King Island, Now in the Picture

King Island is renowned for its dairy products, meat, seafood, alternative energy and clean air, but not for local television and radio reception. Until now, local residents have long suffered varying, poor reception (especially television) for decades and, being in a remote area, these services are extremely important.

Since the late 1970s, a TV transmitter has operated from Grassy, on the eastern side of the island but it only seemed to cover about 20-30% of the land mass effectively on a good day.

In 2007, as digital television continued to roll out across Australia, King Island Council made inquiries to the Federal Government about applying for a self-help grant to establish a digital television translator facility to redress the poor reception issues with ratepayers. A number of local councils in remote areas around Australia currently operate analogue self-help television and FM radio translators to serve their local communities and, as all of the Tasmanian major television networks do not have their programs on satellite feeds, it was decided that a local digital translator sited in Currie was the best option. This would rebroadcast the programs being transmitted from the main station at Grassy into the poor reception areas.

During initial enquiries, King Island Council did an assessment of locally available skills that could be utilised to achieve a successful completion of what would be a complex project. Following the 2007 Federal Election, a funding commitment was given and further discussions took place with Southern Cross, WIN Television and the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. The local member for Braddon was also contacted for assistance, which proved to be very helpful in establishing our submission with the Department. Purchasing of equipment continued during this time and Council land on a hill outside the main town of Currie was identified as being the best site for transmission.

In April 2009, a funding agreement was finally signed between the Council and the Department. A 27-metre, steel communication mast was ordered from SA to accommodate all of the antennas needed. Contractors washed, sand blasted and painted all 300 pieces of the tower to protect it against salt air. Council staff arranged for foundation earthworks to commence and finally the cement was poured in June 2009. Specialised riggers then assembled the mast, antennas and cabling during one of the worst bouts of foul weather the island had seen for some time. A local crane raised it fully-assembled in one operation. A second-hand shipping container was put in place to house all of the equipment and the installation of transmission components began after the power was connected.

At the present time, three ABC FM radio services and two digital television services are successfully operating from the site, providing local residents with a wide choice of programs. This is the first time viewers have had access to SBS television and radio services. The other three commercial stations are due to come on air over the coming weeks in full HD digital. All digital television transmitters share the one antenna via a combiner network which was made in Australia. Council believes this is the first time in Australia that a local council has attempted to plan, purchase and install its own digital television translator facility in-house.

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Launceston City Council staff are putting the city on the map, literally! Council’s Spatial Information Department has been working with Google Maps to update their satellite pictures of Launceston.

Google Maps is one of the world’s leading Internet maps and is used by people around the world to look at holiday destinations, find businesses, locations, real-estate and hotels to name just a few. The satellite pictures are a popular part of the site. Launceston City Council’s high resolution aerial picture of Launceston, which was taken in December last year, has been integrated into the Google Maps satellite option.

Launceston City Council Mayor Albert van Zetten said it is hoped that many benefits will flow through to local businesses and the community with this information being made available for public use. “It is important for Launceston to be well represented on Google Maps and continually improve how we present to the world. This is a big improvement in the base mapping of Launceston and will improve the clarity and accuracy over the current imagery,” he said.

Wireless Waterfront Now a Reality

The Minister for Workplace Relations, Lisa Singh, joined the Tasmanian Electronic Commerce Centre (TECC) in December 2009 to demonstrate the capability of the completed Stage One of a trial of wireless connectivity on Hobart’s waterfront.

The Tasmanian Government contributed $178,000 to the TECC to support the Wireless Waterfront trial, designed to provide Internet and intranet access on the waterfront to users with a WiFi capable mobile phone, laptop, notebook or device. The initial wireless footprint encompasses Princes Wharf No.1 shed and Salamanca Place, Salamanca Square and Parliament gardens. Now, visitors and locals can connect online - globally and locally, with cultural events, business and each other. The wireless technology will also enhance the visitor experience by providing immediate access to detailed and tailored information.

After being shown an initial landing page, users could access information about the area, including details about Salamanca, TMAG, Polar Pathways, upcoming events such as MONA FOMA and community facilities such as parks and toilets, for free. Information and services will be extended over time as businesses, event organisers, Council and the Government make more information available for the trial. The network also provides the first five megabytes of Internet access for free, with further access available through a purchase through the website.

Ms Singh said that the trial of a ‘wireless waterfront’ would create an opportunity for Tasmania to become a leader in fourth generation (4G) wireless applications and services and, along with the rollout of the NBN, ensures that Tasmania is a leader in the application of technology and innovation.