

Investigation Report no. BI-756

Summary	
Licensee	Central Highlands Broadcasting Inc.
Station	100.7 Highlands FM
Type of service	Community Broadcasting
Relevant legislation	<i>Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (BSA)</i> • Subclause 9(2)(b) of Schedule 2 [continue to represent community interest] • Subclause 9(2)(c) of Schedule 2 [encourage participation in operations and programming] <i>Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice 2008 (the Codes)</i>
Decision	The Licensee: > Breached subclause 9(2)(b) of Schedule 2 to the BSA > Breached subclause 9(2)(c) of Schedule 2 to the BSA > Breached Code 7.3 of the Codes
Attachments	Licensee's licence renewal material and other submissions to investigation

Background

On 24 July 2025, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (**ACMA**) received a complaint about Central Highlands Broadcasting Inc. (**Licensee**).

The complaint raises allegations which suggest that the Licensee is failing to comply with licence conditions in the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (**BSA**) and provisions of the Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice 2008 (**Codes**).¹

In December 2025, the ACMA commenced an investigation under the BSA into the Licensee's compliance with:

- the licence condition at subclause 9(2)(b) of Schedule 2 [continue to represent community interest]
- the licence conditions at subclause 9(2)(c) of Schedule 2 [encourage participation in operations and programming]
- Code 7.3 of the Codes [complaint handling]

The Licensee

The Licensee has held a long-term community radio broadcasting licence since 1998 to represent the general geographic area community interest in the Kyneton RA1 licence area (**Kyneton RA1**), in the Southern Highlands of Victoria. The Licensee commenced providing the service in 2000. The current expiry date of the licence is 1 July 2028.

The Licensee is an all-volunteer run station. The service operated by the Licensee is 100.7 Highlands FM (**3CH**). 3CH is the only community broadcasting licensee in Kyneton RA1. A significant geographical proportion of Kyneton RA1 overlaps with other licence areas.²

Assessment and submissions

This investigation has considered the:

- the complaint received by the ACMA on 24 July 2025 (**the Complaint**).
- the Licensee's submissions received on 30 September 2025, 6 November 2025, 11 December 2025, 2 February 2026, 15 April 2026, 30 April 2026 and 14 May 2026.
- information available on the Licensee's website and social media accounts in the period 8 January 2026 to 5 March 2026.
- publicly available information about networked programming provided by the Community Radio Network (CRN) and the Southern Community Media Association (SCMA).
- information provided by the Licensee in its last licence renewal application.

Other sources are identified in this report where relevant.

¹ Being the codes in force at the time the complaint was initially raised with the Licensee

² This includes Castlemaine RA1 (which contains 20% of Kyneton RA1's population); Maryborough (VIC) RA1 (which contains 54% of Kyneton RA1's population); Bendigo RA1 (which contains 54% of Kyneton RA1's population), and Melbourne RA1 (which contains 40% of Kyneton RA1's population).

Issue 1: Is the Licensee continuing to represent the community interest it represented at the time when the licence was renewed?

Relevant licence condition

Schedule 2

Part 5 – Community broadcasting licences

9 Conditions applicable to services provided under community broadcasting licences

(2) Each community broadcasting licence is also subject to the following conditions:

[...]

- (b) the licensee will continue to represent the community interest that it represented at the time when the licence was allocated or was last renewed [...]

Finding

The ACMA is of the view that the Licensee breached sub-paragraph 9(2)(b) of Schedule 2 to the BSA.

Reasons

The Complaint

The Complaint raised concerns that the Licensee was no longer adequately reflecting or connecting with the local community and has no active membership.

Licence condition and ACMA guidelines

It is a condition of every community broadcasting licence that the licensee must continue to represent the community interest represented at the time the licence was allocated or last renewed.³ For a licensee representing a general geographic area community interest, this requires more than only continued broadcasting within the licence area. The service must remain directed to the needs and interest of the community, and the licensee must take regular and proactive steps to remain informed about those needs and interests as they change over time.⁴

The ACMA's Community Broadcasting Participation Guidelines (Participation Guidelines) provide that licensees should use a range of measures to identify and review community needs. Licensees are expected to take proactive steps and should not rely solely on unsolicited listener feedback. Relevant indicators include whether the licensee consults with its community, whether programming decisions are informed by that consultation, whether the

³ Subclause 9(2)(b) of Schedule 2, *Broadcasting Service Act 1992*

⁴ Australian Communications and Media Authority [About community broadcast licences](#)

service includes material of local significance that is relevant to the community served, and whether the licensee adjusts its service in response to identified needs.

Licence information

In 2023, when the ACMA last renewed the community broadcasting licence in Kyneton RA1, the Licensee represented the general geographic area community interest. A general geographic area community interest is a general interest and refers to the specific needs, issues and culture of a community within a defined geographic area.

The major towns in the licence area are Kyneton, Macedon, Gisborne, Woodend, Castlemaine, Daylesford, and Newstead, which fall within the Macedon Ranges Shire, the Mount Alexander Shire and the Hepburn Shire. Kyneton RA1 covers an area of 5,051 km².

The broader Macedon Ranges Shire is described⁵ as a semi-rural municipality, located approximately an hours' drive south from Melbourne's central business district. The main industry is tourism and includes a mix of agribusiness, manufacturing, and small businesses. Other key sectors include wine production, sheep and cattle farming and boutique food manufacturing.

The licence area has a predominantly Australian-born population of 91,997, with 81.32% born in Australia and English as the main language spoken at home. The age profile is diverse, with 18% of residents aged under 15 and notable proportions in older age groups including 18% aged 65-79 and 5% aged 80 and older. The remaining population is distributed across younger and middle-age brackets; 9% aged 15-24, 9% aged 25-34, 12% aged 35-44 and 15% aged 45-54.⁶

Licensee submissions

In response to the ACMA's requests for information, the Licensee provided submissions about how it considered it had continued to meet the community interest licence condition. While the Licensee did not provide certain documents initially requested in September 2025, including AGM minutes, office-holder details and membership information, it later submitted that changes in community demographics and limited available time among community members had affected traditional forms of engagement, notwithstanding that listeners remained engaged with the service and station promotions were undertaken at external events.

