

ABA PROPOSES NEW COMMERCIAL TV SERVICE FOR RIVERLAND

The ABA proposes to make a new commercial television licence available in the Riverland area of South Australia.

It also proposes to make two new FM channels available for radio services. The two radio channels have been set aside for ABC or SBS services in line with existing Ministerial reservations.

In addition, the ABA has put forward plans to improve reception of existing commercial and ABC services.

While it has not set aside any radio channels for new commercial or community radio services at this time, the ABA will review this position in 1996.

'These proposals lay the groundwork for a significant expansion of broadcasting services to the Riverland,' said ABA Chairman, Mr Brian Johns. 'In a wider framework, they signal the beginning of the final stage of the ABA's broadcast planning process. The Riverland plan is the first detailed blueprint of the many we will produce to plan future radio and television services throughout Australia.'

Both existing television services in the Riverland, the ABC and RTS, broadcast on the VHF band. Under the ABA's proposals, neither will have to relocate to the UHF band at this time, although the ABA has set aside UHF channels for both.

The ABC television service in the Riverland occupies channel 3, which is part of the radiofrequency spectrum normally used by FM radio. Moving the service from channel 3 to a channel in the UHF band would make more channels available for FM radio services, but at a cost to many television viewers, who would need to purchase new antennas or other receiving equipment to receive ABC television.

Having regard to the costs to Riverland viewers and the low levels of demand for additional commercial or community radio services, the ABA's preferred option is to leave the ABC service where it is for the moment and review the situation at the conclusion of its national planning process, scheduled for 1996.

Any new commercial television serv-

ice will be allocated a UHF television channel.

The ABA's preliminary views are contained in the public planning proposals for the Riverland area. The proposals contain draft licence area plans for the Riverland. These draft licence area plans are the first to be released in the ABA's national planning process to identify and allocate vacant radio and television channels and improve reception of existing services.

The release of the public planning proposals follows extensive public consultation including a public meeting in Berri in November last year. A call for written comment resulted in many submissions, which the ABA has taken into account in preparing the proposals.

Copies of the proposals are available from the ABA on free call (008) 810 241. Written submissions are invited. The closing date is 30 September 1994. Submissions should be addressed to the Planning Officer for the Riverland, Australian Broadcasting Authority, PO Box 34, Belconnen, ACT 2616, quoting file reference 94/6281.

BACKGROUNDER

The licence area plans for the Riverland region of South Australia will contain details of all national, commercial and community radio and television broadcasting services that are to be available using the broadcasting services bands of the radiofrequency spectrum. These are the parts of the spectrum used by AM and FM radio services and VHF and UHF television services.

The ABA may make any vacant channels available for commercial, community or national broadcasting services.

Commercial radio or television broadcasting licences shown as available in a licence area plan will generally be offered via a price-based allocation process to be determined under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (the Act).

MAIN ISSUES

The main planning issues disclosed by the ABA's public planning process are

that there are vacant television channels sufficient to meet all immediately foreseeable demand but a shortage of channels for radio services.

One reason for the shortage is that the ABC television service in the Riverland, ABRS, occupies VHF channel 3, part of the radiofrequency spectrum normally used by FM radio. Since 1984, the Government has pursued a policy of moving television services from VHF channels 3, 4 and 5 to make room for additional FM radio services. In coming to its preliminary views, the ABA has considered the advantages and disadvantages of moving ABRS 3 to a UHF channel (after a period of operation on both frequencies).

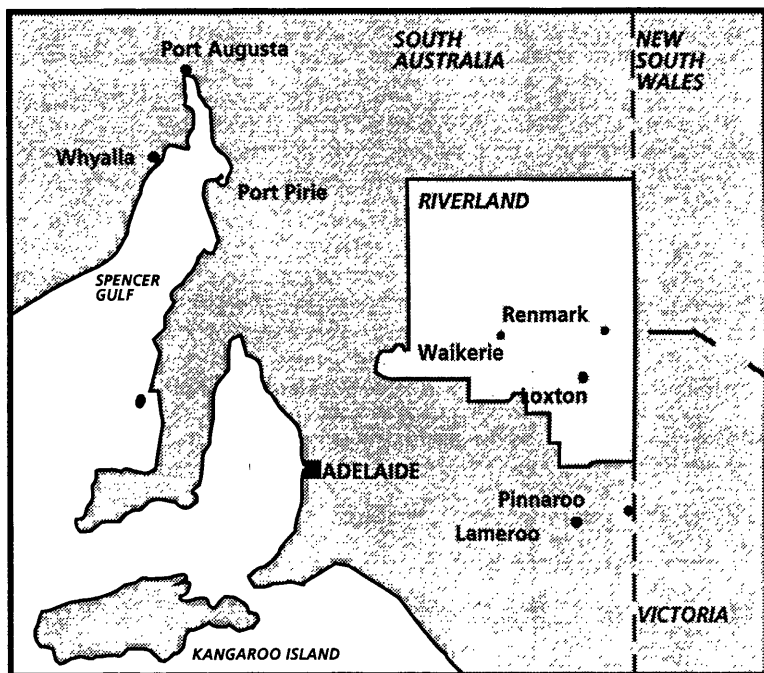
Moving the ABRS 3 service would make room for five additional FM radio services in the Riverland, as against two additional FM services if ABRS 3 does not move. As there are existing Ministerial reservations for two ABC or SBS radio services there is no room for a community radio service or additional commercial radio services in the Riverland unless ABRS 3 moves.

