

## The History of SWRFM—The first 20 years

### Preface:

*SWR-FM was originally formed by Enayat Khan, Paul Matthews and Ken Jones in November 1991. The unincorporated group conducted its first test in January 1992. The station was formed out of dissatisfaction with other community stations and aspirant groups in Western Sydney and out of the need for Blacktown to have its own station.*

*The principals (Enayat, Ken & Paul) had observed that it was common for community radio stations to impose unfair controls and bias against different volunteers in their groups - in particular the young. The principals believed that the absolute first priority of a community station is to provide unbiased and simple access for "the man on the street" directly to the microphone of a community station, without having to put up with the politics and power games which often dissolve the "fun" of Community Radio into a shouting match of back stabbing and misery. The ideal location for such an "open access" community service was Blacktown, with such a large representation of young and often vilified people. Through all its troubles and success, SWR-FM has survived to become a unique force in Community Radio.*

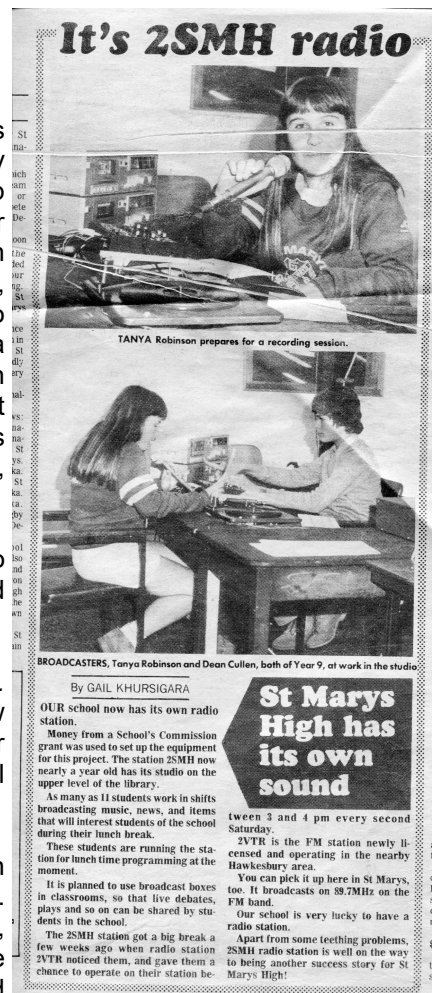
*SWRFM now approaches 35 years of history. That's enough history to fill several books. You are looking at those books right here. Very few community stations have documented their history in the way that SWRFM has since its inception. The SWRFM story you are about to read, could well be the story of any community station in Australia. It's gripping fun and amazing. Enjoy. We did.*

### ANCIENT HISTORY—SOWING THE SEEDS OF SWR

Once upon a time waaaay back in 1981.... there were three high school mates and a teacher. That teacher (let's call him "Schistdisc") was enthusiastically involved in a new concept: *Community radio*. One of Sydney's very first "sub metro" low power stations - 2VTR in Windsor - was just starting up. Their school English Mistress was very excited. The possibilities were discussed in staff meetings and in collaboration with the three students. Lets call them Paul, Dean and Enayat. Under the skilled direction of "Schistdisc," a "school radio station" was soon set up in a room in the school's library. On the desk was a disco mixer, a few turntables, an old valve PA amplifier and a squawky horn speaker mounted on the eaves at the end of the Agriculture block. It wasn't long before the sounds of Jona Lewie and INXS were added to the Lunchtimes of *St Marys High School*. The perpetrators of the scheme, with eyes wide shut, looked further a field for grander possibilities!

Soon many students, with the help of Schistdisc, were finding their way into 2VTR at Windsor on weekends to present top 40 music shows. The crowd loved it! Everything was rosy, fuzzy and warm.

*Except for the annoying fact that.. due to its paltry 20 watt mono FM signal.. 2VTR could barely be received in the suburb where the school was! A few years afterwards everyone went their separate ways. The old horn speaker finally fell, as the agriculture block was demolished to make way for a new jail (whoops) senior school. Meanwhile, for our heroes, the college years rolled in.*



Rare photo of "Schistdisc" behind 2VTR's original RME panel sometime in 1987, with Enayat to far Right looking on.

And.. four years later in 1987... they rolled out again. As if time had just stood still, Paul and Enayat (this time without Dean, who had mysteriously vanished, we'll learn more about him later..) again found themselves in the same "toilet block" studio at Windsor, pushing a new wave of music through the now ageing 2VTR equipment. Mr Schistdisc (now the station's volunteer manager) occasionally listened in.

'87 and '88 came and went. It was a glorious age for recorded pop music. Then in 1989, a new young female broadcaster joined the station. She started playing music styles that neither Paul, Enayat or (it seemed) many of the other station personnel on the management committee appreciated. In a disgusting

episode of cooperative intimidation, she was soon dispatched by the stations' management committee. Paul and Enayat were disgusted.

Around them, the moth eaten station (still using it's now literally rusty 20w transmitter equipment) was falling apart. Friday evenings soon resembled a travelling production. Everything from mixers, CD players and even monitor speakers had to be bought in from home, simply because the station's ones were broken and never repaired. Meanwhile, the management seemed to squander it's meagre budget on outside broadcast caravans. That's when they even *had* a budget. Since most of the time, nobody ever seemed to be bothered to even collect airtime fees, attract sponsors or chase up the mountain of bad debts already owed to the station.

Paul and Enayat found themselves reasoning in this way: "What if there was a "real" Community Radio station.. you know.. one where anyone could come and *broadcast anything they wanted*. You know.. one where all the gear actually worked. And which could actually be received by a radio located more than two miles down the road from the station. And where the music tastes of management were not imposed on the broadcasters.

What if... You know?...

But it was not to be. Yet. In 1989 and very frustrated, Paul and Enayat finally said their good byes to Mr Schistdisk. He seemed to be as disgusted at the situation as they were. The idea of "real Community radio" sat in their minds.

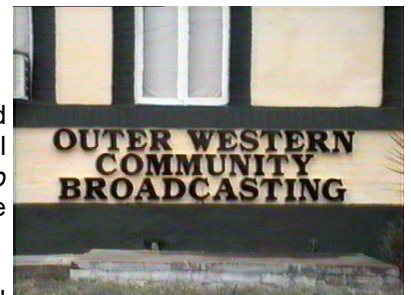
*A strong priority of the founding members of SWR, was to pursue the best possible radio coverage for a low power station, so everyone could easily pick it up in their cars, homes and places of work. At SWR, technical issues involving the transmitter and antenna have always taken highest priority, often leaving little volunteer time for anything else in the past. This dedication to technical excellence extends right through SWR's entire history right up to today. For further reading look for "SWRFM—A Technical Journey" on the SWR web site.*

*In the 1990s as an aspirant, SWR-FM extensively tested six different transmitter sites around Blacktown in just six years. It also worked closely with the Australian Broadcasting Authority to assist not only SWR-FM, but other community aspirants in Western Sydney to prove that 200kHz spacing in adjacent areas can and does, work.*

*This would allow for more community broadcasters to exist in a common area. The rewards for this technical effort are now obvious: SWR's FM signal currently covers the greater Blacktown area very well with a quality stereo signal, an area serving over 450,000 people - more than twice that of most other metropolitan community stations This is with technical specifications the same as everyone else, and just 200kHz spaced with other services nearby. In fact SWRFM can still be heard clearly in most parts of the Sydney Metropolitan Area serving over 3.5 million potential listeners.*

### **IT IS BETTER TO HAVE LOVED AND LOST- THAN TO HAVE NEVER LOVED**

In early 1991, a newspaper article drew Paul's attention to a new group being formed in St Marys. A "community radio station," being set up in Collins St. "WOW" Paul thought.. *finally an opportunity to be involved with a station he could actually pick up in his own suburb!* Bounding with energy, he walks into the shabby run down house and meets the equally enthusiastic but very green, female volunteer manager.



*It was perfect.* All the hard work had been done. They already had a building and everything! All they needed, was someone with a shred of technical knowledge to actually get them on the air. This would be a symbiotic relationship. Within three months, Paul and Enayat had borrowed equipment from anywhere they could. They had "WOW FM" ready for their first fantastic test broadcast. And it was going to be great. *And then it got.. better!*

From out of the blue, a young, dorky guy wearing shorts in the freezing cold and driving a Hiace van covered in ladders and antennas, lumbers in. Being a freshly qualified RF engineer and interested in broadcasting, he had contacted the CBA (Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, the industry peak body) only a week beforehand. They had dropped the news to him about the "happenings" in St Marys, suggesting he might want to pay them a visit. Let's call him "Ken".



And now the two were three. **Paul, Enayat and Ken.** Watch out world! Within a week, 100 watts of glory shot out all over St Marys. Everybody was having fun!

