

Features

Hobart's maritime radio station has been shut down to the anguish of fishermen and small boat owners. But as JOCELYN FOGAGNOLO reports, the safety line for those at sea has been replaced by new technology which promises a better service for all.

THE closure of Hobart Radio's transmitting and receiving station on the top of the Queens Domain in Hobart just over a month ago marked the end of an era in radio broadcasting in the state.

Its closure, two months short of the 80th anniversary of its opening, also meant the end of a way of life for the many radio operators who have manned the station over the years.

Nevertheless, the move to shut it down was inevitable in the interests of progress.

It is part of the introduction, after two years' preparation, of the new international distress and safety communications system, GMDSS (Global Maritime Distress and Safety System).

This is a sophisticated, communications service for all vessels in Australian waters under which OTC, on behalf of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, provides a 24-hour safety of life at sea (SOLAS) service through five key coastal radio stations at Melbourne, Sydney, Townsville, Darwin and Perth.

As well as Hobart, other stations to close were Esperance, Carnarvon, Broome, Thursday Island and Rockhampton, with Adelaide to follow and Brisbane reverting to a daylight operation.

Product manager with OTC Maritime, Mr Jim Simpson, said the closure of the stations coincided with developments in radio technology which enabled the use of long-range, higher frequencies.

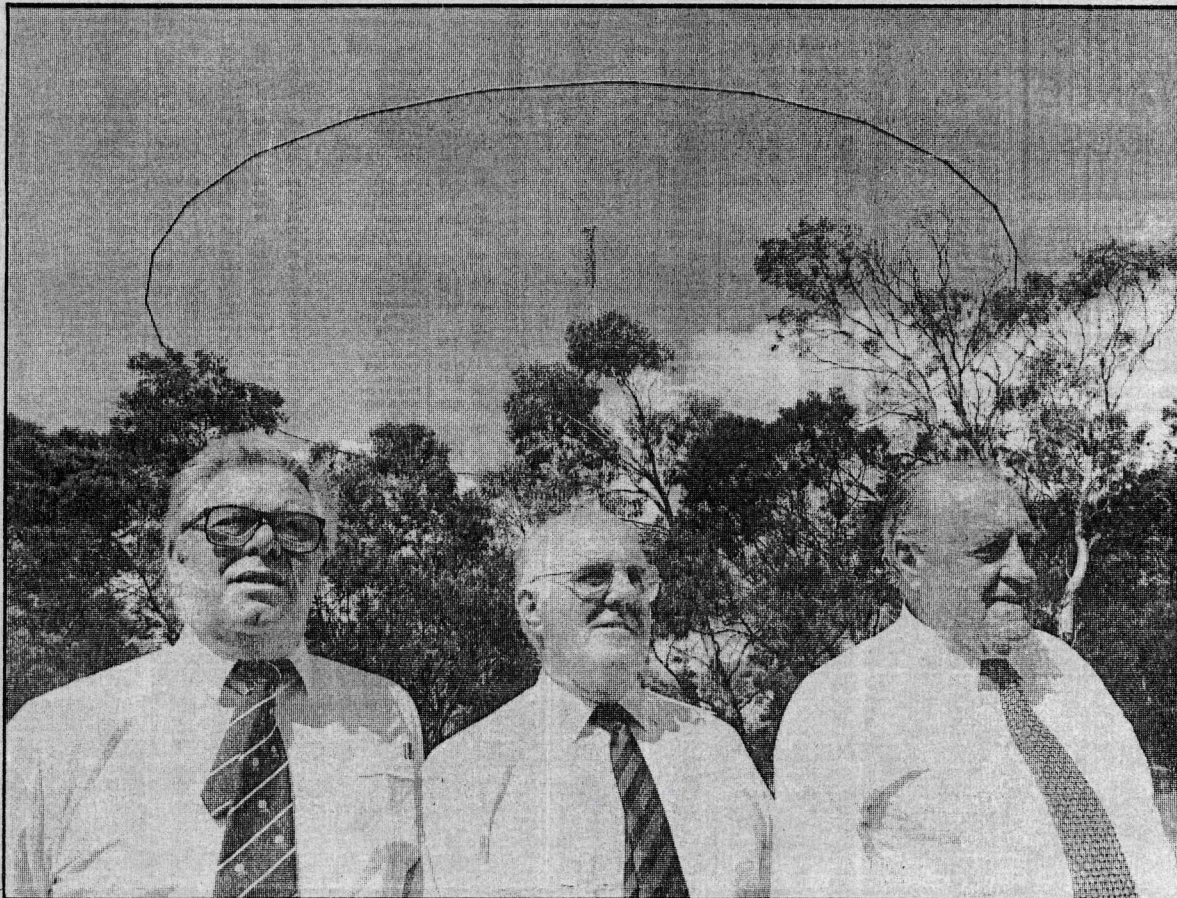
There was also the greater use of satellites and the expansion of OTC's VHF network including auto-seaphone around Australia.

OTC has just installed a second seaphone channel for the Hobart area (channel 24) to supplement the existing channel 27 facility.

It has always been stressed that the success of the new GMDSS depends on small craft carrying modern, properly-installed HF radio equipment.

There has been some reservation to the move among fishermen and small boat owners in Tasmania, partly because of geographical characteristics peculiar to the state or because they had not installed updated HF radios capable of reaching Sydney or Melbourne in an emergency.

The week that Hobart Radio made its last call the former Labor government announced it had done a deal with OTC under which it would take over the OTC remote receiving station on Bruny Island and keep it open for emergency signals which would be monitored 24-



Retiring operators at Hobart Radio, Mr John Brooksbank, left and Mr Phil Jones, centre, in front of the huge biconical monocone radio aerial with former operator, Mr Harry Banks, who retired in 1976 just before it was dismantled.

It's not over and out for safety at sea

hours a day from the Marine Board of Hobart's Port Control building via existing land lines leased from Telecom.

The facility — a remote receiving station only — is described as a powerful, quiet and useful centre for reception of signals by Mr Simpson, and both OTC and mariners were happy with the arrangement.

"We were pleased that the government [then] and we were able to strike a mutually acceptable commercial arrangement," Mr Simpson said.

However, he said this week nothing further had been heard from the new

government and he was not aware whether the land lines had been kept open.

At the same time, with all the expensive radio transmitters and other equipment cleared away from Queens Domain and redeployed to other stations and the huge aerials toppled and dismantled, a question mark hangs over the future of the building itself — considered worthy of preservation as part of Hobart's past.

It has been suggested the building, formerly leased by OTC, but on land owned by the Hobart City Council, be made available as a radio museum.



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