



WIA Centenary history fact sheet

This year there is a global celebration with many local radio clubs supporting the centenary of organised amateur radio in Australia. That is happening in recognition of the foundation of the Wireless Institute of Australia, the national radio society that began in Sydney in **1910**.

The activity of private wireless experimentation began in Australia and elsewhere in the late **19th century** not long after the German physicist Heinrich Hertz proved the existence of radio waves in **1886**.

In recognising the benefits of amateur experimentation governments permitted private individuals who became known as amateur wireless experimenters and later radio amateurs

These experimenters were at the forefront of this new science contributing to the development of broadcasting (**from 1920**), worldwide communications via shortwave radio (**1923/24**) and other technical developments. In fact, long before the internet, radio amateurs were acknowledged to be the first true world citizens, having the ability to communicate across international boundaries worldwide from their home.

During both **WWI (1914-18)** and more so for **WWII (1939-45)** it was often the radio amateur both male and female who provided training to service people to become radio operators in theatres of war, including vital coast watch operations behind enemy lines.

There was enormous development of both radio communications and radar during WWII, again with the contributions of radio amateurs working in professional capacities in both private and governmental research as well as the armed services.

The first amateur radio satellite was launched on **December 12, 1961**, barely four years after the launch of world's first satellite Sputnik. The WIA Project Oscar in **1969** resulted in the 5th amateur radio satellite Australis Oscar 5 being launched in **January 1970**. It was built by two groups at Melbourne University.

Many more have been built in various countries and launched contributing to knowledge about low earth orbiting satellites.

At times of natural disaster radio amateurs provide emergency communications. In Australia this began in response to a devastating tropical cyclone north of Cairns in **February 1927**. Other notable events were the Black Friday bushfires in Victoria **1939**, New South Wales floods in **1955**, Tropical Cyclone Tracy **1974**, Ash Wednesday disaster **1983**, Newcastle Earthquake **1989**, the Black Saturday disaster **2009**, and on numerous other occasions.

Always moving with the times including being an early adopter of digital technology, today amateur radio is a multi-faceted communications hobby enjoyed by two million people in over 100 countries for personal pleasure, self education and training, and community benefit.

They are people with all types of backgrounds, age groups and abilities, who with their radio interest, in all of its forms, meet on the airwaves for a chat or engage in their own form of experimental activities.