

25 YEARS
DUTCH CONNECTION
@VOX FM 106.9



Cover image: Alex Blăjan, Unsplash, 2016



José Arends and Peter Blom 2023 (photo courtesy Yoke Berry, 2023).

25 YEARS DUTCH CONNECTION @ VOX FM 106.9

On Sunday the 9th of November 1997, the first Dutch program in the Illawarra was broadcast on the community radio station VOX FM 106.9.

For the programmers and listeners alike it was an arduous task to stay up on a Sunday night from 11 to midnight to present or hear the show.

In the first years there were many people involved in presenting a happy hour of music, interviews and news items from the Netherlands.

Twenty five years later, the *Dutch Connection* is broadcast twice a week, on a Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon with the one presenter who stayed all those years: José Arends. On the days that she is away, Peter Blom who was one of the original team members of the *Dutch Connection*, takes care of the program.

It is an honour to present this report which was compiled with help from past presenters.

Yoke Berry

Dutch in Wollongong, August 2023



*The old VOX FM studio in Ellen Street, Wollongong.
(photo courtesy Peter Blom, 2023).*

HOW IT STARTED¹

The late Martin Pronk² was a member of the Dutch Australia Society in the Illawarra (DASI) and the conductor of the Dutch-Australian choir Pro Musica. In 1996 he took the initiative to request a Dutch program on VOX FM 106.9, the community radio of the Illawarra.

¹ VOX FM moved from Ellen Street, Wollongong to Tallegalla Street, Unanderra in December 2019.

² Martin passed away on 30 May 2019.



View of the VOX FM studio in Ellen Street, Wollongong at night time (photo courtesy Peter Blom, 2023).

Martin placed an advertisement in the *Wollongong Advertiser* and recruited Ina and Wim Starmans. It would take over a year before a time slot was made available by VOX FM 106.9 and the only free time slot was on a Sunday night from 11 pm to midnight³.

Peter , who was already a member of the radio station, and Wim took responsibility of the controls. Ina and Martin were the presenters.

³ Report in DASI newsletter *De Stuw* by Secretary Keith Prins, May 1998.



Ina and Martin (photo courtesy Ina & Wim Starmans, 2023).

THE FIRST PROGRAM

Sunday 9 November 1997

Starting with those words:

"This is the first broadcast of a Dutch language program on VOX FM for Australians with a Dutch background and Dutch people living and working in the Illawarra. From now on you can listen to us every Sunday evening from 11 to 12 o'clock on VOX FM 106.9. The people who provide this program are Martin Pronk, Peter Blom, Ina Starmans and Wim Starmans.

In the next hour you can listen to Dutch music for young and old. More information about this radio program and the possibility for you to be more involved in this program will be discussed in detail later in the program".



Ina, Martin, Peter and Wim (photos courtesy Ina & Wim Starmans, 2023).



In this first program, Wim Starmans interviews Martin Pronk about the intention of the Dutch program. Martin then briefly speaks by phone with the president of DASI, Leo Reinders who congratulates the program makers.

Congratulations were also given by Dutch Premier Wim Kok who was visiting Australia at that time and was interviewed by Martin in Sydney. The program closed with the Dutch National Anthem.

The Sunday night late time slot was temporarily changed in March 1998 to Sunday afternoon 3 to 4 pm but it took persuasion and fierce arguments by Martin Pronk and the DASI club to maintain this spot.

A link to the recording of this historic broadcast is available [here](#)⁴

⁴ With thanks to Peter Blom for providing a copy of the recording.

Advertiser, Wednesday 15 April '98

Dutch speak up for early radio slot

By GLYNISS PATTERSON

THE Illawarra's Dutch migrant community is facing forced surrender to the Italians of its Sunday night slot on community radio station 2 VOX FM.

The Dutch were overjoyed in March when the Italians voluntarily swapped their "more civilised" time slot for the Dutch group's late-night slot.

But the Dutch delight may be short-lived.

Dutch program founder and co-ordinator Martin Pronk believes the Dutch Hour - Het Nederlands Uurtje - could be forced back to the later time if the Illawarra's Dutch community doesn't act.

