

SUBMISSIONS TO THE ABA PLANNING PROCESS

The ABA received more than 450 submissions in response to its call for input on planning priorities for radio and television services throughout Australia.

The priorities will set a timetable for planning the broadcasting spectrum in various parts of Australia. The ABA will then examine areas in priority order to clarify where new licences and improvements to existing services are needed.

'The response from the public, governments, industry bodies and other interested people has been excellent,' said ABA Member Mr Tim O'Keefe, when addressing the Towards 2000 Radio Conference on 24 February.

'We have received enthusiastic support for the new planning process set out in the Broadcasting Services Act and our process of wide public consultation.'

The submissions, from every State and territory, cover a wide range of issues including reception problems, new community radio services, second licences for solus markets, technical issues, extensions of ABC, SBS and Parliamentary services, narrowcasting, programming concerns and support for innovative uses of broadcasting (see below for more detail).

The ABA will use the submissions to prepare a draft priority plan for developing and improving broadcasting services in Australia.

'This will be a very challenging task as there are differences of opinion amongst some submitters. We'll be working hard to resolve these competing priorities equitably under the act,' said Mr O'Keefe.

The ABA aims to release the draft plan for public and industry comment in late April. At the same time, all submissions made to the ABA will be open to public inspection. A final plan is likely to be published by mid-year.

Early examination of the submissions suggests:

- members of the public are keen to improve the reception of existing television and radio services;
- members of the public are very interested (about 50 per cent of applications received were about the ABC and SBS) in increased programming

diversity through greater access to the ABC, particularly 2JXX, and SBS television;

- broadcasters in solus markets (markets with only one commercial television or commercial radio operator) are very interested in the availability of second licences because they want to provide more programming diversity for listeners by way of two complementary services in the same market;
- people in isolated areas of Australia are keen to have better access to basic broadcasting services;
- supporters of community radio made few submissions, however of those received, submitters were generally looking to expand this type of broadcasting because of its contribution to programming diversity.

N.B. The ABA has been asked by the Minister for Transport and Communications to advise on which broadcasting channels should be reserved for community and national services (ABC and SBS).

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The ABA invited submissions on December 7 last year, with a deadline of 12 February 1993. The planning functions of the ABA are set out in Part 3 of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*. The emphasis is on the efficient and effective allocation of the broadcasting bands to meet market and social needs. All of the stages of the planning process must be the subject of wide public consultation.

The Act provides for a three stage planning process. This process is central to the operation of the Act as channels cannot be made available for new services until the planning is completed. The three stages are:

Establishment of priorities for planning the provision of services;

Preparation of frequency allotment plans that determine the number of channels to be available in particular areas of Australia, to provide services that use the broadcasting services bands; and

Preparation of licence area plans which determine the number and characteristics, including technical parameters, of the broadcasting services that are to be available in particular areas.

LOW POWER INFORMATION SERVICES EXTENDED TO 1995

The ABA has increased business opportunities for low power information services, by making licences available for an extra year until 31 January 1995.

Low power services provide localised information such as tourist radio, parking advice for outdoor public events and commentary at sporting fixtures.

The extension of time was approved so licences may continue to be issued for a 12 month period. This will also allow licences issued in December last year and January this year to be renewed where appropriate.

On 1 December 1992, the ABA released part of the broadcasting spectrum (five channels at 87.6, 87.7, 87.8, 87.9 and 88.0 MHz) for low power services on an interim basis until 31 January 1994.

'The extension of time to 1995 will allow even more services to be authorised,' said ABA Chairman Mr Brian Johns.

Low power services are licensed to use transmitters with a coverage of less than two kilometres in urban areas (this restriction may be eased to up to 10 kilometres in rural areas where there is less chance of interference). Low power services are generally licensed for 12 months. Licences cost either \$28 or \$141, depending on the strength of the transmitter being used.

'There are now some 270 applications for information services with the ABA and more than 130 licences have already been issued with services operating in each state and territory,' said Mr Johns.

Application forms for low power transmitter licences and information about technical conditions are available from Stirling Finlay (06) 256 2832. 