

Wester Ross Radio Ltd



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2006

OUR THIRD YEAR ON-AIR

Two Lochs Radio is coming up for its third year on the air, and continues to deliver upon its core promise of over 30 hours per week of local programming and service to the communities of Gairloch and Loch Ewe. We've welcomed several new voices to the airwaves this year and also gained some valuable extra behind-the-scenes support. We've also made a few more innovations in the studio to help make things easier for presenters, and improve our delivery.

PEOPLE AND PROGRAMMES

We have continued to organize our programmes quarterly (13-week) blocks and we are currently into our twelfth 'season' since starting. We review our programming and presenter resources during each quarter, and our general scheme of programmes has continued broadly according to plan this year. We have maintained the increase in hours that we brought in last year, and added some new things.

The station continues to be heavily dependent on its team of volunteer presenters, without whose commitment to their weekly shows there would be no programmes. Coping with holiday cover and other unforeseen absences has been greatly eased by having some new presenters on board, and I would like to welcome David Taylor and Graham Nash as regular new presenters, and David Carruthers as a new co-presenter. Also welcome back to Ailsa whom we briefly lost to the bright lights of Inverness, but who is back as a regular presenter again.

We also now have three extra people helping out in behind the scenes on programme content. Jackie Wilson is doing a great job of maintaining our What's On listing week in week out, with Tracy providing cover for times when Jackie is away. Donald MacRae, who has in the past provided holiday cover as our news reporter, has now taken on the lead role producing news bulletins, with me acting as backup. These folks are now a great help with the daily round of radio work, and I would like to thank them warmly for their increased commitment.

As always, we would be very pleased to hear from folk with ideas for new programmes or features, especially anything that would be unique to our area and the people in it. Do get in touch if you have an idea. You don't need to have technical skills – we can provide support with the nuts and bolts, but new ideas are always even more welcome when accompanied by an offer to carry them out! We have a few in the pipeline just now, so listen to this space.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

We have continued our links with various local groups, the schools, service providers and other agencies, and have regular reports or interviews with many of these. We continue to urge everyone to make the most use of the radio to support and publicize their own activities.

I report last year that Cuillin FM were about to install equipment to match up with our system for linking studios with high-quality sound so that we could look forward to much clearer sound on our regular Friday morning links. They did that, and we have used the system to great advantage since this spring in also bringing an excellent two hours of Scottish dance music from Cuillin FM on Saturday nights.

Again this year we also used the system to bring three hours a day of reports and music direct from the Royal National Mod, which was in Dunoon. As last year, we could have wished for better sound quality being produced at the other end to make the most of our link, but the programmes were nonetheless interesting and worthwhile, with several favorable comments received. I would like to thank Campbell especially for helping me cover the extra hours needed to pick up and prepare those programmes for air outside our normal local transmission times.

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Knowing that we would not be able to hold a Hogmanay party in the community Hall this year (as New year's Day was a Sunday), we organized an alternative event in the spring – a Grand Eurovision party at which we had a lot of fun and food while the euro-music events unfolded on the big screen. As Hogmanay is a Sunday this year, we may do something similar again. Any alternative ideas for a community event of our own as always will be received with interest.

We took part in two outdoor community events again this year, making the most of our new outside event equipment. We had a pitch and fundraising tombola at the Gairloch Highland Gathering – thanks as last year to Janet Tippett, Helen Mitchell and her sister Jackie for masterminding that. We also took part in the Aultbea Fun Day in July, providing public address (thanks to Clary for doing the public address announcements – he hardly needed our super new radio microphone!), and to Anne for organizing another tombola for that event.