Following the ACMA's decision to investigate the matter, the Licensee submitted that it had identified and reviewed community needs over the previous two years through engagement with health and community organisations, local councils, service organisations, not-for-profit groups and broader community networks. It stated that, rather than using formal surveys, it had relied on one-to-one engagement and listener feedback, including phone calls, to inform its understanding of community needs and programming relevance. The Licensee also submitted that its programming reflected community interests through a mix of information-based content, local updates, news, lifestyle and rural information, and that it broadcast more than 100 hours of live programming each week. In further submissions, the Licensee stated that it had discontinued use of online surveys due to an absence of responses, that listeners had expressed satisfaction with the programming in direct discussions, and that it had maintained a focus on mental health and suicide prevention issues in light of local community needs.

⁵ [Know Your Council – Macedon Ranges Shire Council | vic.gov.au](#)

⁶ [Census data \(by single licence area\) - Broadcast Licencing Area Report - Power BI](#)

Analysis

Regularly identify and review the needs of the community

The ACMA accepts that community needs may be identified in a range of ways and that direct engagement can be a relevant source of information. The difficulty raised in the Licensee's submissions is that it has not demonstrated it has a regular, structured or documented process for identifying, reviewing and responding to the needs of the community it serves. The Licensee did not provide recent surveys, structured consultation records, documented outcomes of outreach activities, or clear records showing how information gathered from the community was reflected in programming or operational changes.

The ACMA has also had regard to the Licensee's public-facing material. The Licensee's website and social media presence did not provide persuasive evidence of an active and current service directed to the matters, events and activities of the local community. At the relevant time, the program information available on the website was not current, some pages contained dated material, some links were broken and the published contact details were not reliable. Those matters are not determinative in themselves. However, taken together, they are consistent with the broader absence of evidence of recent, proactive and continuing engagement with the community the Licensee is licensed to serve.

Programming highlights local issues and reflects community interests

The ACMA has also considered the nature of the programming broadcast by the Licensee. The material before the ACMA indicates that a substantial proportion of the schedule is comprised of third-party networked programming and that the amount of locally hosted and locally produced material is limited. Broadcasting third-party content is not of itself inconsistent with the licence condition. However, where a service representing a general geographic area community interest relies heavily on non-local material, the ACMA would ordinarily expect to see stronger evidence that the remaining local content is informed by identified community needs and that the overall service continues to reflect issues, interests and perspectives of particular relevance to the licence area. That evidence was not provided here.

For example, on 4 February 2026 the Licensee provided a weekly program schedule titled Summer 2026 Program Guide. As at 19 May 2026, the program schedule published on the Licensee's website, was the schedule titled Autumn 2025 Program Guide. The updated Summer program schedule (not available on the Licensee's website) included 36 hours of locally hosted programs with a significant repetition of programs broadcast.

Licensee	Hours of locally produced programming	Average amount of locally produced content per 168 hour week in regional area ⁷
3CH	36	95

⁷ Community Broadcasting Association Australia Data on local content 2022-23 financial year [Record ED24/107116](#)

At the renewal of the licence in 2023, the Licensee was asked to consider focusing on increasing the amount of its programming that is hosted in, produced in, or relates to the licence area.

On 15 April 2026 the Licensee advised that following major regional fires that disrupted other broadcast and telecommunications services, the Licensee was asked by Telstra Regional and Victoria Police to become an emergency service broadcaster, providing crucial information to the community with limited alternative services. The Licensee stated that Victoria Police would share their building and provide power, a generator backup and a secure room attached to their operation centre.

The ACMA acknowledges the important contribution to the needs of the community by the Licensee becoming an emergency service broadcaster. However, in considering the service as a whole, the broadcast of this material appears isolated or limited rather than evidence of a sustained and systematic process of identifying community need and shaping the service accordingly.

As noted in the Participation Guidelines, licensees are expected to take proactive steps to ascertain the needs of the community they serve and this can be achieved in a range of ways. These include consulting with the community and undertaking surveys; making programming decisions that are driven by community input; providing programming that highlights local issues and reflects community interests; participating in and engaging with the community at local events, maintaining active engagement with the community through social media; and by including unique local content that is not available on other services in their programming.

The Participation Guidelines state that “sole reliance on a feedback telephone line and/or requests from listeners to demonstrate community need does not represent proactive action on the part of a licensee in ascertaining the needs of the community it is licenced to serve.”⁸

From the information provided to the ACMA there is limited, to no evidence to demonstrate that the Licensee is taking proactive or regular steps to identify and review community needs in its licence area. This assessment is based on the following observations.

- The Licensee has not undertaken recent surveys and has limited documentation of structured consultations or programming decisions, (discussed further at issue 2 below) clearly tied to community input.
- Limited recent community engagement. The Licensee has not demonstrated how it proactively engages with community members and seeks feedback. Whilst the Licensee states it seeks one on one feedback, for example through participation at local events, and outside broadcasts, no information was provided to demonstrate there is a clear process, deliberately planned and aimed at collecting and documenting feedback.
- In considering whether programming highlights local issues and reflects community interests the ACMA notes the majority of the Licensee’s published program schedule is sourced from third parties, including the Community Radio Network (CRN) and

⁸ Community Broadcasting Participation Guidelines, ACMA, Page 25

Southern Community Media Association (SCMA). Locally produced content on the program schedule on the Licensee's website, appears dated and is repeated.

- Outdated or inconsistently monitored contact points and inactive social media, website and a membership form that lists an email address with known deliverability/access issues; no dedicated, reliably monitored channel for community feedback.

Adjust the service to reflect the evolving needs of the community

The information available supports the following observations:

- Minimal programming change: the weekly program schedule⁹ on the Licensee's website shows only minor variations from the 2023 schedule and does not reflect the updated Summer 2026 guide that was submitted to the ACMA.
- Predominance of third-party content and aged local material: the schedule is largely network content provided through CRN/SCMA; limited local content is dated.
- Limited locally relevant programming: based on the program schedules, there appears to be little programming addressing varied issues specific to the community interest represented.
- Decline in local programming: proportion of local programming appears to have decreased since the licence was renewed in 2023.

