



Home Communications Minister visits NSW community radio station where bushfires struck in 2019/20



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Amy Leiper, 8th June 2022

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The CBAA was pleased the Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland, chose to visit Braidwood FM, a community radio station in Braidwood NSW, for one of her first outings. In 2019-2020 catastrophic bushfires ripped through the community and the station's volunteer team broadcast 24 hours a day to keep the community safe.

Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland, said, “When the 2020 bushfires blazed through the regions, community radio was a constant. Through the early hours of the morning and into the night, Braidwood FM was a conduit for crucial, urgent, local information. It broadcast the movements of the fire and helped the community stay safe during this devastating time. It’s more than a community broadcaster – during the bushfires, Braidwood FM was a lifeline.”

Gordon Waters, Braidwood FM’s Station Manager, said, “For a small community station run solely on volunteers, we are grateful that the Minister took the time to visit our station. It’s the people of community radio that keeps it going and it meant a lot to all of us to know that not only did the Minister know we existed, but actually came and saw our studio. It was only due to the commitment and passion for our community and our station that kept us going for nearly 2 Months night and day during the fires and we know that what we did saved lives. It is great to get recognised for our efforts and we are proud and thankful to say that no lives were lost in Braidwood region during that time.

We broadcast for as long as we could get information and some people had the radio on 24 hours a day every just day get the latest local update. There was no on the ground local coverage from the ABC here. It’s not like people here could turn on the ABC and know what was happening at Jinglemoney Lane.”

Jon Bisset, CBAA’s CEO, said, “We are very pleased that the Minister took the time to visit Braidwood FM. It shows Labor recognises the vital role community radio plays in supporting vibrant Australian communities. Across our sector, stations have been at the forefront of providing support and connection through recent disasters – like [Bay FM \(https://www.bayfm.org/\)](https://www.bayfm.org/)’s relief efforts for Byron Shire, connecting people with critical services, meals, and medical care after the recent floods. They are also innovating to ensure regional communities don’t miss out on important news and information – like [Outback Radio \(https://www.cbaa.org.au/article/outback-radio-2web-saves-outback-regional-newspaper-bourke-and-it%E2%80%99s-surrounding-community\)](https://www.cbaa.org.au/article/outback-radio-2web-saves-outback-regional-newspaper-bourke-and-it%E2%80%99s-surrounding-community) in Bourke and [Torres Strait Islanders Media Association’s 4MW \(https://www.cbaa.org.au/article/regional-newspaper-inquiry-recognises-value-community-radio\)](https://www.cbaa.org.au/article/regional-newspaper-inquiry-recognises-value-community-radio) who returned their local papers to their communities. We look forward to working with the new Government to ensure our stations are supported to deliver news and information to their communities.”

About 60 km from Canberra, Braidwood’s tiny community radio station, Braidwood FM, had only just expanded its transmission range when fires threatened the town of about 1,600 people. In late November, a rapidly changing fire in Tallaganda National Park kicked off 14 days of near continuous emergency coverage.

Equipped with printouts of maps and their local knowledge, station volunteers put hourly updates to air from the Rural Fire Service, directly connecting listeners to the information source. Their listeners called in with updates and became active eyes for the RFS. For some, it was the only source of information and portable battery-powered radios sold out in town.

Community members came into the studio to drop off food and gift baskets to thank the volunteers. At the end of the long stint, one of the listeners went into the station to share their story: 'I was in Braidwood but I'm widowed, I was scared, and I've got a sister over in Farrington. And I knew by listening that she was OK and that the odds were that we were going to be OK.'

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