"Since November the Dutch have been able to hear familiar words and songs on community radio VOX FM 106.9 - if they were awake late on Sunday nights," Mr Pronk said.

"The program moved to an earlier time slot in March and more of the elderly Dutch can now enjoy their program".

"But it may be a temporary time as another community has prior rights to it.

"It is up to the Dutch-Aussies in the Illawarra to make it known that they wish to keep to an earlier time by phoning and writing in."

Mr Pronk said the aims of the program were to promote good relations among Dutch-speaking people - which include the Flemish-Belgians and Suid Afrikaners - and the wider community.

"The Dutch language is spoken outside the Netherlands wherever the Dutch colonised or settled.

"Some Indonesians still speak Dutch, as do people from Surinam and the

Dutch Antilles.

"There are a few Dutch sub-languages and many regional dialects.

"For example,

Flemisch (Vlaams) is spoken by roughly 50 per cent of Belgians and in pockets of northern France. Afrikaans is spoken by descendants of the Dutch Boer settlers in South Africa, and Frisian (Fries) was recognised officially in the 1960s as a separate sub-language of the Dutch province of Friesland.

"Although there are many who believe English will eventually become the world language, I firmly believe in the value of retaining national languages for the richness of diversity and a clue to the national character," Mr Pronk said.

He also said it was especially important to reach the younger generation and perpetuate the language, to save it from being lost.

"The survival of the language is seen by many as not being important," Mr Pronk said.

"Dutch immigrants have a great capacity to adopt the language and culture of their chosen new country.

"In America, it is the now fifth and later generations who are setting up Dutch cultural clubs and trying to regain a little of their roots.

"I hope to promote the continuum before the original migrants (are gone)."

Mr Pronk said he was looking for Dutch-speaking people to help with the program at least monthly. Training would be provided.

To promote the retention of his native language, Mr Pronk has established a link with the

IVIO language institute in The Netherlands, which provides individually tailored courses via mail, email, fax and local tutors.

For more information, Mr Pronk can be contacted on 4225 9393 during office hours.



Dutch radio program founder and co-ordinator Martin Pronk.



José Arends, Yvonne Thijssen, Astrid Carr and Ina Starmans (photo courtesy Ina & Wim Starmans, 2023).

IT WAS A LOT OF FUN

Ina Starmans remembers⁵:

"... I think I responded to an advertisement (in Advertiser) in late 1996, early 1997, in which they asked for someone who spoke good Dutch and wanted to participate in a radio program for Dutch people. Well I could, so I called and made an appointment with Martin Pronk. I think we started earlier than September 1997. All contacts went through Martin, eg Vox FM and Dutch club. Wim did the controls, together with Peter and I was behind the microphone. We still had a lot to learn ourselves, eg I talked too fast and my Dutch was different than the Dutch were used to, because they had emigrated to Australia in the 50s and 60s, so their Dutch was also from that time.

We had to search for music.

I remember interviewing my mother, she was with us for 4 wks around Christmas and New Years 1997/98. It was a lot of fun".

⁵ Email Ina Starmans 22 May 2023.



Martin Pronk, Wim Starmans, Thony van der Mol, José Arends, Ina Starmans, Astrid Carr and Yvonne Thijssen (photo courtesy Ina & Wim Starmans, 2023).

DUTCH CONNECTION

Ina, Wim and children returned to the Netherlands and new recruits to the team were José Arends, YvonneThijssen, Thony van der Mol and Astrid Carr. Thony and Astrid were planning a program together but it did not eventuate. Yvonne helped plan the programs with José who would also present on the radio with Peter doing the panelling.

Eventually a more reasonable arrangement was made with VOX FM to have the Dutch program aired on Monday afternoons, from 5-6pm and later still to Wednesday afternoons from 5 to 6 pm; the radio program became known as the *Dutch Connection*.

A typical program would include Dutch community news such as wedding anniversaries, special birthdays, events at DASI, interviews, news from the Netherlands and Dutch music.

