

NO LICENCE FOR IPSWICH COMMUNITY TV GROUP

The ABA has decided not to allocate a temporary community television licence to Public Access Television Transmitter Ipswich (PATTI).

The ABA has issued temporary licences in a number of areas for community television services using the so-called sixth channel, which is the last high power free-to-air television channel available in many parts of Australia.

For the Brisbane television service area, of which Ipswich is a part, the ABA issued a licence to Brisbane Community Access Television Group Incorporated (BRIZ-31) in September 1993. This temporary apparatus licence for use of the sixth channel (channel 31 on the UHF television band) was allocated for a 12 month period and is subject to renewal by the Spectrum Management Agency (SMA).

'PATTI's proposal was to utilise spectrum which was not part of the sixth channel', said Ms Debra Richards, ABA Director of Program Services. 'We would encourage PATTI or its constituent members to join the existing Brisbane service to provide local programming to the Ipswich region through that service.'

In addition, the ABA found PATTI did not satisfy the criteria for temporary allocation of the sixth channel, which are set out in the ABA's Access Statement or with the general rules governing potential community broadcasters seeking access to the sixth channel.

The ABA has made the sixth channel available on a temporary basis until February 1996 for the provision of open narrowcasting services for community and educational non-profit purposes.

The ABA cannot to allocate permanent community television licences until the completion of the Ministerial review of the television broadcasting industry which must be completed by July 1997.

COMMUNITY TELEVISION

When the Broadcasting Services Act took effect in October 1992, the service category of community television was defined for the first time.

Community television groups have long expressed a desire to use the sixth channel for community access television services.

In September 1992, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport, Communications and Infrastructure (HORSCOTCI) delivered a report on possible uses of the sixth channel and gave priority to its use for educational television, over community access television in the longer term.

It recommended, however, that no decision on permanent use of the sixth channel be made until the completion of a ministerial review of the television broadcasting industry, which must take place by July 1997.

The committee made this recommendation after finding educational interests were not ready to utilise fully the channel in capital cities, and that by the time they were prepared, alternative technologies might be available for delivering educational television.

The committee recommended that meanwhile, the sixth channel should be made available immediately for community access television, on a continuing trial basis, pending completion of the ministerial review.

On 22 December 1992, the Minister directed the ABA to give favourable consideration to the HORSCOTCI recommendation that the channel be made immediately available for community access television on a continuing trial basis. The ABA decided the HORSCOTCI recommendations can best be accommodated by making the sixth channel available on an area by area basis for open narrowcasting services for community and educational non-profit purposes.

The sixth channel has to date been made available in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Lismore and Brisbane until 28 February 1996, with apparatus licences for each area being issued on a yearly basis.

In order to safeguard community participation in the sixth channel, the ABA developed a set of criteria, against which applicants are assessed.

The purpose of the Access Statement

is to inform applicants of the objectives of the direction of the Minister for Communications and the Arts in respect of use of the sixth channel, i.e. that the channel be made available for community access television on a continuing trial basis, and to provide guidance as to how the objectives may be met by applicants and service providers.

ACCESS STATEMENT

The ABA is committed to making available radiofrequency spectrum (the sixth channel) for allocation to providers of open narrowcasting services for community and educational non-profit use.

In exercising its discretion to issue apparatus licences to applicants proposing to provide such services, the ABA will have regard to the extent to which the service will be accessible to individuals and relevant groups within the area to be served.

In considering the accessibility, the ABA will give consideration to the extent to which the applicant's constituting documents safeguard:

1. the level of openness or non-exclusivity in membership and membership policy;
2. the existence and fairness of any grievance mechanisms relating to membership exclusions;
3. the equity of access for members to programming airtime and the existence of structures including a grievance mechanism, designed to allocate airtime fairly;
4. the flexibility of programming policy and format sufficient to allow new sources of programming to be incorporated, and;
5. the right of the community to take part in a range of activities involved in the operation and management of the service.

The ABA will further look to the constituting documents of the applicant (and any other material on which the applicant relies) for evidence of a consistency with the purposes for which the sixth channel has been or will be made available, that is, community and educational non-profit use.