But then.. something went terribly wrong in heaven. People, who Paul, Ken and Enayat had never seen before, suddenly came in and took control. People who had not been present at any of the committee meetings. People who did not want open access.



It became apparent that the so called "outer western community broadcasting" group had no formal membership. It was not incorporated at all. It had no governing constitution. For all it was worth, it was controlled by just one single person. A relatively powerful Penrith based businessman. He wanted the station to be an ethnic language station.

In fact it later became apparent that this same small group of people were actually part of another (later unsuccessful) group, who were contending the then available Sydney wide ethnic license, which is now operated by Radio 2000 FM. These people had no interest in the local Penrith or St Marys area whatsoever.

After conducting what had mostly been a very successful test broadcast, things suddenly "imploded" at the end. With no other option available, they found themselves out on the front lawn.

Again, the "What if" discussions started up. *Was it time? Could it be now? Is this the time for truly accessible community radio? could it be here?*

### **THE UNWANTED CHILD IS BORN: Wednesday 22nd January 1992.**

It took another nine months, before our three human figures (having taken holidays from their regular jobs) could be found rummaging around in the back room of an old Church building in Mt Druitt. They were setting up equipment for SWRFM's first test broadcast.

This event was intended as more of a joke than any serious attempt at community radio. There certainly was a hint of payback though.. aimed at WOW FM. Nobody ever even thought it would amount to anything more than just a week of fun.

The ambitious seven day test included a live bands day featuring eight local bands. It featured a live outside broadcast at the local shopping mall. It established many technical benchmarks considered impossible, even by other stations who had lots of money when SWR had none. The entire test was conducted for the princely sum of \$300. Even the phone lines were borrowed.

This was grass roots, Mount Druitt Westie "you can't tell us what we can't do" attitude at it's best. The broadcast was received over a huge area. It used only 100 watts and a home made antenna made for \$10 bucks using bits from the local hardware store. *What a blast!*

Problem was.. it *worked*. Suddenly, other people came out of the woodwork like cockroaches. Everywhere. People who wanted to be involved. More dedicated volunteers. *People who wanted more. More SWR!*

"Damn. What have we done." Soon afterwards, in May 1992, the "unwanted baby" formed by that first ramshackle test broadcast became the "SWRFM Public Radio Association." Incorporated with just 12 members, CBA financial membership and.. no idea. The introduction of the new "Broadcasting Services Act" was looming. It promised a new dawn of opportunity. A time where community licences would be gazetted and issued in just a few years. A veritable golden age of prosperity. Licenses were promised to come like running water.. and with new technical parameters allowing much larger coverage and with higher power than ever before.

*"Yes.. it must be worth it. Lets do it. SWRFM. Lets go for it."*

### **THE ORPHAN GOES TO SCHOOL**

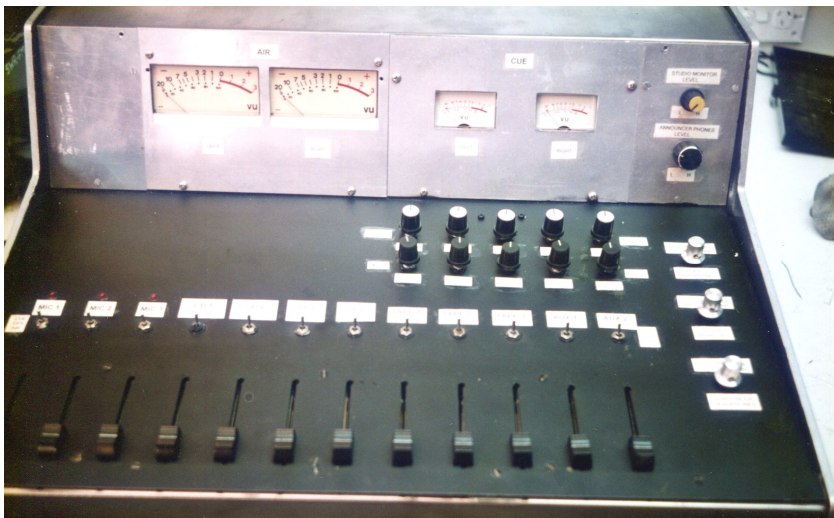
In these first years SWRFM was very much in competition with WOW FM back in St Marys, who had since found new and perhaps more gullible technical staff to help them. Both organizations became aspirants for "Western Sydney" community radio, no such actual license area yet being defined.

Ken, Paul and Enayat very much "equally owned SWRFM" at this point. Early tests had the station broadcasting in seven (and later nine) day bursts of activity a couple of times a year, being given a maximum of 30 days' per year to test. This was the legislative limitation at the time. Early SWRFM tests became a goliath technical effort, with each test surpassing the last for complexity and inclusion.



Above : A rare shot of the studio set up at Whalan Community Centre in 1993.

SWR's early tests were broadcast on 88.3MHz. When other frequencies became available due to the closing of WIN-4's VHF TV broadcasts in Wollongong this was changed to 100.3MHz. It was felt that the new frequency was more "in the middle" of the band (and thus easier to find.) There was also better potential to be able to provide a higher powered service at 100.3 than back on 88.3MHz which had since been "assumed" by WOW in St Marys for their tests.



When 100.3MHz was chosen, handshake agreements were made between another group against WOW - newly formed AIR-FM in Penrith - to use 100.7MHz. Agreement was then made (with difficulty) with the ABA to test the concept of these 400kHz adjacent services with the two aspirants.

Very few photos of SWR's "Mk1" mixer panel exist, as it was on sold to another aspirant to get money to build the second one. Designed and built from scratch in 6 weeks in 1992, for SWR's second test broadcast and lasted in service until 1995.

The first problem occurred during SWR's November 1992 test, when it was found that our transmissions in Emerton on 100.3MHz caused problems with Channel 9 TV reception in the area. This previously had not happened with 88.3MHz. The reason was mainly due to our strong signal "saturating" the inputs of local viewers' TV sets, creating a harmonic right on 200.6MHz - on top of Channel 9's color carrier! Unfortunately it just so happened that this weekend of the test also clashed with the NRL Grand Final!

While it was proven that the problem could usually be solved by installing filters in viewer's homes, the need to do this in perhaps 300 or more surrounding homes was financially beyond the reach of SWR-FM at the time. In any case, the very much "temporary" occupation of the Popondetta Rd Emerton studio site ended shortly after the third test. This test proved that to avoid interference problems with broadcasting on 100.3MHz, our transmitter would have to be located in a *non residential area*.

In early 1993 an interest group loosely formed around Blacktown Council. It became known as the "Friends of SWR -FM." This group remained separate to SWR due to the need to ensure that the Council were not seen as supporting one aspirant who were not yet guaranteed a licensed service.

In cooperation with the "Friends," SWR conducted a short test broadcast in March 1993 to cover the Blacktown Show. The transmission site for this test was established in the lift motor room at the top of Council's Civic Centre in Blacktown City itself. A mobile studio, in a caravan borrowed from 2RRR, was established at Blacktown Showgrounds. A temporary studio was also established at Doonside High School. Both of these were linked to Civic Centre using UHF links and also linked together using "Crossbar" audio links, these being a curious and very cheap 1990's technical tool used to transfer live high quality audio between local sites, explained in more detail in our "outside broadcasts" story.

Ironically, the borrowed OB van at the Showground was situated literally right next door to the Simpson Pavilion.. where SWRFM's current studios exist today! Sadly, no photographic records exist of this important SWR era. Thankfully though, there are plenty of audio archives which make for what could only be described as "interesting listening."

This landmark test was very successful. But it was also VERY demanding on the technical staff! It included three days broadcast "live" from the show, with many programs also presented from Doonside. This included a great "Live" dance party in the school hall to wrap up the test. Whilst the signal was well received in and around the Blacktown CBD itself, the Civic Centre broadcast experienced coverage problems to the North West due to shading effect caused by the adjacent and higher "Westpoint" building. There were problems receiving the signal in Mt Druitt, Plumpton and Riverstone, ironically places which had been well covered by previous tests.

With continued assistance from the "Friends," SWR conducted it's next test from Whalan Community Centre with the FM transmitter located at Prospect Electricity's new facility at Huntingwood, linked by UHF link. Programming wise, this test was pivotal for SWR, a time when we gained many new and long time broadcasters and supporters.

However problems were experienced with the UHF link. It was just too far. Whalan Community Centre sat too low in the valley. High trees surrounding Whalan meant that listeners only heard a noisy, mono signal.

Soon after this test Prospect Electricity became less friendly, so the Huntingwood site was abandoned. In fact Huntingwood had proven to be "too good." Whilst it left holes in the Blacktown area itself, it was too easily received in Sydney's northern suburbs right up towards Hornsby, where another aspirant had been testing on a very adjacent 100.5MHz at the time.