On the other hand, moving ABRS 3 would mean a cost to many television viewers, who would need to purchase new antennas or other receiving equipment to receive ABC television adequately on UHF (no VHF channels are available for use in the area).

Having regard to the costs to Riverland viewers and the low level of demand for additional commercial or community radio services, the ABA's preferred option is to postpone moving ABRS 3 to UHF and review the situation after the completion of the ABA's national planning process, scheduled for 1996. A UHF channel has been made available for use by ABRS to enable the commencement of simulcasting at any time.

OTHER ISSUES

The ABA's public planning proposal also canvasses a number of other issues. To improve poor reception of the existing ABC regional radio service on 1305 kHz, the ABA proposes an increase in the height of the antenna. This



will improve the coverage of the existing service and also prevent interference to services in other areas.

The ABA considered whether the RTS television service should vacate its existing VHF channel 5A and move to a UHF channel, leaving channel 5A available for non-broadcasting uses.

Although channel 5A has been designated for non-broadcasting uses, the ABA is at present unaware of any demand from potential users that would warrant the expense of moving RTS to UHF at this time. An alternative UHF channel has been made available in the draft licence area plan to enable RTS to commence simulcasting at any time.

The ABA's proposal also considers options for establishing commercial television re-transmission facilities in Pinnaroo and Lameroo. It is proposed to extend the licence area of RTS to include Pinnaroo and Lameroo.

As a result of a proposal from RTS to establish a translator service at Waikerie which would also serve the communities of Morgan and Cadell, the option of extending the RTS licence area to these communities is also considered.

It is important to note that the ABA cannot fund or compel others, including the ABC and SBS, to fund additional broadcasting services, or improve reception of existing broadcasting services, in an area. It can only determine the number and characteristics of channels,

completed in September 1993 with the release of the ABA's priorities for planning services across Australia. Stage two is also complete with the publication of the frequency allotment plan earlier this month, setting out the number of radio and television channels in particular areas of Australia. With priorities set and the frequency allotment plan in place, the ABA can now complete this third and final stage of the planning process, over the next two years.

Over the coming months public planning proposals containing draft licence area plans will be circulated for public comment then released in final form. Public consultation for the first round of planning in remote Australia and other high priority areas has been completed.

The ABA expects to complete the following radio and television licence area plans by year's end: the Riverland, Mildura, Griffith (television only), Darwin and the Top End, Kalgoorlie, South East South Australia (television only), Spencer Gulf (television only), Broken Hill, Mount Isa, Central and South West Western Australia, and remote Australia.

The technical parameters for the services detailed in the licence area plans will include frequency allocations, siting and power levels for transmitters necessary to deliver the service. At any time, licensees may approach the ABA to vary licence areas or the technical

including additional translators, that are to be available in an area.

PLANNING

The release of draft licence area plans begins stage three of the planning process.

The first stage was completed

in the licence area plan. Before any variations are approved, the proposals will be the subject of further public consultation.

ALLOCATION OF BROADCASTING SERVICES BANDS LICENCES

With the exception of the capacity reserved for national and community broadcasters, other capacity set out in a licence area plan will be available for commercial licences, under a price-based allocation scheme. The ABA will commence the allocation process after a final licence area plan for each area has been determined.

Exceptions are where an existing commercial radio or television service is the sole service of its type in a market, or 'solus operator'. Both 5RM and RTS are solus operators.

If there are licences for two additional commercial radio services available for allocation in the licence area, an existing solus radio service may be allocated one of those licences on request, in accordance with section 39 of the Act. However, in the case of the Riverland, since no commercial radio licences will be available for allocation at this stage, there is no opportunity for 5RM to obtain such a section 39 licence. If two commercial licences become available for allocation after the ABA reviews the Riverland situation in 1996, 5RM will be able to apply for an additional licence at that time.

If there are one or more licences for additional commercial television services available for allocation in the licence area, an existing solus television service provider may apply for permission to provide a second service for a limited period. The ABA may give its permission, in accordance with section 73 of the Act, if it is satisfied that another person would be unlikely to be interested in, and in a position to, operate another commercial television broadcasting service in that market.

Channels not immediately required for broadcasting services may be allocated for other purposes (such as open narrowcasting) for a fixed period determined by the ABA. At the end of that period the spectrum will once again become available for mainstream broadcasting.