Whilst broadcasting third-party programming is not, of itself, a contravention, a schedule predominantly composed of non-local content may raise concerns about whether a licensee representing a general geographic area interest is meeting that community's needs or providing content specific to its interest group and that differs from other broadcasters.

Website and social media

The community cannot actively engage with the Licensee through social media. The available information indicates the Licensee has not been proactive in maintaining its social media platforms over an extended period. On 11 December 2025, the Licensee advised the ACMA that its Facebook page (*100.7 HighlandsFM | Woodend VIC | Facebook*¹⁰) had been shut down. The ACMA observed that an X account at *100.7 HighlandsFM (@1007highlandsFM)* / X has 19 followers, no posts and appears to be inactive.¹¹ The account has not published any content since 2013, highlighting the longstanding nature of the problem.

A review of the Licensee's new website, <https://centralvictoriancommunityradio.com.au> (**the Licensee's website**), indicates the Licensee has not been proactive in maintaining its online presence for some time. The website does not include information demonstrating the station is attuned to current local community affairs or engaged with current local issues, and several features suggest these deficiencies have persisted for some years. For example:

⁹ As at 11 February 2026 (Autumn 2025 Program Guide).

¹⁰ [100.7 HighlandsFM | Woodend VIC | Facebook](#) accessed 6 March 2026

¹¹ [100.7 Highlands FM \(@1007highlandsFM\) / X](#) accessed 6 March 2026, the last post was in 2013.

- the 'News' page¹² contains articles published between January 2022 and June 2024 with no more recent updates identified as at July 2026, indicating it has not been actively maintained for a considerable period
- the 'Local Community' page contains broken links to the 3 of 8 external community sites
- the 'Podcasts' page contains 3 audio series recorded between 2020 and December 2023, with no newer material identified, suggesting the platform has not been proactively refreshed for more than 2 years.
- during the ACMA's investigation, the ACMA found the website was intermittently unavailable delivering an HTTP Error 503.¹³

On 15 April 2026, the Licensee advised it would investigate when domain names become available for the station to obtain registration, and that it would meet with a website developer to find a method to access its website information. Whilst there have been longstanding issues across its social media and website content, the Licensee appears to have only recently considered taking steps to address them.

Contact address and membership applications

The Licensee's website has a link to a section titled "become a member" where a membership application form can be downloaded. As at 19 May 2026, the application form included the Licensee's previous URL (www.highlandsfm.org.au) and contact details thedesk@highlandsfm.org.au. The same email contact detail is provided on the Licensee's 'about' webpage.

Whilst the Licensee's previous URL currently redirects users to the current website, the contact details are out of date. The Licensee has repeatedly informed the ACMA of difficulties it has experienced accessing the email address thedesk@highlandsfm.org.au, and has requested that all communication to the Licensee be sent to a personal email address of a board member.

The contact address listed on the licensee's website is 2 Forest Street Woodend.¹⁴ The studio address notified to the ACMA in the 2023 renewal application in 2023, is 117 High Street Woodend which is also the address for the Woodend Community Centre. The About page on the Licensee's website states the station is located at the Woodend Community Centre. The Forest Street address appears to be a separate property. This information suggests that there is limited, if any, presence at the station to facilitate meaningful community contact.

On 15 April 2026 the Licensee acknowledged that the published contact information was not current and stated that a telephone number was available as an alternative means of contact. The licensee said the error would be corrected once control of the station's domain name was obtained.

¹² [News - Highlands FM](#) Accessed 6 March 2026 and 5 July 2026.

¹³ An HTTP Error 503 (Service Unavailable) indicates that a server is temporarily unable to handle a request, usually due to being overloaded with traffic or down for maintenance. It is a server-side issue, meaning the website exists but cannot be accessed, often fixing itself shortly

¹⁴ [About - Highlands FM](#) accessed 19 May 2026

The Licensee has been, aware of ongoing access issues relating to the email address (March 2023 to May 2026) and has not taken steps to provide an alternative more reliable channel for community contact.

Where contact details are not current, community members attempting to provide feedback, submit membership applications (discussed further below) or contact the station generally will encounter barriers.

Conclusion

Whilst the Licensee demonstrated responsiveness to local circumstances by providing emergency information during recent bushfires, this does not form part of the station's regular programming. The guidelines require regular, proactive identification and review of community needs. Community engagement could be strengthened through a series of practical, low effort measures. These include regularly assessing community needs through online polls and on-air prompts inviting feedback using accurate contact details; publishing the current program schedule; updating contact and membership pathways; replacing the outdated station email address (thedesk@highlandsfm.org.au) with a dedicated, monitored address, and reactivating social media channels.

Having regard to the evidence as a whole, including the limited documentation of consultation, the absence of reliable and current public-facing engagement pathways, the dated nature of publicly available local content combined with the predominance of third-party programming and the lack of demonstrated service adjustments based on identified community needs, the ACMA is not satisfied that the Licensee continued to represent the general geographic area community interest it represented when the licence was last renewed.

For these reasons, the ACMA's view is that the Licensee has breached the licence condition at subclause 9(2)(b) of Schedule 2 to the BSA.

Issue 2: Is the Licensee encouraging community participation in operations and the selection and provision of programs?

Relevant licence condition

Schedule 2

Part 5 – Community broadcasting licences

9 Conditions applicable to services provided under community broadcasting licences

(2) Each community broadcasting licence is also subject to the following conditions:

[...]

- (c) the licensee will encourage members of the community that it serves to participate in:
 - (i) the operations of the licensee in providing the service or services [...]
 - (ii) the selection and provision of programs under the licence

Finding

The ACMA is of the view that the Licensee breached sub-paragraph 9(2)(c) of Schedule 2 to the BSA.

Reasons

The complaint

The complaint raised concerns that the Licensee may not be complying with its obligation to encourage the community in Kyneton RA1 to participate in its operations and the selection and provision of programs under the licence.