Using the "Friends," negotiations ensued towards the possibility of acquiring the Whalan site, which was otherwise not utilised effectively for Council and was costing them a lot of money to maintain. Meanwhile, new contacts obtained through the "friends" were established to locate SWR's transmitter atop a newly built hotel adjacent to the Rooty Hill RSL Club. This was a location smack bang in the middle of the Blacktown map and for all purposes, seemed to be an ideal one, at least on paper.

The deal for this test was "supposedly" assured. So planning for SWR's much longer October 1993 test proceeded. Imagine our disgust then when at the very last minute, the RSL Club suddenly refused access to the site. The "seventy something" old coots on their Board of management were reportedly worried that the transmission might "affect their poker machines!" No amount of qualified and experienced technical evidence could convince these "powers that be" of how stupid this idea was. So with only 48 hours before the start of the next test, SWR was without a transmitter site!

Following some amazingly fast 11th hour talking between Mt Druitt TAFE's Electrical Engineering division and Ken and Paul, a transmitter site was established there and the test began only 12 hours late. Ken and Paul had both attended Mt Druitt TAFE only a few years earlier, having completed most of their engineering qualifications there. They knew the staff well and.. the staff trusted the capability of their students! The TAFE college later became a major SWR-FM sponsor. As a result, a 5 year lease was eventually signed for use of the Mt Druitt TAFE transmitter site. However SWR was experiencing other problems. They were far less technical and a lot more personal. Perhaps not so easy for Our Heroes to solve.

The extended broadcast schedule in October 1993 (24 days straight) proved too ambitious for the aspirant group. Tempers frayed. The financial position floundered. Security at the Whalan Centre suddenly became a major issue. Shortly after the test, the Whalan site was declared unsuitable for SWRM use and it was abandoned.

The aftermath of that October 1993 test burnt out many volunteers. Some left. Those who remained, faced apathy from Blacktown Council who as can be expected, were not game to make any decisions quickly. Despite this, the "Friends" group, now thinned considerably, continued to meet monthly. Possible locations continued to be discussed.

The situation looked hopeless.

Research had been undertaken. Committees had been formed. Rules written. The group's membership had grown and attitudes changed. It had been great fun.. and that's all that mattered. One objective however had never changed: that of *Open access*. Everyone was welcomed to take a timeslot on the air. Whoever rocked up to the front door was given a time slot, sat down in front of the equipment and given a chance. Often with far less than ideal levels of training beforehand. In some cases that cost the station its dignity. But it didn't matter. SWR had been *the community on the air. It sounded fantastic.*

### **THE CHILD MOVES IN WITH ENAYAT**

In January 1994 something curious happened. Something which would happen again.. and again. For years to come, *the "discarded, unwanted child" of Community Radio" would repeatedly be saved by one of our heroes, dragging the others behind them.*

The first one to don the metaphorical cape and tights was Enayat. He found, and secured, a lease on a small, run down council owned building in the middle of nowhere on Eastern Rd between Rooty Hill and Doonside: ***The "Greenhouse"***.

*"Coming?" Enayat asked on the 'phone.*

*"Where"?* said Ken & Paul

*"SWR".. remarked Enayat. "I'm going down to start building a studio. Coming??"*

Ken and Paul look at each other. Each knew deep inside that neither had the time, inclination nor strength to do SWRFM again.



"Awww.. Come on.. we can't let him go down there by himself now, can we?.. he's our mate after all.."

And so SWRFM moved into it's next phase of aspirant life as a *Weekend Broadcaster*. In February 1994, the ABA agreed to allow 90 days of testing per year to be used up by broadcasting on *weekends only*. This would give the station an almost "full time" identity. It would be far better than the bursts of activity that typified the previous years' tests.

"It's only until 1995. Come on guys.. we can do it. They'll be handing licenses out in 2 years. C'mon, we only have to keep the thing going just a few more years, then it'll run itself".

Oh.. how *WRONG* they were!



The Greenhouse—Photographed one day before it was finally demolished to make way for the new Olympic Precinct.

### **THE WEEKEND TESTING ERA BEGINS**

Enayat had gone forward to secure a "handshake lease" on part of an old building in Aqlina Reserve which being used as a "Clubhouse." We had all seen this empty as we drove past to the "Friends" meetings. It was managed by a Parks Committee headed by Alderman Kathie Collins. This was sufficiently distant from the politics of Council to enable the committee to "shake a deal" with SWR without requiring anyone to stick out their neck at a Council meeting. A low rent for otherwise unused space was secured. Enayat declared that SWR was not finished yet!

So again (!) the principals rallied their friends and a number of local businesses for materials and built SWR's third studio, a slightly more permanent affair which sat in the Greenhouse on Eastern Road between 1994 and 1999. *(Drive past the Blacktown Olympic Sports Park. The Greenhouse used to stand right where the entrance road is today.)*

Of course this plan meant SWR could no longer rely on "borrowed" equipment. They HAD to have their own transmitter and link equipment, as the Greenhouse site was not suitable in itself as a broadcast site. It was far too low. Enayat purchased a transmitter, which remained in his ownership, never being owned by SWR. Blacktown Council also chipped in with a \$1100 grant. This enabled the installation of a simple 4 wire Telstra line (at that time charged on a concession rate) between the Greenhouse and the TAFE College. This would now carry SWR's broadcast to the world every weekend.

There had been a longstanding attempt by Paul to influence the sites chosen by SWR. He always pushed that the studio and transmitter remain in the same Telstra exchange area, in this case Rooty Hill. This would enable this low cost option of using existing phone lines as wide band analog transmission lines to remain possible. It paid off. In April 1994 SWR again graced the airwaves and a new era was born. *The Weekend SWR era!*

The initial performance of the 4 wire line was worse than hoped. This was due to the presence of a long, very old paper insulated main telephone cable under Rooty Hill Road South which served the area south of the railway line. The combined line distance to the TAFE was just over 7km. Eventually it was possible to patch in some good quality line equalisers (thanks Jim) in Rooty Hill exchange itself which solved this problem.

Over the following years SWR struggled on. Waiting.. and waiting.. for the licensing process to begin. 1994 came and went. 1995. Then 1996. The aim of the principals at this time was merely to keep the station "above water" until licensing could save it.

The problem, was that we began to get used to tuning in to a 16yo Zaghet every Saturday morning with his "2WS Brekky show." Somehow it just wasn't the weekend anymore without hearing someone play Colleen's 1993 vintage "S.W.R.FM" Crash Promo across the air. The 1995/96 era was spent patching and patching. Applying even more band aids to our antiquated transmitting system and equipment.

### **THE BATTLE FOR WESTERN SYDNEY BEGINS**

Meanwhile over in St Marys at WOW, things were also exploding. The technical team that had replaced our heroes in 1992 (Let's call them Clive and Steve), after pouring years of their own effort and time into the WOWFM project, again found themselves suddenly surrounded by mysterious people from the dark corners of that group.

There was basically a repeat of the coup that had happened in 1991 to Our Heroes. Spearheaded by people who never showed their faces until "certain questions" were asked. Questions about the ethnic mix of the station's

programming. Ways in which it might be possible to "open up" the station to more different formats. Again: another dedicated team of volunteers found themselves on the back foot of WOW FM and out in the cold.

"They've done it again.. WOW's kicked out their whole on air and technical staff".. said Ken.

"I wonder what they will do.. maybe they'll go it alone? said Paul.

'Let's ask them".. suggested Enayat. Soon afterwards "AIR FM" in Penrith was born. Totally separate from SWRFM both groups now consisted of members who had previously been "burnt" and split from WOW FM. A new "Coalition of ex WOW people" was formed.

One of the results of this coalition was the eventual definition of the Penrith and Blacktown licence areas. Up until 1994, with only WOW and SWR testing, it had been assumed that only one license would ever be gazetted for the combined Western Sydney area of Penrith and Blacktown.

After an exhaustive series of technical tests on transmitter sites and new frequencies in 1995 by both SWR and AIR, it was established that it was quite feasible to operate *two separate stations in each district both Penrith and Blacktown*. This would leave WOW in the middle at St Marys. The push was now on to convince the ABA to issue *two licenses*, instead of just one.

And so it was that through this coalition, SWR and AIR both altered their focus respectively to cover only Blacktown and Penrith. SWR re - drafted it's constitution to exclude membership of residents outside the Blacktown licence area and changed it's name to the "*Blacktown City Community Radio Association Inc*" in 1995. This was done to demonstrate to the authorities that SWRFM was now purely dedicated to the Blacktown area exclusively.