THE DUTCH CONNECTION
26/7/99

	TIME	LENGTH	CD	TRACK	INFO
1.					Welkom + "De Hollanders" + aankondigen gast: Anne Anderson
2.	5.03	3.11	Nettie	7	Paul de Leeuw "Op een mooie Pinksterdag"
3.	5.06	2.33	7	2	De voorgeschiedenis van de Nederlandse Popmuziek Blue Diamonds "Ramona"
4.	5.08				Nieuws van de DASI
5.	5.11	4.10	Nettie (cd 1)	9	Het Goede Doel "Geboren voor het geluk"
6.	5.15	4.10	60 (cd 1)		De allergrootste Hollandse hits van 1997 De Kast "De ideale Vrouw"
7.	5.19	5 minuten			Interview
8.	5.24	2.25	32	7	Het Beste van Henk Wijngaard "Ik heb een wagen volgeladen"
9.	5.27	4.30	27	4	Gert & Hermien "Kletsen doen ze toch"
10.	5.31	6 minuten			Interview
11.	5.37	2.42	52	18	Gouden Piratenhits Bobby Klein "Jodel Bobby" <i>(request from John Matisco)</i>

	TIME	LENGTH	CD	TRACK	INFO
12.	5.40	2.35	52	4	18 Gouden Piratenhits Appie Scheper "Mexicaanse Polka"
13.	5.43	4 minuten			Nieuws van de Telegraaf en Uitdrukking van de week
14.	5.47	6.38	15	8	De Leukste Conferences & Liedjes Henk Elsink "Johanna"
15.	5.53	3.56	Yvonne Thijssen	1	Ik heb je lief Clouseau "Altijd heb ik je lief"
16.	5.57				Afscheid nemen
17.	5.58	4.30	2	5	James Last in Holland Medley: "Ketelbinkie, Als de Klok van Arnhemuiden"

Dutch Connection program for 26 July 1999 (courtesy Yvonne Thijssen, 2023).



Peter, Margriet & José (photo courtesy José Arends, 2023).

FOND MEMORIES

Margriet Brandsma joined the program sometime in 1999. She recalls⁶:

"..I have fond memories of the radio program. Very nice to look for music together with José and Yvonne. And I also remember an interview in Frisian".

Yvonne returned home to Canada with her husband and children in 1999 and Margriet and her husband returned to the Netherlands in 2000. She visited Australia in 2007 with three daughters and they were honoured guests at the *Dutch Connection* radio program.

⁶ Communication with Margriet Brandsma, May 2023.



Martin, Peter and José in 2000 (photo courtesy Peter Blom, 2023).



Irene Kreis in 2020 (photo courtesy Yoke Berry, 2023).

FROM 2000 ONWARDS

Irene Kreis ⁷ helped José with the radio program for a few years on a weekly basis starting in late 2000. She donated many Dutch CDs.

José: “It was a ‘gezellige tijd’ with Irene, Martin and Peter”.

Martin left the program around 2001 after which there was friction with the DASI club about ownership of the Dutch radio program. DASI paid \$250 per annum to VOX FM for membership and on air time⁸.

After a meeting with the VOX FM Board in 2003 it was resolved that the Dutch radio program is independent of any of the Dutch community groups in the region.

The DASI board then elected to cease funding *Dutch Connection*. Eventually, the Catholic Dutch Migrant Association (CDMA) offered to become the official Dutch umbrella group of *Dutch Connection*⁹.

⁷ Dr Irene Kreis was Associate Professor in the School of Public Health, University of Wollongong from 1994-2008.

⁸ Email José Arends.

⁹ Today, the Department of Multicultural Affairs donates a sum of money to VOX FM for the purchase of music and general administration (e.g. computer).

An umbrella group was necessary for Vox FM 106.9 to apply for the Ethnic Grant through the Department of Multicultural Affairs; 75% goes to Vox FM 106.9 and the presenter receives 25% to buy necessary items to produce a program (such as music, a computer and its upkeep). On leaving the station or program, all items must be returned to Vox FM 106.9 who keep a record of purchases¹⁰.