These concerns included that the Licensee has limited to no community involvement and that persons wishing to become involved have experienced barriers to participation. It was alleged the Licensee limited access to equipment; provided no opportunity to participate at annual general meetings (AGM) or be elected to the management committee, and was heavily reliant on networked on-air content (from CRN and SCMA) at the expense of locally hosted/produced programming.

Licence conditions and ACMA guidelines

Paragraph 9(2)(c) of Schedule 2 to the BSA requires community broadcasting licensees to encourage members of the community they serve to participate both in the operations of the service and in the selection and provision of programs.

The Participation Guidelines provide that licensees encourage community participation in their operations when they:

- promote the service to the community and are open and accessible to the community
- make the community aware of opportunities to participate in the service and invite the community to participate in the service, value, and promote membership and volunteering, including by promoting the benefits to the communities they serve.
- have sound corporate governance practices, including
 - having measures to prevent the concentration of control and procedures for complying with regulatory requirements
 - having an effective and transparent committee structure, so the community can have a say in the running of the service
 - having procedures for complying with regulatory requirements including the obligations that apply to companies and incorporated associations under relevant Federal, State and Territory legislation for holding meetings, keeping records, and lodging documents.

Licensees encourage community participation in the provision of programming in two distinct areas, program selection, and program provision. Licensees do this by providing opportunities for members of their community to have a say in programming decisions. A common way to encourage collective decision making about programming is for licensees to establish a program committee with unrestricted membership, to have a publicised procedure for making programming applications, to accept and consider programming applications and to collectively decide the programs that best reflect the needs of the community based on the identified needs and preferences of the community served. The requirement to encourage participation is not easily demonstrated where oversight of programming decisions is concentrated in one person or a small group.

Sound corporate governance practices give communities confidence that their community broadcasting services are managed appropriately and provide transparency in decision making. Satisfying regulatory reporting obligations demonstrates appropriate management practices because it shows that a licensee has effective governance structures, transparent decision making and robust accountability mechanisms in place, which provide community confidence and encourage participation.

Licensee's submissions

In submissions made on 2 February 2026 and 14 May 2026, the Licensee advised that it encourages community participation through:

- outside broadcasts
- a brochure, distributed at community events, containing information about the organisation, including a form for individuals interested in becoming a member, supporter, or program presenter and outlining various ways to contact the station
- regular on-air announcements inviting listeners to participate as presenters or to contribute to the station operations and programming
- providing opportunities for people with disabilities to participate and present programs

- working with a school on developing a proposed program.

On 2 February 2026, the Licensee reported it had 28 members following the launch of its first remote studio.

The licensee provided a copy of the Minutes of the 2025 AGM held on 29 November 2025. Those Minutes recorded that 6 people attended the meeting, that the president had resigned and a new president would be elected, and that all existing committee members were re-elected. A new president was subsequently appointed.

On 2 February 2026, the Licensee advised that it had not received any applications from members of the community expressing interest in participating in the operations or programming of the service.

On 30 April 2026 the licensee advised that in the last 2 years it had received four program proposals,

- one from a presenter with disability needs who was being supported to present a music program and “what’s on in the community”,
- one from a school to implement the program, Be Heard, that is being developed,
- a proposal from the NDIS that resulted in the broadcast of a program under the title Radio GaGa, and
- a vision impaired presenter enabling the broadcast of Mel’s Blind life.

The ACMA has also had regard to information previously reported to it as part of its licence renewal and compliance work (see summary at **Attachment A**).

The ACMA notes that the program guide provided with the 2023 renewal application and dated 29 April 2023 listed the broadcast of Mel’s Blind Life and Radio Gaga indicating they have been broadcast since 2023 and are therefore not new program proposals.

Despite ACMA requests to provide a documented procedure for making or assessing program proposals, or information to demonstrate that programming decisions are based on information actively collected from the community served, the Licensee submitted on 14 May 2026:

- it had held one-on-one discussions with community members that influenced weekend music programming
- the participation policy is contained within the licensee’s Constitution [sic].

Analysis

The ACMA also accepts that small volunteer-run services may face practical constraints in attracting members and volunteers, particularly in regional areas. However, the obligation in paragraph 9(2)(c) is concerned with whether the Licensee’s arrangements, taken as a whole, encourage participation from the community served. On the material before the ACMA, those arrangements were not sufficiently open, reliable or accessible to meet the obligation. These include:

- participation pathways were not sufficiently accessible or effective (see details at points 1 and 2 below)
- communication and contact channels relevant to participation were unreliable or outdated (see details at points 1 to 5 below)
- the Licensee did not demonstrate a transparent framework for community participation in programming (see details at points 3 to 5 below)
- governance arrangements did not sufficiently support open and broader community involvement (see details at points 6 and 7 below)

1. *Promote the service and make the community aware of opportunities to participate*

This section addresses whether the Licensee's public-facing material provided clear and effective pathways for the community to become involved in the service.

In the 2023 licence renewal application, the Licensee stated that policies, including those directed to community participation, would shortly be available on its new website (<https://centralvictoriancommunityradio.com.au/>). During the assessment period of this investigation, and at least until 19 May 2026, policies were not available on the website and the link to the CBAA Codes of Practice was broken.¹⁵

On 14 May 2026, the Licensee advised that its participation policy was contained in its Constitution. The ACMA notes that the Constitution (Rules of Central Highlands Broadcasting Incorporated) (the Rules) is not available on the Licensee's website.

The Licensee supplied two recordings as evidence that it encourages participation. Those recordings invited community members to get involved in the station by presenting programs, producing local news, or helping behind the scenes. Those recordings directed listeners to highlandsfm.org.au, which no longer contained relevant information about the community broadcasting service.

When the ACMA sought clarification, the Licensee explained that while the email address announced was incorrect, the website had a contact phone number. The Licensee said this would be corrected once it had ownership of the domain name.

The ACMA acknowledges the explanations provided. However, it does not change that the information provided to the community members was inaccurate or incomplete during the relevant period. It was not apparent that clear and reliable directions were provided to make it easy for community members to respond to the invitations to participate. The Licensee continued to promote the outdated web address rather than updating the announcement. Alternative contact methods did not appear to be promoted or communicated.