This left AIR to handle Penrith from their established transmitter site in Werrington. It left WOW FM the "piggy in the middle" with no clear focus or aims for either area. The *coalition strategy* was to convince the ABA that two separate stations were the way to go for Western Sydney and that SWR and AIR should be the favoured aspirants for those services. With a promise of the Sydney Frequency Allotment Plan commencing in early 1996, this seemed like a good strategy. Meanwhile, our heroes continued to "keep SWR afloat in a lifeboat" awaiting the rescue by the License Area Plan process.

However by this time, and unknown to any of the aspirants, the rot had truly set in at the ABA. Release of the Sydney LAP was repeatedly delayed. First by months, then years, again and again and again. The SWR life boat was getting full of holes. By the end of 1997 the SWR balance sheet was becoming flooded in red ink.



### THAT BLOODY SPACE PROBE

In late 1995, a new symbol rose from the ground at *Australia's Wonderland*, a theme park in Eastern Creek since sold and demolished in 2004. It was "**Space Probe 7**".

*"We simply MUST test from there" said Enayat.. "It's perfect!!"*

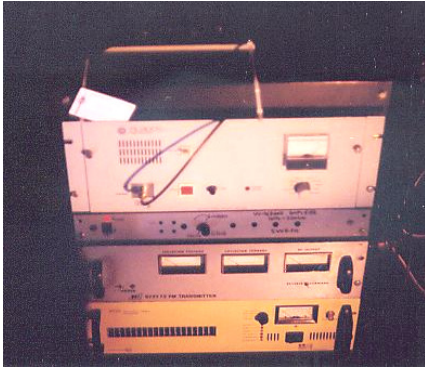
Enayat approached Wonderland and obtained a handshake verbal agreement to install some temporary equipment at the top of the tower and conduct a test. Everyone agreed. So

away we went.. into a period of SWR History the technical committee would very much love to forget!

A need to move from the Mt Druitt TAFE site was primarily spearheaded by Telstra, who had suddenly decided to double our rent on the 4 wire line and remove it from concession status for no reason. This put the line rental well beyond the reach of SWR's meagre weekend budget.

Fortunately, a few reliable and dedicated members put together a loan to the station and we bought a second hand UHF link. A few weeks later, the heavy equipment was duly hauled up 75 metres inside the probe by the technical team and unceremoniously plonked on the floor at the end of a tiny catwalk in the hat of the space probe.





SWR switched on from the probe in November 1996. Oh what heaven! Our coverage was dramatically improved, especially in the Blacktown CBD itself which was never served very well from the TAFE site, which had limited our ability to attract sponsors. The money saved from the line rental eventually paid off the STL equipment loan.



*However...*

Only a few months later.. *the failures began*. One by one the transmitter, RF amplifier and UHF receiver failed. Then failed again. And again.. atop the probe. *Every failure meant a late night 75m climb straight up for Ken, Paul or Peter, with a heavy piece of gear in tow, slung over their back.*

The problem now.. was the band aid solutions of the past. These were falling apart atop the damp and exposed environment at the top of the tower. As a result, SWR was often reduced to low power transmissions from the probe. Throughout 1997, the problems sapped and wasted time for the technical committee. It lowered morale.

The problem needed to be fixed.

In September 1997 on a cold and windy night, the tech committee spent 10 hours hauling up a new enclosure to the top of the probe for the equipment, with the intention of re installing it in a safer, more permanent fashion rather than having a pile of equipment just sitting on the floor hooked together with wires. It was hoped this would protect the equipment from the elements and the failures would stop.

Instead, the problem became the *management of Wonderland itself*, who then claimed that the alterations had not been authorised. In fact they had been requested and approved only two months before. However the manager who had approved them was no longer there. In the intervening time since SWR first struck that "handshake agreement" the management of Wonderland had changed *no less than eight times!* The temporary deal was over.

SWR was off the air again.

In January 1998 SWR took the decision to abandon Space Probe. The site was just too hard to work. The transmitter returned briefly to the TAFE College, however it was found that it was impossible to get the UHF link to work to there from the Greenhouse, which sat low on the other side of Rooty Hill. The Telstra lines of course, having long since been disconnected.

### **ENAYAT DROPS THE BALL. KEN SWEEPS IN FROM BEHIND!**

*"This time I've had enough" said Enayat. "They can go to hell if this is what we get for all our hard work!"*

*"Well I must admit it does look pretty grim" repeated Paul. 'I've got better things to do than keep SWR going for yet another year'".*

In 1998 the life line came from a very unexpected place. *The Australian Government*. They passed an amendment to the Broadcasting Services Act which allowed TCBL'S (Test Broadcast Licenses) to be issued on a *virtually permanent basis*.

With no other aspirants anywhere to be seen contending the Blacktown licence, it was the equivalent to a bloody strong and effective life line. *Virtually as good as a permanent licence*. It gave the project enough energy to ignite a fire under SWRFM's next saviour hero.. Ken Jones!

*"I'm taking the transmitter gear down to Horsley Park" said Ken.*

*"What? Why??"*

*"Well why not?? Its a bloody good site and my boss said we can test it"..*



"C'mon. I'm going down tonight. I've got an antenna and some cable ready that I ripped off another job. C'mon Guys. let's go. It's not too late.." remarked Ken.

"Here we go again" said Paul, as he and Enayat turned their trusty steeds up the dusty hill and past the rickety gate towards a new transmitter site that was destined to become SWR's last.

Confirmation with the ABA's technical division the following morning approved the site relocation. Within a month SWR again switched back on.. and .. **DUDE!!! What awesome coverage!** The site was perfect. It soaked Blacktown with a stronger stereo signal than SWR had ever done before. It took in a good slice of Fairfield and Holroyd aswell to boot. All with only 60 watts! Now you could now drive around most parts of Sydney and still comfortably pick up SWR!

In fact it had confirmed something Ken had been working for a long time to prove: that there is no difference between conventional "two way" radio practice (with which he worked every day) and broadcasting. The same techniques that presented clear signals in courier vans all around the city, also worked more than admirably for wide band stereo FM audio!

Ken's installations always used simple technology. They were almost always vertically polarized. The Horsley Park location also worked exceptionally well due to ground planing effect of the low antenna, which was only 15m above ground level.

It was a very high and ideal site. Ken was able to direct the broadcast far more easily into Blacktown. He had ultimately secured the final transmitter site that SWRFM continues to use to this very day.

Shortly afterwards, in an unprecedented community radio sector cooperation between SWRFM Blacktown, AIRFM Penrith and MCRFM in Campbelltown along with the ABA itself, *three Sydney sub metro aspirants* simultaneously shuffled frequencies to improve separation of their services. This last move cemented the technical specifications that still exist today for the respective licence areas of Blacktown, Penrith and Campbelltown.

The only group that didn't play ball was Hornsby on 100.1MHz, who today suffer limited coverage to the South due to their position in relation to SWRFM on 99.9MHz.

In February 1999, the ABA finally released the **Sydney Frequency Allotment Plan - and it had worked!** Right there.. was a **perfect copy of the plan the three aspirants had discussed 12 months earlier**. It used the same transmitter sites and powers and covered the same proposed areas.

Two licenses. For Western Sydney. Penrith and Blacktown. Operating from the existing established AIR and SWR test transmission sites. **No WOW to be seen. Success!**

All SWR had to do now was sit back and wait for the License Area Plan, then actually apply for the license. All the while, keeping SWR running as the ramshackle dinghy boat full of holes that it was, for just a few more years. This itself had been made easier by the fact that now with virtually full time broadcasting, realistic sponsorship could finally be sold. The red ink had finally begun to drain from the balance sheets.



Very few photos of the Greenhouse studios exist. This is one such photo, which would have been taken in around 1996. The panel is the second one fully designed and built by the SWR tech team, having entered service in 1995.

## A NEIGHBOUR MOVES IN

One innocent night, back in mid 1998, Paul received a phone call from a Mr. Tevah from a radio station known as *Rio FM*. Mr. Tevah explained in halting English, that the ABA had requested that he speak with Paul about the possibility of sharing (at that time) the 100.3MHz test frequency.

At first, Paul was aghast and confused. Why would the ABA do this? However confusion soon turned to understanding as he realized that he was almost certainly speaking with SWRFM's first competing aspirant. Or at least the ABA's licensing dept had recognized Rio FM as such, and confused it with the Blacktown Sub Metro license area instead of recognizing Rio as a narrowcaster. Which it undoubtedly was, since it was already broadcasting several "out of band" services from Chester Hill which required listeners purchase special receivers in order to tune in.

"We can handle this" they said. Paul and Ken studied closely the detailed frequency allotment sheet and spacings they had been using when dealing with SWR's, AIRs and MCR's own allocations at that time. They recognised that 100.9MHz might be a practical frequency that could be tested in the Bankstown area, where Mr Tevah wished to broadcast. Suggesting this to Mr Tevah, Paul also then called the ABA technical dept and suggested that Rio be given 100.9MHz to test with. This would be a "win win" for both sides, as the 100.9 frequency was otherwise unallocated.

