port Broughton in the Easy FM studio.