The Licensee advised that it supports other community events by supplying broadcasting equipment to community groups and that information brochures are made available to groups undertaking those activities.

¹⁵ As at 19 May 2026.

The rebroadcast of community forums is an example of the Licensee's engagement with local issues and community groups and may provide a valuable service to the community. However, it does not, of itself, provide a clear pathway for community members to participate in the operations, governance or programming of the service.

The Licensee provided examples of opportunities for people with disabilities (an NDIS and vision-impaired presenter) to participate, including committee assistance to present programs. These are examples of enabling participation by community members and reducing barriers to participation. The engagement with the local school is relevant evidence of outreach and participation opportunities for younger community members.

These are positive examples of support for participation. However, on the material before the ACMA, they appear to be isolated and dated instances rather than evidence of a current, systemic or effective strategy to encourage broader community participation in the service.

Overall, the Licensee's material indicates some efforts to engage with its community, but it does not demonstrate clear, reliable and current public-facing pathways were in place through which community members could readily seek to become involved in the service.

2. *Membership numbers and membership application*

This section addresses whether the process for becoming a member of the Licensee was sufficiently accessible to support community participation in the operations of the service.

At the renewal of the community broadcasting licence in 2023, the licensee reported it had 26 members and the ACMA asked the Licensee to take specified actions to strengthen its corporate governance practices and to encourage community membership and participation. Relevant actions included to:

- consider removing the requirement for membership applications to be nominated and seconded.

The requirement for applicants to be nominated and seconded by existing members when applying for membership of the Licensee is considered to be a barrier to entry and participation. That barrier is likely to be heightened where the membership body is smaller, as it limits the potential applicant pool to only those who can secure the necessary endorsements.

The ACMA sought a response from the Licensee on 1 November 2024 to the assigned actions. On 3 February 2025 the Licensee advised by phone call that

- it was experiencing IT issues and did not have access to its email address,
- the location of the station was one of the limitations it was experiencing in increasing members,
- it was investigating relocating to a neighbourhood house in a nearby suburb,
- not many people near the studio were interested in volunteering but people elsewhere were interested, but could not travel and they had been provided with remote recording equipment, but the station could not afford to supply more people with remote equipment,

- the Licensee had regular volunteer presenters and would be introducing a new program soon,
- there was interest in the community, but it was limited due to distance and the transient nature of the population.

The ACMA accepts that a small volunteer-run regional service may face practical constraints in increasing membership and volunteer participation. However, those constraints do not remove the need for the Licensee to maintain arrangements that make membership reasonably accessible to the community it serves.

On 15 April 2026 the Licensee advised the ACMA it was about to run advertisements in the local newspapers and other publications seeking people to become involved in the station. However, the licensee did not provide evidence of any broader strategies to increase membership or volunteer participation.

As stated above, Licensee's membership form had not been amended to remove the nomination and secondment requirements.

At the time of this investigation, the Licensee had not confirmed if it has taken the actions listed in the 5 October 2023 letter that were relevant to improving membership and participation arrangements.

As discussed under Issue 1, the ACMA accessed the membership form from the licensee's website (Become a member - Highlands FM). The membership form cited out-of-date references to the station's website (www.highlandsfm.org.au) and contact information. (thedesk@highlandsfm.org.au). As noted under Issue 1, this website has since been replaced, and the station email address does not appear to be regularly monitored or to be a reliable communication channel for contacting the Licensee.

The ACMA considers that the outdated website listed on the membership form, the requirement to be nominated and seconded and the unreliable contact details combine to create a barrier for community members who may wish to become members of the Licensee. In circumstances where membership applications are the principal means by which members of the community seek to participate in the operations of the service, these matters indicate that the Licensee's membership arrangements were not sufficiently accessible or effective to encourage broader community participation.

3. Participation policy

This section addresses whether the Licensee had in place a clear and accessible framework setting out how community participation was to occur.

The ACMA did not receive a link to, or a copy of, the Licensee's participation policy.

On 27 September 2023, the Licensee informed the ACMA that all its policies were based on the Codes contained in the Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice and stated that "a digital version will shortly be available on our new website".¹⁶

In response to requests from the ACMA for the participation policy, in February 2026 the Licensee submitted a document titled Statement of Purposes 2011. The document, dated June 2011, reflects the purposes for which the Licensee was established as an incorporated association under *Associations Incorporation Act 1981* (Vic), since repealed. It does not reference or cover participation and is not a participation policy.

As noted above, the Licensee subsequently advised the ACMA that its participation policy was contained in its constitution. References to participation in the Rules focus on procedural matters relating to voting, taking part in meetings, governance and dispute processes and does not include a clear community participation policy.

The Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice, as updated in 2025, require licensees to have in place, abide by and regularly review key governance documents including governance policies and to make them freely available.

On the material before the ACMA, it is not possible to confirm whether the Licensee had a participation policy in place during the relevant period. If such a policy did exist, the ACMA was not provided with it and it was not shown to be readily accessible to members of the community who may wish to participate in the operations of the service or in programming. This reduces transparency about how participation is intended to occur and supports the view that the Licensee did not have a clear and accessible framework for community participation.

4. Program selection

This section addresses whether the Licensee demonstrated a sufficiently transparent process for community participation in the selection of programs.

As discussed in Issue 1, the Licensee does not conduct surveys and stated it prefers to have one-on-one discussions with members of the community and community groups and receives many complimentary phone calls from listeners. In the submission dated 30 April 2026 the Licensee advised that feedback indicated listeners wanted to be entertained when they relax on weekends and that this had influenced the programming of music on the weekend.

This material indicates that the Licensee has received some informal listener feedback and, at least in one respect, says it has taken that feedback into account in shaping weekend programming. However, informal feedback of this kind is unlikely to demonstrate a transparent or accessible process through which members of the community may participate in program selection.

¹⁶ Email dated 27 September 2025 from the Secretary to the Community Broadcasting, ACMA.