Shortly afterwards Mr Tevah commenced broadcasts on 100.9MHz from Chester Hill, in *100% Spanish language*. Both RIO and SWR were two totally different organizations with different aims in different areas, broadcasting continuously on two different frequencies. Happy days!

## KEN DROPS THE BALL, NOW IT'S PAUL'S TURN

Alas the bliss was short lived. Problems again befall the SWRFM team once again, this time from a different source. Due to the impending establishment of an Olympic softball stadium on top of their little Greenhouse, SWRFM was soon to find itself homeless again. This time, the enemy was the local council. In typical style, they buried the station in bureaucratic stalling for time, until the very, very last minute when that great big Olympic hands finally clapped. SWR was forced to move. *In two weeks!*

The conditions of the move were appalling. This time it was Paul who took up the challenge, spending countless days and weeks of his daytime work time wading through offices, paperwork and site inspections before the current site was chosen in Blacktown Showgrounds.

The problem was that in order to occupy the site, SWRFM would need to spend at least \$10,000 to connect basic services to the building such as power and phone, and to convert a neighboring lighting tower into an STL link mast to get the signal back to Horsley Park. Then, they had to effect the actual move of a working radio station.

This was money the station simply did not have. Being an aspirant broadcaster, grants from places like the CBF (Community broadcasting Foundation) were still out of reach. In the end, a verbal agreement was obtained from the Council that the funds would be reimbursed, before the work finally proceeded.

You guessed it.. *it took over nine months to get the money back from Blacktown Council*. But that's another story.

*"Hey we're moving the station on Saturday 7th. The bulldozers are there on Monday Morning"... remarked Paul.*

*"Damn it. I am supposed to work in Melbourne that week. The boss will not be impressed".. said Ken*

*"This is the last thing I need right now" said Enayat.*

*Enayat looks at Ken.. "Are we going to..?"*

*"Aww.. come on!! we're so close!!!! This time for sure!!!! We'll have the license next year!! It's a guarantee.."*



Photo of the very first days of occupation of the Blacktown Showgrounds site in mid 1999, showing construction of studio one proceeding at a blistering pace towards opening a mere two weeks later.

"OK. Just this one last time then"...

And so now, SWR seemingly had a new and permanent home. In all fairness, it was much better than the last.

It was right smack in the middle of Blacktown city. Easily accessible. Roomy and.. well.. *not falling apart like the Greenhouse was*. New members and broadcasters continued to file through the doors and start full time broadcasting, there still being no other real competing aspirant for the Blacktown license.

Meanwhile Paul, anxious to urgently fill SWRFM's vacant air time slots and seriously in need of cash just to pay for things like rent for both the transmitter site, the new studio building and pay off the debt Council refused to pay, offered discount flat rate airtime during the daytime hours to *anyone who walked in*. *No questions asked*.



Ken's young son Corey Jones, in the "brand new" Blacktown Showgrounds studio as it first appeared to broadcasters in late 1999. At this point, the 100% home grown and built MkII Mixer panel had already been in service for four years. It would see another seven before being replaced in the 2006 studio refit.

In his ignorance ,and somewhat distracted by the hundreds of other screaming things that happen during working life in your thirties, Paul allowed over *18 hours per week* to be offered to an associate member known as a *Father Maroun Moussa*. He proceeded to present a religious program every morning, which became known as "*Voice of Charity*".

### **THE CONTEST FOR BLACKTOWN HEATS UP**

Fr Moussa was the perfect broadcaster. He always paid his airtime fees well in advance. He rarely gave any trouble. However complaints soon started to file in to the station about SWRFM's broadcast format, from other members and eventually from Blacktown council itself. Complaints which asked why such a large amount of prime airtime had been handed to one single religious group every day of the week. In effect, the station devoted so much airtime to this one program daily, it was in danger of losing it's identity altogether.

A programming committee was formed, consisting of station members allocated to the committee by the Board. They look more carefully at altering the test programme schedule, to make way for other types of program. Wherever possible, they grouped like programs together to help avoid the "disjointed" programming that otherwise resulted from the "ad hoc" allocation methods used in SWRFM's past.

One change that the committee made, soon became apparent. They moved to restrict non English broadcasts and religious broadcasts. This meant that Fr Moussa (who broadcast more than triple the time per week than any other ethnic or religious broadcaster on SWR) found his airtime suddenly cut back considerably to match the length of similar programs presented by other ethnic and religious broadcasters.

Imagine the shock, when in December 1999, Paul then discovered that a group known as "*Voice of Charity*" had *registered itself with the ABA*, and *requested to conduct it's own test broadcast - on 99.9MHz - in competition with SWRFM!* The very same station that Mr Moussa was currently at that time still enjoying 10 hours per week of time happily presenting programs on! *The SWR team were disgusted*. Fr Moussa was immediately thrown out of the Association, having been deemed as "*acting prejudicial to the interests of the Association.*" Fortunately Fr Moussa had been an associate member, meaning he had little recourse of appeal.

But there's more. "*Voice of Charity*" then insisted on a meeting, *to discuss a merge!* But "*Merger*" should not have even been in the sentence, since their "terms" were ludicrous. They suggested a 50/50 weekly air time split, coupled with a host of other ridiculous attachments along the lines of "*Voice of Charity*" controlling content of other programs! With licensing so close, and the Voice of Charity argument for the Blacktown license so weak, SWRFM decided to take it's chances alone.

The team from SWR walked away from the table. *A wise decision in hindsight.*

## **Remember RIO FM?**

The "Spanish Language Broadcaster".. happily humming away from Chester Hill at 100.9MHz?

**Remember WOW FM?** the piggy in the middle? And also at the time happily full time TCBL broadcasting on 88.3MHz from St Marys? You guessed it. **Crunch time had finally come.**

With the release of the final Frequency Allotment Plan by the ABA these two frequencies *vanished*.

The two aspirants using them suddenly found themselves off the air.

The *100.9 frequency* was swallowed up by relocating existing licensed service 2BCR at Bankstown. *Ironically this was later revoked in 2006.* Rio's tests at 100.9 from Chester Hill had clearly proven it was suitable for service in that area, so the ABA jumped at the chance to use it. The ABA were well within their power to recommend to RIO that they should contact 2BCR to negotiate access to do some programs, after all they were the local community access radio station and Chester Hill was in it's license area.

However. The ABA, in their infinite wisdom, chose instead to advise them that the only way they could get back on the air was to *contend the neighboring Blacktown license against SWR*. This created a *third aspirant* for the Blacktown licence.

"*Voice of Charity*" never carried out ANY test broadcasts of their own. However RIO did. And as a result, SWR were now forced to begin sharing 99.9 with RIO in 2001. The complicated TCBL time share regime at that time however still gave SWR the "lions share" of broadcast time on the air, as RIO were then considered to be a "new entrant" to the Blacktown race.

*SWR lost two 30 day gaps of broadcasting to RIO in 2000, and again in 2001.* Both of these were filled with RIO's 100% Spanish broadcasts. Clearly NOT a service vying to serve the wider Blacktown community!

## **THE BIG RACE IS ON**

As for WOW FM and Penrith, well. WOW now had almost 10 years of on air experience, however turbulent it had been. Regardless of the fact that they had single handedly evicted two other groups of people in their past who both went on to form SWR and AIR respectively, they had also enacted a forced studio relocation. WOW now had a number of new people involved with it. They had variously managed to finally "shake off" their dark past. WOW was now very much contending the Penrith license as a sub metro aspirant.

Unfortunately the now seven year old "*AIR FM*" had by now completely changed their management. Their aims and objectives had bent in a particularly commercial direction. This put at risk their ability to even qualify for a community license *at all*.

*The case for Penrith was now neck and neck between WOW and AIR.*

Having both been testing for years, both groups qualified to share the one remaining Penrith frequency (100.7) equally. They struck a deal to switch over every 3.5 days which was a landmark moment. Literally two different stations, sharing the same frequency, on a *weekly basis*.. and recipe for utter chaos.

Both submitted applications for the license. To all observers, the race seemed un-callable. This was especially interesting to SWR, who saw the Penrith experience as a litmus test for Blacktown. *They watched it very closely.*

Finally the day came when the Blacktown licence was gazetted. The three aspirants (SWR, RIO and VOC) all filed applications in March 2000.

*"Ahh, at last.. it's done. Now it can't be much longer.. Surely this year!"*

*"Maybe early 2001. Not long thats for sure! We'll just keep 'er going another year then she'll be right"..*

With Ken and Enayat now well and truly in married life with kids, Paul was the only single on the team with free time still to burn. With the prospect of success being so close, he burnt it harder than ever, enlisting his family in the work tasks. He temporarily located the entire SWRFM office to his home. At times perhaps he burnt it a little too hard.