After Martin's departure, José became a committee member of the Catholic Dutch Migrant Association (CDMA), Dutch Link Sydney, the Dutch Australian Cultural Centre (DACC) and Dutch Genealogy.

On application, the Dutch Courier sent their printed monthly newspaper free of charge (since 2003).

Former DASI President John Vlietstra started sending the monthly club newsletter *De Stuw* and this has been ongoing.

Notable interviews over the years were with:

- Mrs Joanna Gash AM, former member of the House of Representatives representing the Division of Gilmore for the Liberal Party from 1996 to 2013.
- Hank van Stuivenberg, photographer at the Illawarra Mercury and a member of Bellambi Surf Life Saving Club since 1979¹¹. (Hank passed away in 2018).
- Captain Bill Hoogendoorn, General Manager Marine & Port Operations Port Kembla Port Corporation (1989-2004).

¹⁰ Email José Arends.

¹¹ <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HANSARD-1323879322-100438>



Photo courtesy José Arends, 2023.

NOWRA - TRIPLE U

In 2003, José spread her wings and with help from Peter, started a two hour Dutch radio program on the community radio *Triple U* in Nowra NSW on a Wednesday afternoon¹².

She managed this program for 8 years in addition to her Dutch radio work at VOX FM in Wollongong.

Peter left the program in Nowra in 2007 and went his own way at VOX FM. He panelled for the *Headway Program* and later presented his personal program *Tuesday's Jukebox Hits* which is quite popular.

He organised and now manages the enormous music library of VOX FM 106.9.

¹² The initiative was taken by José before the matter of "ownership" re *Dutch Connection* was resolved.



Photo courtesy Malcolm Arends, April 2023.



29 March 2023 (photo courtesy Yoke Berry).

25 Years

In 2017, José was able to get an extra hour of airtime for the *Dutch Connection* on Tuesdays at VOX FM, also from 5 to 6 pm. She now runs both radio programs solo.

Peter still helps out and keeps the Dutch programs going when José is away.

On 29 March 2023, a letter was read out on the *Dutch Connection* from Hugo Klijn, the Consul-General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

To listen to the entire program, click [HERE](#)¹³.

¹³ With thanks to Peter Blom for providing a copy of the recording.



Mevr. José Arends-Valk
Fox FM 106.9
6 Ellen Street
Wollongong NSW 2500

21 maart 2023

Geachte mevrouw Arends-Valks,


Ik werd erop geattendeerd dat u al meer dan 25 jaar lang een Nederlands-talig programma produceert en presenteert.

Ik wil u van harte feliciteren met deze mijlpaal en u danken voor de enorme inzet en de geweldige bijdrage die u heeft gegeven in het algemeen en natuurlijk in het bijzonder aan de Nederlandse gemeenschap in Wollongong en Nowra.

Het is belangrijk om op allerlei culturele niveaus de banden tussen Nederland en Australië te onderhouden en aan te sterken. Uw toewijding en inzet gedurende al die jaren zijn een inspiratie en ik weet dat uw programma voor vele Nederlanders in de regio enorm veel betekent.

Hopelijk kunnen de Nederlanders in de regio nog lang van de muziek, nieuws en interviews in uw programma op VOX FM106.9 genieten.

Met vriendelijke groet,



Hugo Klijn
Consul-Generaal van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden

*Mrs. José Arends-Valk
Fox FM 106.9
6 Ellen Street
Wollongong NSW 2500*

March 21, 2023

Dear Mrs Arends-Valks,

I was made aware that you have been producing and presenting a Dutch-language program for more than 25 years.

I would like to congratulate you on this milestone and thank you for the enormous effort and the great contribution you have made in general and of course in particular to the Dutch community in Wollongong and Nowra.

It is important to maintain and strengthen the ties between the Netherlands and Australia on all kinds of cultural levels. Your dedication and commitment over all these years are an inspiration and I know that your program means a lot to many Dutch people in the region.

Hopefully the Dutch in the region will be able to enjoy the music, news and interviews in your program on VOX FM 106.9 for a long time to come.

Yours sincerely,

*Hugo Klein
Consul General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands*

