

Address to the Centenary Dinner of the Wireless Institute of Australia

Introduction

Mr Owen (President of the WIA) ladies and gentlemen; indeed colleagues in communications.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at your celebration of 100 years of service to the Australian amateur radio community. It is not often anyone gets to talk at any centenary celebration let alone one where the celebration covers almost the entire history of the use of the radiofrequency spectrum in Australia.

When I made the opening address to RadComms09, I focused the speech around the topic 'Disaster, Triumph, Evolution and Innovation: Important Lessons from the History of Radiocommunications.' In that speech I mentioned that "we have some very early starters in the Australian wireless world with the WIA being established in 1910, only 21 years after our first, 600 yard, wireless transmission in 1889." Little did I realise then that, a year later, I would be talking, metaphorically, to the descendents of those early 'settlers', those 'legitimate experimenters'.

In the four years or so that I have been with the ACMA, I have been endlessly fascinated by the radiofrequency spectrum and the services and uses it supports; one of which is Amateur radio. As a non technical person I have come to the point where I know the difference between a WAZ and a WAP; though I am still not sure about the difference between a LIPD and a RFID. While, on the surface, the world of amateur radio seems to me to be one I can more easily understand and relate to, I note that it too uses a wide range of acronyms, codes and abbreviations. Even meeting an amateur at an event such as this one can be confusing - "Hullo Chris Chapman" he said, "I'm Alan VK 'one' AJ'.

Amateurs

From its fledgling origins over a hundred years ago, where a few inquisitive and talented individuals experimented with the transmission of wireless signals over a few hundred yards in parts of the spectrum now generally used for MF broadcasting, amateur radio has well and truly spread its spectrum wings and been on the bleeding edge. I'm told it is not unusual now for amateurs to transmit television signals, bounce signals off the moon to amateurs on the other side of the earth and to communicate with men in spaceships. Like my children, they seemingly respect no boundaries!

A 100 years ago much of the equipment used back then was necessarily built by the experimenters themselves and, from looking at some of the photographs on the WIA website and recent editions of "Amateur Radio", some of it looked downright dangerous.

Now, while many amateurs still build their own equipment, I also see very sophisticated, and very safe, equipment is readily available at specialist retailers.

So a hundred years ago, experiments were being conducted in a small part of spectrum below about 1400 kHz by a few experimenters. Now well over 15,000 amateurs are authorised to operate in Australia. An amateur with an 'advanced' licence is authorised to access approximately 23 GHz of spectrum across 24 separate spectrum bands ranging from 136 kHz up to 250 GHz; some of which I admit might at present be difficult and expensive, if not even impossible, to access.

Nevertheless, this degree of access probably results from a worldwide, long standing acceptance that the amateur community may be relied on to not only use the spectrum responsibly but also to be involved in the development of new ways to use the spectrum.

On a personal note, I can with some legitimacy "deal myself in" to your centenary celebration – my great grandfather, Sir Austin Chapman, a member of Australia's first government in 1901, was Australia's Postmaster General from 1905 – 1907 and is commonly recognized as "the Father of Canberra"so I always feel at home in coming to Canberra.

It is pleasing to note that amateur use of the spectrum is just not confined to serious development projects. There seems to be some fun too; fox hunts, direction – findings contests and the like.

The WIA

Finally, by way of completing my introduction, I want to talk briefly about the ACMA's relationships with its stakeholders.

The ACMA is in the midst of an ongoing transformation program, which aims to condition the organisation to become flexible, agile and adaptive so as to effectively address a communications environment of constant change. Starting this year, the ACMA commenced to bed down an important part of that program; a new internal structure. This restructure was designed, and is already functioning, to improve our internal connections and bring focus to meeting several sector-specific tasks such as digital television and NBN planning. These improved connections also enable the ACMA to better address its other stakeholder responsibilities. A visible aspect of the newish ACMA brand is its external – facing strapline:

communicating | facilitating | regulating

Our strapline is about us playing our role in the maintenance of this nation's economic competitiveness, about truly making communications, including amateur communications (including amateur communications) work in Australia's public interest. Making amateur communications work well involves having a good working relationship with the stakeholders; in the case of amateurs, mostly through representation by the WIA.

I find it amazing to think that the WIA has been representing amateurs since 1910. Amateurs in Great Britain and the USA had to wait a further two and four years respectively before they were similarly represented. It just goes to show that some of the best ideas come when you are in an Aussie pub (aka the "Hotel Australia" in Sydney).

I mentioned earlier that there are over 15,000 amateurs in Australia. That this number is steadily increasing is probably mostly due to the indefatigable efforts of the WIA.

Triggered by the outcomes of the World Radio Conference 2003 to remove the requirement for Morse code when operating below 30 MHz and WIA support for the establishment of a new entry level amateur licence, the ACA conducted a complete review of amateur licensing.

Over the next four years the ACA and the ACMA implemented a new amateur certification and licensing arrangement. The success of those new arrangements is a testimony to the significant ongoing contribution of the WIA.

Initially, this contribution importantly included shaping the nature of the new entry level 'Foundation' licence, developing syllabi for the three qualifications levels and providing input to the extensive revision of the legislative instruments that regulate amateur operation.

In an ongoing sense, the WIA's professional approach to its activities has consolidated the gains made by the introduction of the new licensing and arrangements. The 'Foundation Licence Manual' is, I am sure, only one example of the effort being put in by the WIA to train and qualify persons to be amateur operators.

In addition to the long - held roles of training and examining candidates, under a ground - breaking deed of agreement with the ACMA, the WIA now manages the issue of amateur certificates of proficiency and the issue of call signs on behalf of the ACMA.

I also know that that the WIA's activities don't stop there. Through its magazine 'Amateur Radio', its regular broadcasts of information and its affiliated clubs, the WIA continues to encourage interest in the pleasures and science of radiocommunications.

All this does not just happen. It takes an enormous effort by large group of people. Volunteers in clubs across the country who run training courses and conduct the examinations, volunteers who put the broadcasts together and contribute to the magazine and volunteers who, through JOTA, assist scouts and guides to experience the wonder of amateur radio. Additionally I know many amateurs provide communications' expertise to the community in times of emergency through WICEN. Grassroot Australians, one to the other - reflective of the finest manifestations of the concept of 'citizen'.

As the voice of amateur radio in Australia, the WIA's contribution does not stop with making representations to the ACMA. The WIA also represents Australian amateurs to the

International Amateur Radio Union and joins with the ACMA to make representations on the international stage, in particular at the World Radio Conferences. And we have an agenda item of direct interest to you: Agenda item 1.23: the proposal for a secondary allocation of about 15kHz in parts of the band 415 – 526.5 kHz.

So that is, I have to say, quite some CV.

President, thank you again for inviting the ACMA to participate in these celebrations.

On behalf of my colleagues within the ACMA, , let me extend our congratulations to the WIA on its achievements over the past 100 years of service to the amateur community in Australia.

That said, there are just two more short comments I need to make.

ACMA looks forward to working with the WIA to make amateur radio in Australia all that it can be.

Its time for me to - QRT.