Paul was the kind of person who wanted to get things done and then not have them come back at him. It reflected in the way he administered SWRFM through 2000 and 2001, with a brash and business like style. This often put others on edge. Even Ken and Enayat were put off.

However with licensing so close.. it was clear that the management style was as temporary as the TCBL licences that SWR was broadcasting on. Which by the way, were themselves being issued with less and less notice and for only a few months at a time, as the ABA itself were unable to determine exactly when the permanent licence would be issued.

Despite SWRFM now looking like a full time station, it was still very much still in a TCBL life boat. Just the same as it had been three years earlier - just a bigger boat. But still well and truly miles from the safety of shore.

### **THE RACERS TAKE THEIR MARKS, ONE DROPS OUT**

By late 2000, and well after the license application had been lodged, SWRFM was finally beginning to attract new people onto it's Management committees who were becoming sufficiently trained and experienced enough to begin holding the fort on their own. Most of these were younger members. The bulk of the long term experience in decision making still came from Our Heroes.

A sea change began to sweep it's way through SWRFM's policies. Changes designed to finally bring it in line with other community stations and ready it for full time licensed broadcasting which was now seen as imminent. The working committees (Programming, Sponsorship, Publicity and Promotion) were overhauled and given new direction with new members.

*The constitution*, last touched in 1995 and now well and truly out of date, received a major rewrite. This featured a change to the membership policy to immediately include members from Fairfield and Holroyd local government areas as full voting members. One particular clause which was also added at this time was SWRFM's now famous and still controversial "*Clause 12*," which made it possible for the assembled association membership to expel a member directly—without appeal—by special resolution. This change came about because of the bad experience gained from the "Voice of Charity" situation. It has served the station well since, giving the majority of members the right to expel a member, without necessarily involving the Board of Management and where a clear majority agree.

The programming schedule was adjusted to more accurately reflect the ethnic splits that had been proposed in the station's license application. The situation regarding the other two aspirants, especially RIO, was changing constantly during this waiting time, often by the hour.

**Remember Dean?** *That mysterious third member of our 1981 School radio station team who... vanished without trace?* Well lets' not leave him out of the picture! Interestingly enough, Dean would suddenly appear *more than 19 years later in the ABA hearing rooms for the Sydney wide aspirants, as FREE FM's programming director!* Isn't it funny how in Community Radio, the same names keep popping up again and again as the decades drift by!

Apart from the obvious language barrier, the principle problem with **RIO** was that it's controlling legal entity was actually a private company owned solely by Mr Tevah. It later went on to incorporate as an Association. However for all sense and purpose, it was still trading from the same premises and with the same controlling interests as "*Radio Rio*," which was an "out of band" 100% Spanish broadcast service who had a transmitter now located at Carlingford.

Fortunately SWRFM's entire history had been completely clean. SWR could be called a lot of things. However it could *never have been passed off as even being remotely linked to a commercial enterprise. From day one, it had always been a non profit community group.* It was clear to SWR that RIO was a wolf in sheep's clothing. Any attempt at negotiating peace or merging with them, would be an invitation to dinner with the devil. If SWR and RIO were to merge, the ABA would almost certainly find that the resultant organization was then *linked to "a profit making enterprise"*.

Meanwhile, *Voice of Charity* withdrew their application for a TCBL, in June of 2001, having since worked out for themselves how hard it would be to actually go it alone and establish their own facilities. In all respects, it now seemed that the Blacktown competition had been reduced to just two aspirants - SWR Vs RIO.

## BABY RUNS AWAY FROM HOME

Without a doubt. *Saturday 28th April 2001* very much became known as "Black Saturday" at SWRFM. That one time when, exhausted.. tired.. asleep at their own wheel.. and totally overstretched, SWRFM was caught with their pants down. This single, fateful night was to be the second time SWRFM was forcibly shut down by the TCBL regime with RIO, handing the frequency to them for another month.

*Everything that could go wrong... Did!*

After a long absence of many years, not having broadcast with the station since the early Greenhouse days, a SWR programmer, lets' call him "Clinton," had returned to broadcasting at SWR. He was presenting a hip hop dance program and things in the studio got a little out of hand.

Now this kind of thing was not completely unknown with Clinton. Even back in the early days, his show had been suspended several times after complaints were received. However SWR's management at the time had failed to bring Clinton up to speed on all the changes in rules and regulations that had happened at SWR during his long absence. Clinton just sat back, had fun and ran it just like in "the bad old days."

Unfortunately, somebody else.. who was waiting to start up their own transmitter up that night after Midnight, was also tuned into the frequency and listening at that time: **RIOFM**.

To make matters worse, a technical glitch meant that Paul had to suddenly jump in the car and attend the transmitter site at Horsley Park to manually switch the transmitter off. Missing the small turnoff on Wallgrove Rd in the darkness, he wasted a precious six minutes finding it again before arriving to shut down the broadcast at 12:06am.

In the intervening time, *Clinton had broken just about every rule in the broadcasting book*. He allowed swear words, sexual references and drug references to slip past the microphone and straight down the throat of the transmitter.

And if that wasn't enough. When the inevitable fax from RIO arrived on Monday Morning at the "SWR Office" demanding a copy of the audio log of the fateful night, Paul in his usual "open access" and "nothing to hide" wisdom, immediately ran off a time coded CD and forwarded it to RIO *without even listening to it*.

*It was like handing them a loaded gun*. Sure enough, it promptly went off in the ABA's face. They launched a full investigation into the matter, later sending all the Blacktown aspirants a letter stating that the license allocation had been "delayed for 4 months" due to *"an investigation into one of the Aspirants."*

*"This is all we need".. stated Ken.*

*"You're an idiot, Paul".. remarked Enayat*

*"Yeah I know..but you try going through all the stuff they've been putting me through.." replied Paul.*

*"Well, we had better try and pick up the pieces and save it again.."*

*"Yeah I guess so.. after all it's only 4 months.. we can hold out that long can't we?..."*

*"Probably, I mean... It's now been nearly 8 years.. whats a few more weeks."*

To the ABA's credit, the investigation was quite thorough. Despite the fact that the only evidence available to them had been provided by SWRFM itself in the form of that time coded CD, the ABA had no trouble in using it to hang SWRFM out to dry four months later.

With it's tail firmly between it's legs, SWRFM sat back chastened. SWR was ready for the Licence allocation process to recommence, fully expecting that it's complaints about the commercial nature of RIO FM would receive similar treatment. Meanwhile the TCBL process gave RIO a third month of testing in October.

*"It's been delayed again, we're going to have to go off the air again".. said Ken.*

*"Not again. We only just did a complete advance schedule. This is going to take weeks just to tell everyone."*

*"There's an excellent chance they'll allocate it in November. Come on guys. We're soooo close..."*

*"OK. We'll do it one more time. Freeze the books for 4 weeks and issue another mailout.."*

Paul and Enayat's comments cemented yet another three months of lifeboat. While the boat seemed to be holding up, it was sure getting smelly, dirty and uncomfortable trying to transport cruise liner passengers around the world in a rubber dinghy. Or at least that's how it felt.

The ABA issued yet another TCBL to SWRFM, which carried it up until the **7th December 2001**. Calls by Paul to the ABA confirmed that *"a decision will be made before the 7th December."* "You need not bother applying for another TCBL."

Armed with this information, SWRFM sat and waited as the days ticked by. On 6th December the call was made and the notification given:

***"The decision has been delayed."***

***Again.***

### **D DAY : 7<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2001**

*"That's it, I've had enough".. yelled Paul. "If the ABA want to run the station themselves, they can have it. I give up. Those guys will never issue the license. It's obvious they haven't a clue what's happening here".*

Paul proceeded to literally redirect calls and enquiries about SWR back to the ABA at that point. *He was just sick and tired of answering the phone.* He drafted an emergency plan to refund broadcasters' money, then plans to take the station off the air.

It was Enayat who stepped in and challenged his actions, later that night.

*"Fine. You want it? You can have it"* said Paul, literally throwing the entire office into the boot of Enayat's car. He wished SWR well, waving his resignation from the Board. *"Five f%\$^ years of promises, sweat and work... and now this. They can have it! I've got better things to do with my life".*

*Paul was gone.*

*SWRFM had exploded. For the third.. and final.. time.*

With the TCBL now expired, the transmitter was shut down that night. One week later, the ABA handed down it's death knell decision: "not to issue the license at this time". ***It was OVER.***

*This time, neither Paul, Enayat or Ken were going to save it.*

### **THE FOSTER PARENTS FINALLY MOVE IN**

This time, SWR was saved by the community it had served for so long. New members rose to take on the challenge. SWRFM's membership decided not to fold. Instead, SWR continued to operate very much "under new management". Waiting in the background since 2000 and now ready and rearing to go, SWR's new and enthusiastic team were ready to step up.