Review of the weekend program schedule indicates that approximately 80% of the programming broadcast on the weekend is sourced from CRN or SCMA. The use of networked programming does not, of itself, establish non-compliance, but it increases the importance of the Licensee demonstrating how community input is invited and taken into account in selecting the programming it broadcasts

The program schedule available online¹⁷ is titled Autumn 2025 and has not been updated since March 2025. The ACMA notes that this is not the most recent program schedule provided to the ACMA. It is therefore unclear how members of the community could access current information about the programs being broadcast.

While the program schedule states, “*we appreciate your feedback*”, the email address listed was not a reliable contact method and the only alternative feedback mechanism identified was by telephone. The ACMA accepts that these channels may provide some opportunity for feedback. However, on the material before the ACMA, they do not establish a clear, current and accessible mechanism through which members of the community may propose, discuss or influence program selection.

In response to the ACMA’s request for information about program proposals, the Licensee did not provide sufficient information to demonstrate that it actively encourages community involvement in program selection or that a clear and accessible process is followed in selecting programs for broadcast.

Overall, the material shows some informal listener engagement, but it does not demonstrate a transparent and accessible framework for community participation in program selection. In particular, the Licensee did not show that current programming information was readily available, that reliable channels existed for community members to provide feedback or proposals, or that a clear process operated for considering community input in programming decision.

5. Program provision

This section addresses whether the Licensee demonstrated practical and accessible arrangements for community participation in the production and presentation of programs.

Providing opportunities for community members to produce and present programs is a key method of demonstrating community participation in the provision of programming.

Relevant examples of activities that may encourage participation in program provision include:

- broadcasting regular on-air announcements inviting program proposals
- publishing information about how to submit program proposals.

As stated above at Issue 1, the Licensee broadcasts 36 hours of locally hosted and produced programs. Of those 36 hours, 10 hours are broadcast between 12 am and 5 am and appear

¹⁷ Accessed 19 January 2026

to be repeats of programs broadcast during the hours of 6 am to midnight. The remaining 132 hours of programming are third party content.

On 16 April 2026, the Licensee advised the ACMA that it runs a community education initiative involving secondary school students, providing hands on training using real radio equipment and that several participating students have progressed into employment in commercial radio. This is relevant evidence of participation and support for younger community members in the service.

The Licensee indicated¹⁸ it has undertaken some activities to support community participation, including providing technical assistance for remote program recording to presenters who are unable to attend the studio, and distributing handouts at community events to promote opportunities to become a presenter.

The ACMA notes that the Licensee's website does not include information regarding the process for making program proposals.¹⁹ The Licensee does not appear to have a publicly accessible, clear, or reliable mechanism for community members to lodge program proposals. Contacting the station is difficult due to unreliable communication channels. The Licensee has acknowledged that the broadcast announcements do not include the correct contact information and the ACMA is unable to verify whether any other meaningful on-air invitations to participate occur.

The ACMA accepts that the Licensee has identified some examples of participation support, including school engagement, remote recording assistance and promotional handouts. However, those examples do not overcome the broader difficulty that members of the community were not shown to have a clear and reliable means of identifying opportunities, making proposals or taking practical steps to become involved in program provision.

Overall, the material does not demonstrate practical and accessible arrangements through which members of the community could readily participate in the production and presentation of programs. In particular, the Licensee did not show that clear proposal pathways existed, that reliable contact mechanisms were available, or that current and meaningful invitations to participate in program provision were being communicated to the community served.

6. AGM

This section addresses whether the conduct of annual general meetings supported open governance and broader community participation in the service.

The Participation Guidelines state that

“Sound corporate governance gives communities confidence that their community broadcasting services are managed appropriately. They also enable communities to have adequate input into the decision making that affects their services.”

Examples of sound corporate governance in the Participation Guidelines include having procedures to comply with regulatory requirements that apply to the service and its organisational structure such as keeping records and lodging documents and having measures to prevent the concentration of control in the hands of a few individuals.

¹⁸ In its 2023 licence renewal application

¹⁹ Accessed 30 January 2026

The Licensee is an association registered in Victoria.²⁰ The ACMA understands that the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012* (Vic) requires associations to hold a general meeting, called an annual general meeting, at least once each calendar year²¹ and to lodge with the Register an annual statement in the approved form unless granted an exemption.²²

A search of the Consumer Affairs Victoria (**CAV**) website's register records lists the most recent AGM has having occurred on 28 September 2012, and the last annual statement as lodged on 29 May 2015, declaring a membership of 82 members. Based on the current information that the membership is 28, this represents a 65.85% decline in membership since 2015. This information is relevant as background to whether the Licensee's governance arrangements have remained current, transparent and accessible to its membership.

The Rules provided by the licensee with the 2023 renewal application state that quorum for all General Meetings and Annual General Meetings shall be 10 financial members or one sixth of the financial membership, whichever is the smaller.

In reviewing the Licensee's Rules, the ACMA notes that

- Rule 9.3(a) provides that:

The business of the Annual General Meeting shall be to confirm the minutes of the last preceding Annual General meeting and of the immediately preceding general meeting (if any) held since the meeting.

- Rule 9.3(e) provides that:

The business of the Annual General Meeting shall be to elect the auditor to the Association.

- Rule 21.2(a) provides that:

Minutes of the proceedings of an Annual General Meeting shall be submitted for confirmation at the next Annual General Meeting

- Rule 25.2 provides that:

The Auditor shall review and endorse the Association's accounts annually prior to the Annual General Meeting.

Review of the Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 November 2025 indicate that the business of the AGM was not conducted in accordance with the Rules. The ACMA observed that the Minutes for the AGM held on 29 November 2025, did not record the approval of the Minutes of the previous AGM; and did not record the tabling of a financial report by the Treasurer.

These matters raise concerns as to whether the AGM was conducted in accordance with the Licensee's own Rules, and more broadly whether the Licensee maintained governance arrangements that were sufficiently transparent and orderly to support community confidence and participation.

