

THE EARLY HISTORY OF RADIO HAURAKI

In early 1966 rumours started filtering through New Zealand newspapers about the audacious plans of four 24 year old Aucklanders to establish a pirate radio station beyond the three-mile limit in the Hauraki Gulf. Their aim was "to wake Auckland up" ... and to challenge the monopoly of the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation.

The four promoters were David Gapes, Derek Lowe, Dennis O'Callahan and Chris Parkinson.

The reports were confirmed on 9 April 1966. "We may be broadcasting in six months," said David Gapes optimistically.

Subsequently the 93 foot wooden coastal trader, Tiri, was refitted to form a base station. The New Zealand Herald reported, "more than 25 young New Zealanders are continuing to work more than 16 hours a day in their efforts to establish New Zealand's first pirate radio station."

As the pirate's plans forged ahead, Government officials become equally determined to stamp out the menace of a pirate station.

In September 1966, gunboat tactics between the Hauraki promoters and the Government were started. The Minister of Broadcasting and Marine, Mr Scott, also the then Postmaster General signed a detention order to hold the Tiri in port. The pirate's broadcasting vessel was literally 'arrested'.

By October 1966 five of the Hauraki Directors had invested their life savings in the venture and lost the lot. Most of the 25 Hauraki staff were broke and working part-time in outside jobs. The company was thousands of dollars in debt and getting close to receivership. All attempts to negotiate broadcasting rights with the Government and the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation had reach a dead-end.

Later that month the Tiri made a desperate bid for open sea. The drama took place at a Wharf in downtown Auckland. Thousands of spectators cheered the pirates, abused the Police and assisted in the escape by hauling on ropes to free the mast of the Tiri, jammed in the partly lowered Western Viaduct drawbridge. Several of the Hauraki team risked their lives by sitting in the steel jaws of the drawbridge to prevent it closing.

Hauraki's Colin Broadley and others scaled the drawbridge and, perching precariously 50 feet above the deck of the boat, attempted to free the ship's mast which was jammed fast beneath the bridge. Finally, the Tiri broke free and moved out into the Harbour, but not before the Police had forced their way aboard.

Half-way down the harbour, Police off the Police launch Deodar, fought a brief, pitched battle with the Pirates, shut down the ship's engines and arrested the crew.

A night in jail followed and then came a highly publicised court case.

In November Radio Hauraki scored a first round victory when Mr L.G.H. Sinclair S.M. dismissed charges brought against five Radio Hauraki directors for defying a Marine Department detention order.

Later the same month a crowd of several thousand, waving placards for Radio Hauraki, marched on a meeting in support of private radio in the Auckland Town Hall.

The Tiri which had been under close arrest at the Devonport Naval Yards, was officially released and handed back to Radio Hauraki's lawyer, Roger McLaren.

On November 16, 1966 the Tiri quietly slipped from her moorings and put to sea.

Announcers and technicians aboard the sea-based station battled against time, fatigue, seasickness and worsening weather to get Hauraki on the air. Working day and night and frustrated by unplanned delays, a temporary antenna was rigged.

November 21, 1966, headlines announced, "Pirates on Air at Last." But the signal was weak and static-distorted. The station was off the air for a week to erect a new antenna.

On December 2, 1966 after nine months of legal wrangles, setbacks and frustrations, Hauraki was transmitting test broadcasts loud and clear from Whangarei to Hamilton. One hour later the antenna was snapped off in a gale. The New Zealand Herald reported that the Tiri subsequently erected its full antenna whilst tied up at Great Barrier Island.

On December 4, 1966, back at its permanent mooring in international waters between Great Barrier and Little Barrier Islands and the Coromandel Peninsula, Radio Hauraki began its first commercial radio programmes. One of the first records played was "Born Free," a song which the pirates believed captured the spirit of the Hauraki story.

Events settled during 1967 as Radio Hauraki improved its broadcasting techniques and transmissions.

Things progressed well and research showed the station was capturing a sizeable audience of young people. Then, on January 28, 1968, the Tiri was shipwrecked on Great Barrier after searching all day for a missing yachtsman. Announcer; Paul Lineham and the ship's cook Derek King broadcast as the ship was grinding on the rocks and finally at 11.15 p.m. sent out an urgent Mayday message. Hauraki went off the air and for a brief period as the Navy and Police set out in a search of the ship and crew, no-one was sure of the fate of those aboard.

The Tiri was a complete write-off. The wreck was towed into calm water and most of the transmission equipment was salvaged.

"We're wrecked but we're not sunk," was Hauraki's message and true to their words the pirates were back on the air broadcasting from the Tiri's sister ship, "Kapuni" exactly one month later. The new ship was renamed "Tiri II."

In July, 1968 NZ Newspaper headlines announced "Writing on Wall for Pirates," following the introduction of a Government bill to outlaw all off-shore pirate radio ventures. Radio Hauraki received a Post Office summons for broadcasting from New Zealand territorial waters, but no convictions were entered.

Parliament delayed the effect of legislation outlawing off-shore pirate radio ventures in the light of the imminent Broadcasting Authority Act which would grant two licences to private radio stations Government policy - and Mr Scott - were mellowing.

June 9, 1969. Radio Hauraki launched a public company, offering 215,000 one dollar shares to Aucklanders. It was indeed a station for the people, of the people.

February 5, 1970. A bid by Radio Hauraki to gain a private radio licence in the face of steep competition from larger corporations and newspaper amalgamations was taken to the newly constituted NZ Broadcasting Authority.

On March 25, 1970 after more than 3 years of sea based transmissions Radio Hauraki was granted a warrant to operate a private commercial radio station.

June 2, 1970. Announcers and crew members nostalgically toasted the last minutes of sea-based transmission from Tiri II. One final weekend of transmission was broadcast over Queen's Birthday Weekend and then the Tiri II sailed back to Auckland. But fate still had one final blow in store for the "Good Guys". Popular announcer, Rick Grant, fell overboard and was lost at sea. A bitter ending when victory seemed so sweet.

Radio Hauraki settled into its modern city offices on September 25, 1970. The station overlooks the Western Viaduct and the Waitemata Harbour, scene of many of her moments of drama.

Today's it is clearly New Zealand's most popular and profitable broadcasting enterprise. Currently it has a 26% share of the Auckland audience, competing with six other stations. The present Managing Director is Derek Lowe, the only original 'pirate' still involved.

(The above courtesy of Doug Nyholm)