*All five remaining Board members would now be below the age of 25.* This gave SWRFM back the same youthful enthusiasm it had begun with ten years beforehand. A new age was here. With no TCBL applied for, the airwaves remained silent until May 2002 when the new management struck back with a new schedule and a new line up, but with the same ideals for access that SWR had always strived for.

Enayat was gone. Ken well in the background. Paul likewise, was well off the Board of Management. Both the Secretary and Treasurer were school age. The President had left school only one year beforehand. RIO were still contesting the Blacktown license with the share ratio moving to a 50/50 arrangement. *This was going to be very interesting.*

By October the long life expired Blacktown Showground studio equipment had not seen any significant upgrade since it was established in the "Greenhouse" seven years beforehand. It was ripped apart and rebuilt, with a splash of paint to make sure that everyone knew that the old was "out" and the new was in. The office was relocated back to the studio building. Money was again flowing into the bank. However administration remained shaky for a few years, as demands were juggled with HSC homework and the usual things that occupy teenage minds.



Broadcaster Steve Duffy in the "revamped" studio post 2003 but before the big rebuild of 2006.

## THE FINAL RACE

In 2002, the new team met with representatives from both the CBAA and the ABA, to discuss and learn from the mistakes that had led to the crash of 2001. In a surprise move, the ABA did indeed call for new applications for Blacktown in late 2002. This time, SWR presented a quite different application. Chief among the changes was a concerted effort to match the airtime offered with the demographics of the served area. The logic used was simple. For example : "The area consists of 6% listeners who can speak Tongan, so no more than 6% of airtime should be dedicated to Tongan language programs" etc.

With Paul having been absent from management for nine months, by the time this was happening he was asked to return and assist with preparation of the new license application. This time, the application was a *team effort*. The work load was broken down and handled by various different committees and members.

In contrast, RIO's application was merely a re submitted version of their previous one. Once again, there was never really much doubt over which station was going to eventually get the license. However this time, SWR had spent extra effort to keep their TCBL slate squeaky clean during the licensing process. The same could not be said of RIO, who were investigated by the ABA for an unrelated matter in 2002. They were found to be in breach.

During 2002 and 2003, SWRFM shared TCBL airtime equally with RIO, who eventually renamed themselves "WEST FM" and finally started broadcasting in English. RIO had also relocated their studios to Fairfield, so as to be within the service area. They relocated their transmitter to Horsley Park on a neighbouring tower, however due to poor technical presentation, their tests covered only a fraction of the area that SWR's did, from essentially the same site.

The "off air" periods at SWR were constructively used to rebuild the office and technical areas. More effort was also directed into rewriting some of the inadequate rules that SWR had operated under since the Greenhouse days. Not since the early SWR tests had there been such excitement at "signoff" and "switch on" nights, when the two TCBL stations would swap use of the frequency. "SWR-B-Q"'s became a regular social feature. In the vacuum created by the step down of the original team, new and long term members became more actively involved with the station's administration.

Eventually, in what could only be described as a puff of unsmoke, the **final permanent community broadcasting licence for Blacktown was issued to SWRFM on on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2003.**

## AT LAST – A REAL DA RADIO

At time of issue, RIO were conducting a test broadcast and SWR was off the air. It took a while for most members to believe that it had finally happened. Least of all, the three who started it all: Paul, Ken and Enayat. Ken continued as an RF consultant to the station for a while and was pivotal in establishing the permanent radiating array at Horsley Park. In true SWRFM tradition it was still built on a shoestring, using materials mostly "pinched from work". This array remains in service for SWRFM today, with only minor maintenance needed *more than 20 years later*.

Paul rejoined the Board of Management in 2004, after being nominated at an AGM. He swore he would never take the position of Secretary again, a promise that would only be broken 20 years later. You'll have to read the more recent history to find out what happened there.

A decision was taken to allow four weeks off in September 2003. This was to prepare for a more permanent broadcast and so that an appropriate "opening day" could be staged. The studio was rebuilt, again. The 1994 vintage custom built mixing panel, now having seen service for 8 years, was overhauled once more to ensure it could last a few more years until it was finally replaced in 2006. RF cabling and link equipment was also overhauled and rewired, as this would be the last chance this could be done before it would enter continuous use. Transmitter testing commenced on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2003.

The big opening day came on *Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2003*, almost *twelve turbulent years* after that landmark test from Popondetta Rd. Emerton in January 1992. Pompous and fanfare there might have been on opening day, except that 70kPh winds seemed to want to blow throughout the day, depositing most of the dusty car park on anyone who had the audacity to show up. This fortunately included the mayor and usual rash of local dignitaries.

## EARLY LIFE AS A LICENSED BROADCASTER

By 2005, SWRFM had cemented itself as *the* premier sub metropolitan coverage community radio station in Sydney. With a large portion of it's area occupied by people from non English speaking backgrounds, around 40% of it's programs were still directed specifically at these people.

In 2005, SWRFM took on it's first paid contract worker for one day per week in administration. However it wasn't until 2008 that SWRFM finally took the step of taking on Joanne Horder, it's first employee who committed to an open office for at least four hours on every working day. This commitment was daring at the time, but SWRFM has since never looked back. With many of the "day to day" tasks now finally taken care of, the Board of Management could concentrate on new directions and growing the station.

Licensed and now finally able to apply for grants through the CBF (Community Broadcasting Foundation), SWR set about obtaining funds to replace its ageing equipment. The new boxes slowly piled up in the back room while plans were laid down for a total rebuild of the studio and tech areas with new equipment. This would variously see SWR enter the early digital era with networks, servers and live assist playout machines added to the mix.

Whilst it would have been possible to fully digitise the station at this point, the decision was taken to retain an analog core. This was primarily because the technical team were not happy with the ability and flexibility of products available from vendors. At this time digital studios still very much mirrored analog, using many discrete components linked by AES digital audio cables.

The studio rebuild finally took place in 2006.



Construction of the 2006 Studio Rebuild commences. This robust design would see the station successfully through the next 17 years of service.

## BUSCO FOR BREAKFAST

In 2009 the bold step was finally taken to *pay* for a breakfast announcer: Wayne Buscombe. Sponsorship sales staff were also added with retainers and commissions. This gave the all important breakfast slot some stability and allowed it to cement itself as a reliable local alternative to the gabfest offered by the distant Sydney commercial stations.

From 2007 onwards, SWRFM continued to take advantage of CBF support (in particular) for it's ethnic broadcasts. At the time, this process assisted to fund capital growth. Steady upgrades to technical ability and strength continued. However at that time the vast majority of SWRFM broadcasting was still "community access" programming, where members of the public came along, joined up as a member, paid a nominal hourly fee (at that time still only \$15 per hour, well below any other station in the area) and get on the air with their own material.

Even back then, as it still is today, SWRFM was the largest Sub Metro community station by head of population served in Australia. With the departure of commercial broadcaster 2WS from Blacktown in 2003, SWRFM now stood as *the only "Western Sydney" broadcast station that covers all of Western Sydney, that still has studios located Within Western Sydney.*



The "2006" rebuild a whopping 15 years later. Still serving the community reliably, 24 hours a day seven days a week. A second studio had also been constructed by this time.

The service completely covers all of the target areas of Blacktown, Fairfield and parts of Parramatta (an area covering approx 500,000 people ) with a very high quality stereo FM signal. It can also be received easily in most parts of the Sydney Metropolitan area and beyond, covering a population of over 4 million. It does this with a licensed ERP of just 200 watts and at that time, with a turnover of less than \$100,000.

### **Within the following seven years since the “official opening” in 2003 SWRFM:**

- Spent \$30,000 and completely replaced it's main studio with all new modern equipment
- Established a powerful online internet presence
- Spent over \$50,000 on an Outside Broadcast Van and related equipment
- Spent over \$50,000 refurbishing the Simpson Pavilion at Blacktown Showgrounds
- Reconstructed the Main Office and Technical area in 2008
- Spent over \$20,000 on replacement and upgrade of transmitter equipment
- Spent over \$30,000 on upgrade of security and computer equipment
- Attended over 80 outside broadcasts, all within the service area
- Grew membership to over 200, of which at least 80 people were active programming members
- Participated directly in multiple festivals and parades in Blacktown and Holroyd areas annually
- Staged annual and regular “Live Bands days” where five live bands were put directly to air
- Kept airtime fees at less than \$20 per hour in a market where the nearest community station equivalent charges over \$120 per hour.
- Retained control of the Association within the Blacktown, Fairfield and Holroyd areas by preventing people living outside those areas from becoming full members of the Association.