²⁰ [Registration number: A0033401H](#)

²¹ Section 63, [Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012](#),

²² Section 102, [Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012](#)

Overall, the material indicates that the Licensee did not demonstrate that its AGM arrangements were being conducted in a manner that supported transparent governance and broader community participation. In particular, available records raised questions about whether annual meeting obligations had been maintained over time, and the 29 November 2025 AGM minutes did not demonstrate compliance with key procedural requirements in the Licensee's Rules

7. Board members

This section addresses whether the concentration of governance roles among a small group of longstanding individuals reduced opportunities for broader community participation in decision-making.

The Organisational Flow Chart provided in 2023 indicated that 9 individuals held all management roles. Following the President vacating that position at the most recent AGM, those responsibilities are now concentrated among 8 people. The ACMA notes that

- the President, who was elected in 2025, has previously held simultaneous positions as a member of the board and has held the position of Program Co-ordinator for 17 years.
- the Secretary has held their position for approximately 14 years.
- the Treasurer has held that position for 6 years.

A small group therefore continues to occupy the key management roles.

The ACMA acknowledges that it is common for small volunteer-run organisations to rely on particular members of the community over several years. However, where governance responsibilities remain concentrated in a small number of longstanding office bearers, and where there are limited opportunities for broader participation, that concentration may itself become a barrier to wider community involvement in governance and decision-making.

The concentration of control in a small number of longstanding members may limit opportunities for broader community involvement in governance and create practical or perceived barriers to participation by other community members. The concentration of responsibilities amongst long-standing office bearers may also present internal governance and operational continuity risks, including reduced role rotation, limited succession planning, and potential over-reliance on individual personnel in addition to reduced opportunities for new members to gain experience, and hesitancy from community members to nominate if they believe the positions are unlikely to be attainable.

Collectively these factors indicate that the Licensee is not effectively encouraging community involvement in the provision of programs.

Conclusion

The Licensee has not provided adequate information or documentation demonstrating that it actively facilitates, promotes, or encourages community participation in programming or the provision of the service.

The available information indicates there are practical barriers to participation, including outdated contact details, unreliable communication channels, a membership form that still requires nomination and seconding, limited public information about how to propose programs, and little evidence of open, accessible governance or programming processes.

For these reasons, the ACMA's view is that the Licensee has breached the licence condition at subclause 9(2)(c) of Schedule 2 to the BSA, which requires licensees to encourage community participation in operations and the provision of programs under the licence.

Issue 3: Has the Licensee complied with code 7.3 of the Codes (2008)

Relevant code provision

Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice 2008 (in force at time complainant complained to Licensee) (**the Codes**)

7.2 We will make every reasonable effort to resolve complaints, except where a complaint is clearly frivolous, without sufficient grounds or not made in good faith.

7.3 We will ensure that

- (a) complaints will be received by a responsible person in normal office hours, and receipt is acknowledged in writing,
- (b) complaints will be conscientiously considered, investigated if necessary and responded to substantively as soon as possible,
- (c) complaints will be responded to in writing within 60 days of receipt, as required by the Act and the response will include a copy of the Codes, and
- (d) complainants are advised in writing that they have the right to refer their complaint about a Code matter to ACMA provided they have first:
 - (i) formally lodged their complaint with the licensee in writing, and
 - (ii) received a substantive response from the licensee and are dissatisfied with this response or have not received a response from the licensee within 60 days after making the complaint.

A written complaint or response can be a letter, fax, or email.

Finding

The ACMA's view is that the Licensee breached Code 7.3 of the Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice (2008) in force at the time of the complaint.

Reasons

The Codes set out the process for complaint handling.

The Complaint

On 24 July 2025, the ACMA received a copy of a complaint about the Licensee that had been sent to the station manager with the station programmer was copied in.

The complaint was lodged with the Licensee on 15 May 2025. The complainant used the personal email address of station manager that the Licensee had advised the ACMA to use in

all correspondence. The complainant stated she had not received a response within 60 days and she referred the matter to the ACMA.

Licensee's submissions

On 12 September 2025, the ACMA wrote to the Licensee and requested confirmation that the Licensee had responded to the complaint and a copy of the response.

On 30 September 2025, the ACMA received an email with an undated letter from the Licensee. The letter suggested the Licensee may not have responded to the complaint based on previous legal advice that engagement would escalate to further communication and threats.

The submission also provided context of previous engagement between the Licensee and a former presenter.

On 15 April 2026 the Licensee informed the ACMA it had recently learnt that the station's solicitor sent the complainant a letter on the station's behalf and that the Licensee had the right not to communicate with the complainant in those circumstances.

By email dated 4 May 2026 the ACMA requested a copy of the solicitor's letter to the complainant and a copy of the notes relevant to the handling of the complaint. The solicitor's letter was not provided. No formal notes were provided.

Analysis

The Licensee did not provide documentation to demonstrate it had responded to the complainant and did not provide notes or records to support the view that the Licensee considered and assessed the complaint and determined it was frivolous.

The Licensee's responses of 30 April and 16 May 2026 focused on the alleged behaviour and motives of the complainant and did not focus on what the complaint was about, the process followed, how the complaint had been assessed or grounds that would support that the complaint was captured by clause 7.2 of the Codes.

Whilst the Licensee referred to the Board considering matters, legal advice and a complaints policy being signed by presenters, the responses did not clearly explain a standard complaint handling process, or what records were kept.

For these reasons, the ACMA's view is that the Licensee breached the Code 7.3 in force at the time of the complaint relating to complaint handling.

Licensee's licence renewal material and other submissions to investigation

Between March and June 2023, the Licensee provided the ACMA with information about its membership and volunteer numbers, organisational structure, the minutes of its 2022 AGM,²³ its Rules, and the methods it uses to inform the community about opportunities to participate in providing the service. At that time, the Licensee reported having 26 financial members and 21 volunteers, including 15 presenters.

In 2023, the Licensee acknowledged that AGMs had not been held every year for a variety of reasons including the impacts of COVID-19. It advised that in years when an AGM had not been held, members had remained in contact by phone. The Organisation Flow Chart provided in 2023 indicated the board comprised 9 members, with lengths of service ranging from 1 year to 15 years.