We have continued, albeit slowly, to work on the *Loch Ewe Remembered* project to capture verbal memories from folks who were working and living around Loch Ewe during the Second World War. We have made a number of new recordings this year, and I would like to thank Alice MacKenzie for coming on board this project and helping with a wealth of potential names for interview and carrying out a number of recordings herself. We also took the opportunity of this year's Russian Convoy Club reunion to record the reminiscences of some of the convoy personnel who were visiting.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Last year we had to report the demolition of our original transmitter cabin on the hill near Port Henderson, and were working to raise funds to buy and install a new super-strong cabin. I'm pleased to say we achieved that earlier this year, with the final lift onto site being made by a helicopter kindly sponsored by Tulloch Ltd. Many thanks to David Carruthers for negotiating that particular assistance. The temporary transmitter housing we installed last autumn has proved very adequate while we proved that the new cabin is secure and watertight, and we have recently been preparing its inside to receive the equipment so it doesn't have to over-winter in the temporary housing. I have cleaned up and reassembled the original main transmitter and it's currently with the manufacturers for servicing.

Following a successful grant application last year, and proving the idea of using the Internet to link back to the studio, we were able to obtain new equipment for putting on shows at public events, and we used this to great effect at several of the functions I have already mentioned.

Two behind the scenes developments this year have made life considerably easier for volunteers. One was the installation last winter of an automatic system for switching back to our overnight 'sustaining service' automatically at the end of unattended playback of our pre-recorded evening shows. Previously these events required volunteers to come into the studio at the end of each day just for the few minutes needed to switch back, and involved a duty rota to do the task day-in, day-out. Now it happens automatically, and the same unit provides automatic switching for Balaich nam Port on Saturdays.

The second change has been to automate the legally required recording of all our programme output for use in case of complaints or queries. This now happens continuously and automatically, and so far has proved very reliable and useful. Previously presenters had to remember to start off-air recordings before every local transmission period, and it was always nerve-wracking to think of the large fines that can be imposed on a station that fails to make the recordings! It was also very slow to get back to a particular recording of a certain time and day - now it takes just moments.

Much needed building maintenance at the studio has received a big boost with David Carruthers spending considerable time working on it at the same time

A major new development is now in the wings – a grant application has recently been approved for a new all-digital computer-based studio system offering simpler controls and much more advanced assistance to presenters on screen during their programmes. It could also play out our prerecorded evening programmes and provide an automated mix of more locally selected music at night. We have had a local demonstration of the most likely system to go for, which was attended by most presenters and generally well-received, and we are working with the suppliers on the most advantageous terms for supply and some modifications to suit our particular circumstances.

FINANCE

Our set-up and initial running costs were well supported by grants, and we are particularly grateful to RACE and Wester Ross Alliance for granting European CED funding, and to the Scottish Executive for Rural Challenge funding. The initial CED funding finished last year, and the Executive funding ended this spring. As projected at the previous AGM, we achieved a roughly break even position on our income versus expenditure in 2005, but with the ending of the Scottish Executive start-up support, we are now largely dependent on our own advertising sales and fundraising activities for day-to-day funding of the station, and this will become a pressing concern over the next year as at present our rate of income does not yet meet our likely expenditure.

Advertising income has continued to rise over 20% year-on-year, but we critically need to find additional advertisers and sponsors to raise our income to the levels we will need for sustained operation in the coming years.

The Fundraising Shop continues to provide a valuable income, However it's income had been declining, being about 10% less in 2005 than 2004. With space issues pressing upon us, we will need to consider if it is the best use of the space available. We are grateful to everyone who has donated items or purchased from the shop, and of course to the volunteers who staff the shop.

The scheme we introduced at the end of 2004 for payment of memberships by standing order proved very successful in maintaining renewal rates and freeing up time to concentrate on new memberships rather than chasing renewals. Many thanks to Anne for all her work on this. Thanks again to the many members who also add voluntary donations to their membership dues.

AND FINALLY...

I would urge anyone to come forward with ideas for new programmes, preferably with volunteers to make them happen (!), and of course ideas for fundraising. We have several fundraising ideas 'on the burner', but as with so many things they need people and time to carry out, so please don't hesitate to step forward if you think you could make a commitment in this area, or know someone who you could encourage to join us in some capacity.

Thank you for reading my report on 2005. There is never enough space to mention everyone who has supported our activities through the year, but as always our sincere thanks go out to everyone who has given us help, encouragement and feedback to help us continue make Two Lochs Radio a local service of real value in which we can all take real pride.

Alex Gray
Chairman