The lions share of the above spending was directly funded by the station from general revenue. While it's fair to say that the Board of SWRFM had always been careful spenders, it's also well known that SWRFM very rarely found itself short of cash in those days. That was rare in a sector known for it's tendency to have it's hands out every time a Federal election comes along. A significant contributor to this, revolved around SWR's very strong technical focus: training and equipping volunteers to do work themselves that other stations had to pay through the nose for.

### **WHAT DOES “S.W.R.” STAND FOR?**

In 1991 “SWR” was originally derived from the term “Standing Wave Ratio”. This is an RF engineering term referring to forward and reflected power into an antenna. If an antenna has a ratio of “1:1” then this means that all the power being sent to the antenna is being radiated out to where it is wanted, to your radio. None of it is returning back or “reflected” back to the transmitter.

In practice, a true ratio of “SWR 1:1” is unachievable. However when establishing RF transmission systems, engineers always work towards this goal so as to ensure that every last drop of power from the transmitter is being radiated and is “useful” instead of wasting power heating up cables and connectors.

Since it was always SWRFM's principle aim to get as much coverage as possible from the legal power licensed to it, the measurement and perfection of “*Standing Wave Ratio*” was, and still is, very important. That's why the station is called “SWR FM”, as it is the only station anywhere, with an almost practical ratio of 1:1. The actual ratio last measured on site at Horsley Park in 2022 was 0.9982:1.

Since 1992 many people have (incorrectly) thought the name stands for “Sydney West Radio”. That's OK...

### **THE SWRFM TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

As you can see, from its very first days SWRFM has always retained a very strong technical focus. It's well understood that Western Sydney is often known as the “engine room” of Australia, containing a disproportionately large number of highly trained and experienced technicians and engineers working in a wide variety of fields. This “rubs off” on SWRFM's membership, which has always contained a disproportionately large share of technically trained people when compared to most other community stations around the country.

SWRFM has consistently adopted new technology as soon as it became available. Usually this was done at a fraction of the cost met by many others in the industry. From its very first days, SWR has consistently remained at the forefront of applying new thinking and methods to radio broadcasting, often leaving even its commercial cousins behind.



In the 2020's, SWRFM's Technical Committee strength and ability is often the envy of other community stations around the country.

*Things didn't get this way by accident.*

Amidst the chaos, a complete technical training course was still developed in the mid '00s. Many young members, often school age or only just entering the workforce, participated in these sessions and actively worked with technical equipment at SWR in "hands on" roles.



The SWRFM Technical Committee today consists mostly of volunteers who joined the station from school age, becoming dedicated to the cause and literally "growing up with it." Today's SWRFM technical committee are highly coveted in their advanced fields of work, thanks partly to the experience they gained at SWRFM in their early years.

Paul himself was studying for his Electrical Engineering Diploma when SWRFM first broadcast in 1992. Carlo Fornisari was first in the SWRFM Studios at the Greenhouse in 1997. Matt Reid walked into the station during an open day as a school age student, in 2001. Alex Agaciak became involved in the 2010's while still at school, just down the road at St Andrews College.

*Invest in young people. Give them the tools and the opportunity they need to experiment, make mistakes, grow and learn. They are the future.*

Nowhere else is that more evident than at SWRFM in Western Sydney.

Also in this series;

- SWRFM—A Technical Journey
- SWRFM—Outside Broadcasts
- SWRFM—Parade floats
- SWRFM—The New Era
- SWRFM—History Slide Show

SWR-FM.. MT DRUITT'S OWN COMMUNITY RADIO STATION - 88.3MHz ---FIRST TEST BROADCAST---AUSTRALIA DAY WEEKEND---OFFICIAL PROGRAMME---			
<u>Wednesday 22nd January 1992</u>		<u>Saturday 25th January - Continued</u>	
A.M.	8:00 - Station Opening - Enayat Khan	P.M.	1:00 - Saturday Sports Special
	9:30 - The Morning Radio Drama		4:00 - Music with a Message - Paul Matthews
	10:00 - Classical Music		5:00 - The Goon Show - with Rodney Simpson
	11:00 - Hebershan Public School presents...		6:00 - The Country & Western Corner - American Country Music
P.M.	12:00 - The Lunchtime Concert - Today; "Steve Winwood"		8:00 - Bassics.. Turn up the Sub-Woofers! - Stuart Jackson
	1:00 - A World of Music - Cultural		10:00 - Saturday Night Party Zone - Dare to ring up!
	2:00 - Top 40 Favourites - Jeff Lawson		Midnight - Inphase Overnight.
	4:00 - Music with a Message - Paul Matthews		
	5:00 - Country Corner		<u>Sunday 26th January 1992</u>
	7:00 - Eye Opener with Ken Jones - Local topics & news	A.M.	8:00 - Stay in Bed & Listen ..
	9:00 - New Wave Music Attack with John & Mike.		10:00 - Classical Music Feast
Midnight	- Inphase Overnight - Album Music.		11:00 - Music with a Message - with Paul Matthews
			12:00 - Jazz Jazjar
	<u>Thursday 23rd January 1992</u>	P.M.	1:00 - The "New Age" Movement - as seen by a Christian
A.M.	8:00 - The Snooze Button - Wake up with Enayat Khan		2:00 - American Country Music - with Mike Mc Coll
	9:30 - The Morning Radio Drama		4:00 - Fusion Australia
	10:00 - Junk in the Morning - stuff you never hear anymore!		5:00 - The Goon Show - with Rodney Simpson
P.M.	12:00 - Lunchtime Concert - Today; "U2"		6:00 - And now we haz Jazz - Bill Matthews
	1:00 - A World of Music - For the Cultural amongst us!		8:00 - MegaMusic from Werrington.. Totally commercial free until midnight with Peter Chambers
	2:00 - MegaMusic - with Peter Chambers	Midnight	- Inphase Overnight
	4:00 - Music with a Message - Paul Matthews		<u>Monday 27th January 1992.. SWR-FM YOUTH DAY</u>
	5:00 - The Goon Show - with Rodney Simpson.	A.M.	8:00 - Australian Music Extravaganza
	6:00 - Scottish Country Dancing - The Blacktown Triumph Club		10:00 - Live Broadcast - Local Band "Bits & Pieces"
	7:00 - Eye Opener with Ken Jones - More from our community		11:00 - Live Broadcast - Local artists - "Tim & Tony"
	9:00 - And Now We Haz Jazz.. - Bill "Bones" Matthews	P.M.	12:00 - Live Broadcast - Local Band "Medius Happy"
	11:00 - Alternative Music Show		1:00 - Australian Music
Midnight	- Inphase Overnight - How can you sleep through it?		2:00 - Live Broadcast - Local Band "Detours"
	<u>Friday 24th January 1992</u>		3:00 - Australian Music
A.M.	8:00 - The Snooze Button - Totally Commercial Free Radio!		3:30 - Live Broadcast - Local Band "Feckerhead"
	9:30 - The Morning Radio Drama		5:00 - Live Broadcast - Local Band "The Gonnas!"
	10:00 - Technical review - Just what is SWR FM?		6:00 - Local Band - "Decision" .. followed by "The Blues!"
P.M.	12:00 - Lunchtime Concert - Today; The Beatles!		8:00 - Australian Country & Western Music - Mike Mc Coll
	1:00 - A World of Music - Not Everyone was born in Australia!		10:00 - Alternative Music Spot - with Enayat Khan
	2:00 - Interlude	Midnight	- Inphase Overnight.
	4:00 - Music with a Message - Paul Matthews		<u>Tuesday 28th January 1992</u>
	5:00 - Just Tune in and See!	A.M.	8:00 - The Snooze Button - C'mon.. Back to work!
	7:00 - INPHASE - The biggest and wildest collection of music ever assembled in Mt Druitt!		9:30 - The Morning Radio Drama
Midnight	- Inphase Overnight - The Celebration Continues!		10:00 - Madang Public School Presents.. "2NAD"
			11:00 - "Back to School"
	<u>Saturday 25th January 1992</u>		12:00 - The Lunchtime Concert - Today; "R.E.M."
A.M.	8:00 - The Snooze Button - Relax.. it's Saturday!		1:00 - A World of Music - with Enayat Khan
	9:00 - Totally Live Outside Broadcast from MT DRUITT MARKETOWN... Tune in for the wildest mess you've ever heard! Or just come down and see us in person!		2:00 - Top 40 Favourites - with Jeff Lawson
			3:00 - St Marys Christian Community School Band .. In Review
			4:00 - Music with a Message - Paul Matthews
			5:00 - "Carol Scott"
			6:00 - Local Musical Talent Review
			7:00 - Eye Opener with Ken Jones.. Local Topics & news
			9:00 - "Prince" - The Music.. with Ken Jones
			11:00 - SWR-FM's FIRST TEST - GOODBYE & CLOSEDOWN

Ring The STUDIO HOTLINE - (02) 623-2860  
Let it RING!! or we may not HEAR YOU!!