In November 2025, the Licensee confirmed that there had been no changes to the board members or their roles from those listed in the information provided to the ACMA in 2023 and that all members of the station continued to be volunteers.

In 2023 licence renewal application the Licensee

- informed the ACMA it had a program working group and that programs were selected by the programming sub-committee.
- provided an Organisation Flow Chart that indicated that the program working group consisted of 3 people and made provision for any current presenter or interested member of the public to participate.
- stated that whilst it publicised that anyone in the community could request to be a member of the programming sub-committee it had not received an expression of interest since 2012, which the Licensee stated indicated that the community was happy with the program committee's choices.
- stated it had received 3 proposals for new programs in the preceding 12 months, all of which were approved and broadcast.
- stated that it actively encouraged anyone who wanted to produce a local program and that it would support applicants by providing training and removing networked programs to accommodate locally produced programs.

At the time of its licence renewal, the licensee advised that if someone proposed a new program, they were given the resources to produce a pilot program. If it was of an acceptable

²³ For noting, in March 2023, in relation to another investigation, the ACMA asked the Licensee to provide further copies of its meeting minutes from the last five years. The Licensee submitted that, due to technical problems with its 'Cloud storage system', it was not able to retrieve these records. Accordingly, the ACMA was not able to consider these records as part of that or this investigation.

quality and content and the presenter guaranteed to produce the program on a regular basis, the program was slotted into the appropriate grid in the program guide.

When the licence was renewed in 2023 the ACMA recommended that the licensee

- amend its Rules to remove the provision relating to fining members so as to reduce the possibility of discouraging participation, and
- remove the requirement on its Application for Member Presenter form for applicants to be nominated and seconded in order to apply.

Review of the licensee's application for member/presenter form on 19 May 2026 indicated the requirement to be nominated and seconded in order to apply for membership had not been removed.

Agreed Actions

Agreed action	Due Date (from publication of ACMA report)	Reporting / Evidence to ACMA
<i>Adopt and publish a Complaints Handling Policy compliant with the Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice 2025.</i>	<i>Within 30 days</i>	<i>Copy of adopted policy and evidence of publication.</i>
<i>Publish the Complaints Handling Policy on the website, at station premises, and through any digital membership portal.</i>	<i>Within 30 days</i>	<i>Screenshots/photos and publication links</i>
<i>Ensure the policy includes complaint lodgement methods, timeframes, acknowledgement and response procedures, and ACMA referral rights.</i>	<i>Within 30 days</i>	<i>Copy of policy demonstrating required content</i>
<i>Establish and maintain a central electronic Complaints Register recording required complaint information.</i>	<i>Within 30 days</i>	<i>Copy/extract of register and register template.</i>
<i>Retain the Complaints Register for at least five years and make available to ACMA on request.</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>Confirmation of retention arrangements and register records if requested.</i>
<i>Acknowledge all written complaints within 5 business days and provide a substantive written response within 60 days.</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>Complaint statistics and register entries demonstrating compliance.</i>
<i>Committee of Management to review Complaints Register quarterly and record complaint numbers,</i>	<i>Quarterly</i>	<i>Copies of Committee meeting minutes.</i>

<i>unresolved complaints and systemic issues in meeting minutes.</i>		
<i>Adopt and publish a Membership Policy establishing fair, transparent and non-discriminatory membership processes.</i>	<i>Within 90 days</i>	<i>Copy of policy and evidence of publication.</i>
<i>Make membership eligibility criteria, application procedures and appeal processes publicly available.</i>	<i>Within 90 days</i>	<i>Website/publication evidence.</i>
<i>Maintain an up-to-date Register of Members.</i>	<i>Within 90 days and ongoing</i>	<i>Confirmation and membership register records.</i>
<i>Implement or maintain an online membership system allowing electronic applications, maintenance of member information, recording of outcomes and written notification of decisions.</i>	<i>Within 90 days</i>	<i>Evidence of system operation and sample records.</i>
<i>Report membership numbers, growth initiatives, volunteer opportunities and governance activities to members at each AGM during the undertaking period.</i>	<i>At each AGM</i>	<i>AGM agenda, reports and minutes.</i>
<i>Develop and publish a Community Participation Strategy addressing membership growth, volunteers, broadcasting opportunities, under-represented groups and local content.</i>	<i>Within 90 days</i>	<i>Copy of strategy and evidence of publication.</i>

<i>Establish and publicise processes for community members to propose programs, volunteer, participate in training and provide feedback.</i>	<i>Within 90 days</i>	<i>Published procedures and communication materials.</i>
<i>Conduct at least one community consultation activity (survey, forum, meeting or equivalent).</i>	<i>Within 12 months</i>	<i>Consultation report and supporting evidence.</i>
<i>Provide ACMA with a summary of consultation outcomes.</i>	<i>Within 12 months</i>	<i>Consultation summary report.</i>
<i>Train all active volunteers and presenters on the Codes, complaints handling, community participation, membership pathways and community broadcasting responsibilities.</i>	<i>Within 120 days</i>	<i>Training materials, attendance records and completion records.</i>
<i>Provide compliance reports to ACMA.</i>	<i>3, 6, 12 and 18 months</i>	<i>Written compliance reports with supporting evidence.</i>
<i>Include complaints statistics, complaints register records, membership data, community participation initiatives, training records, adopted policies and Committee meeting minutes in each compliance report.</i>	<i>At each reporting milestone</i>	<i>Supporting evidence attached to compliance report.</i>

Reporting Schedule

Report Number	Due Date	Minimum Evidence Required
<i>Report 1</i>	<i>3 months</i>	<i>Evidence of all 30-day, 90-day actions, complaints data,</i>

		<i>policies, registers and minutes.</i>
<i>Report 2</i>	<i>6 months</i>	<i>Updated complaints, membership, participation and training records, plus Committee minutes.</i>
<i>Report 3</i>	<i>12 months</i>	<i>Evidence of community consultation, consultation outcomes, ongoing compliance and governance records.</i>
<i>Report 4</i>	<i>18 months</i>	<i>Final compliance report demonstrating ongoing compliance with all agreed actions.</i>