



Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2021-53

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Findings regarding market capacity and the appropriateness of issuing a call for radio applications to serve Salt Spring Island

The Commission finds that the market of Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, could sustain a radio station at this time. Given that no parties other than Gulf Islands Community Radio Society (GICRS) expressed an interest in serving this market, the Commission considers that publishing a call for applications is not necessary.

Accordingly, the Commission will publish the application filed by GICRS for a broadcasting licence to operate a new community radio station in this market as part of the non-appearing phase of an upcoming public hearing.

This decision takes into account a public record for this application that was completed before the onset in Canada of the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

Introduction

1. In Broadcasting Notice of Consultation 2019-384, the Commission announced that it had received an application by Gulf Islands Community Radio Society (GICRS) for a broadcasting licence to operate a community radio station to serve Salt Spring Island, British Columbia.
2. Salt Spring Island is located approximately 85 km west of downtown Vancouver and 50 km north of Victoria. While the region is reached by various radio services serving Victoria and Vancouver, there are currently no originating radio stations serving the market of Salt Spring Island.
3. In Broadcasting Decision 2007-387, the Commission approved an application by Salt Spring Island Radio Corp. (SSIRC) to operate a specialty commercial radio station, CFSI-FM, to serve Salt Spring Island. Then, on 21 January 2013, the Commission approved a change in the ownership and effective control of SSIRC to Satnam Media Group (BC) Ltd. The Commission announced the change in ownership and effective control in Broadcasting Information Bulletin 2013-274. Due to multiple non-compliance instances with regulatory requirements, the Commission revoked the station's licence in Broadcasting Decision 2015-281. In that decision, the Commission recognized that Canadians living in Salt Spring Island no longer had

access to the radio service of CFSI-FM but was confident that a higher quality radio service could be provided to the island's residents.

4. In accordance with Broadcasting Regulatory Policy 2014-554 (the Policy), the Commission called for comments on the capacity of the Salt Spring Island market to support a new station and the appropriateness of issuing a call for applications for new stations in this market. The Policy states that the Commission weighs various factors, such as market capacity, spectrum availability or scarcity, and interest in serving the market when deciding whether to:
 - publish the application for consideration as part of the non-appearing phase of a public hearing;
 - issue a call for applications; or
 - make a determination that the market cannot sustain additional stations, return the application and issue a decision setting out this determination.

Interventions

5. The Commission received approximately 200 interventions in support of the application from members of the public, small businesses and local organizations.
6. Members of the public and small businesses stated that a radio station would provide public safety information and emergency alerting, which is especially important in rural locations such as Salt Spring Island. They also indicated that the station would give the community a local voice by broadcasting content relevant to the community and would benefit the region's older demographic as well as local businesses, local art and community engagement. These interveners added that they would support the new station with volunteer time and advertising money.
7. According to the Salt Spring Island Arts Council, given that the arts sector is a major social and economic generator in the region, a new radio station would help advance the social and economic benefits of a strong arts sector. The Capital Regional District indicated that the radio station would be an important source of information for local news and commentary and would be vital for emergency communications. It also intends to collaborate with the applicant for emergency planning. The Health and Safety Committee and the Salt Spring Island Amateur Radio Society both stated that a local radio station would be beneficial in emergency situations and added that, whenever natural disasters result in power outages, there is no communication infrastructure for support.
8. The National Campus and Community Radio Association argued that the Commission should not issue a call for applications because the region does not have the capacity to support a commercial broadcaster. In its view, because the proposed station would have very little commercial potential, the Commission should proceed with a notice of consultation regarding GICRS's application.

9. GICRS submitted that there is no local radio station to provide local news and that it received broad support within the community. It added that, except for the existing Salt Spring Island media, local businesses have no outlets for the day-to-day advertising that a local radio station can provide. The applicant also stated that a local radio station would offer a platform for local emerging artists to share their work with the community. Further, it indicated that a community station would give information on vital issues such as ferry delays, weather warnings, and emergency broadcasts on natural disasters, as well as Amber alerts and major police incidents.

Commission's analysis and decision

10. The Commission considers that a new radio station would generate local revenue without facing competition from existing stations. In addition, a new station could repatriate tuning from out-of-market stations. The Commission also notes the wide support from local residents, businesses and organizations.
11. No originating stations currently serve the community of Salt Spring Island.
12. A frequency availability assessment showed that the frequencies proposed by the applicant are two of the last known available frequencies in the market.
13. Further, no parties other than GICRS expressed an interest in serving this market.
14. While the record of this proceeding closed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission notes that the pandemic has had significant negative impacts on the Canadian economy. However, the Commission is of the view that the market can sustain a new station despite the negative effects of the pandemic, given that the proposed station is a volunteer-based community station with low operating costs that would not be completely reliant on advertising revenues and would face no competition from other stations serving the market.

Conclusion

15. In light of all the above, the Commission finds that the Salt Spring Island radio market could sustain a community radio station.
16. Given that no other parties expressed interest in serving this market, the Commission will publish the application filed by Gulf Islands Community Radio Society as part of the non-appearing phase of an upcoming public hearing.

Secretary General

Related documents

- *Call for comments on market capacity and the appropriateness of issuing a call for radio applications to serve Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, Broadcasting Notice of Consultation CRTC 2019-384, 28 November 2019*

- *CFSI-FM Salt Spring Island and its transmitter CFSI-FM-1 Mount Bruce - Revocation of licence*, Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2015-281, 25 June 2015
- *A targeted policy review of the commercial radio sector*, Broadcasting Regulatory Policy CRTC 2014-554, 28 October 2014
- *Applications processed pursuant to streamlined procedures*, Broadcasting Information Bulletin CRTC 2013-274, 5 June 2013
- *Licensing of a radio station to serve Salt Spring Island*, Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2007-387, 22 October 2007