

# PLANNING FOR BROADCASTING

**THE AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING AUTHORITY IS ENGAGED IN A NATIONAL PLANNING PROCESS TO IDENTIFY AND ALLOCATE VACANT RADIO AND TELEVISION CHANNELS AND IMPROVE RECEPTION OF EXISTING SERVICES. A VITAL ELEMENT IN THIS PROCESS IS CONSULTATION WITH THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE MIX OF SERVICES THEY WANT IN THEIR AREA.**

## **PLANNING FUNCTIONS OF THE ABA**

The planning process is proceeding in three stages. Stages one and two are complete and the ABA is now into stage three—the release of draft licence area plans for the top priority television and radio planning zones.

The first stage was the establishment of priorities for planning services. The second stage involved the preparation of frequency allotment plans that determine the number of channels to be available in particular areas of Australia. The third and final stage is the preparation of licence area plans which determine the number and characteristics of the broadcasting services that are to be available.

### **STAGE 1: PLANNING PRIORITIES**

Firstly, the ABA needed to determine its planning priorities between particular parts of Australia and between particular parts of the broadcasting services bands.

In December 1992, the ABA made an initial call for public submissions on the priorities for planning broadcasting services throughout Australia. Draft planning priorities were released for public comment in May 1993 and the ABA released its determination of planning priorities in September 1993.

As part of the priorities process, the ABA divided Australia into geographic areas, or zones. The ABA defined 23 radio planning zones and 22 television planning zones. It then assigned each of these zones to one of five priority groups, with group one zones having the highest priority and group five the lowest.

### **PRIORITY DETERMINATION**

Australia contains areas with an abundance of broadcasting services as well as areas of relative lack of services. Residents of major cities commonly enjoy the full range of national services (the ABC and SBS), three commercial television services, various commercial radio services and numbers of local- or city-wide community services.

People living in most remote or sparsely settled areas of the country commonly suffer a dearth of all types of broadcasting services. The ABA gave great weight to this factor in its final decisions. The ABA's priorities tend to give higher priority to areas of relative lack than areas of relative abundance.

The ABA gave television planning in large areas of remote Australia and parts of regional Australia which have only one commercial television service.

The ABA has given the lowest priority to almost all mainland areas where five of the six available television channels are used, or intended to be used. Tasmania, with four television channels, has also been given a low priority. No permanent allocation of the sixth television channel can take place until after the Commonwealth Government's review of the television industry, due for completion by July 1997.

In determining radio priorities, the ABA not only considered the issue of abundance versus lack of services, but also the expressed interest in addressing needs for new services. Unlike television, there are no short-term legislative impediments to the introduction of new radio services.

Some parts of Australia have the same television and radio planning priority. Radio planning in large regional areas

of eastern Australia was given a higher priority than television planning in the same areas because the Commonwealth Government's equalisation policy has resulted in three commercial television services in each of these market (two in Tasmania).

The ABA's Planning Priorities are available from the ABA's offices in Sydney or Canberra on request.

### **STAGE 2: FREQUENCY ALLOTMENT PLANS**

The second element of the ABA's planning process is the determination of frequency allotment plans, with wide public consultation.

Frequency allotment plans show the number of channels that are available in each zone to provide broadcasting services that use parts of the broadcasting services bands. It does not cover other broadcasting service delivery media such as high frequency (HF), satellite, microwave distribution systems (MDS) or cable systems.

The frequency allotment plan provides a general framework on which the spectrum capacity can be distributed nationally to accommodate existing radio and television services as well as future demand for additional radio and television services throughout Australia.

This general framework is essential to ensure that planning for individual services in particular areas will not adversely affect channel capacity allotted elsewhere. Through frequency allotment plans it is possible to monitor the impact of planning of services in one area on the channel capacity in neighbouring areas.

Frequency allotment plans do not pro-

# SERVICES

vide any guidance on how the broadcasting services bands should eventually be allocated between various sectors of the broadcasting industry. This is decided by the ABA for a particular part of Australia.

The frequency allotment plans only set out the general framework for channel capacity. They do not show actual frequencies. Many issues are better addressed under close examination during determination of licence area plans in particular parts of Australia. The initial frequency allotment plans may be varied as necessary during the intensive licence area planning process. Changes would be subject to wide public consultation in the affected zone.

In May 1993, the ABA released its first draft frequency allotment plans. In the light of comments received, second draft plans were released for comment in December 1993. The frequency allotment plans were published on 19 August 1994.

## **STAGE 3: LICENCE AREA PLANS**

Licence area plans describe the number and characteristics, including the technical specifications, of services to be available in particular areas of Australia. As each licence area plan is completed, the ABA can proceed, where appropriate, to allocate any vacant channels. In completing a licence area plan, the ABA may also propose any necessary variations to the frequency allotment plans resulting from the preparation, or revision, of licence area plans.

The first draft licence area plans, for licence areas within Group 1 zones are in final preparation. They include radio and television licence area plans for remote Australia, central and south-west Western Australia (Geraldton, Northam, Bunbury, Busselton and Albany) and Darwin and the Top End. They also include television licence area plans for Griffith, Mildura, Renmark, Mt Gambier and Spencer Gulf.

Submissions will be invited on each of the draft licence area plans. Following consultation, the licence area plans for all Group 1 zones are scheduled to be determined by 31 December 1994.

Licence area plans will thus provide industry with radio and television broadcasting service capacity in each part of Australia. The licence area plan will give the proposed frequency or channel the maximum effective radiated power for each licensed service and any constraints that apply to particular channels. Where broadcasting facilities are already established, the licence area plan may indicate the nominal transmitting site so that the integrity of the frequency plan can be maintained.

## **TELEVISION CHANNELS IN THE FM RADIO BAND**

In some parts of Australia, notably in south western Western Australia, Newcastle, Wollongong, Canberra, Spencer Gulf, Townsville and the Riverland (SA), television services occupy VHF television channels 3, 4 and 5, which are within the international FM radio band (VHF Band II).

Previously, Government policy was to clear television services from these channels to make room for FM radio services. In areas where television services remain in Band II, the ABA will examine whether it is necessary to clear those channels when planning radio in that particular part of Australia.

If radio and television planning has the same priority (as in Riverland and South West Western Australia) the issue can be dealt with at that time. If radio planning precedes television planning—as in Wollongong, Newcastle and Canberra—and demand is identified for FM radio services, Band II planning for radio and television will only be completed at the time television planning is to occur.

## **TECHNICAL PLANNING GUIDELINES**

The Act requires the ABA to develop

technical planning guidelines for all services that use the broadcasting services bands. The guidelines cover such matters as the emission standards to apply to services, permitted maximum field strength of services outside the licence area boundary, maximum radiation levels in populated areas, and necessary protection ratios between services on the same and adjacent channels.

Draft Technical Planning Guidelines were published in July 1994. They are expected to be finalised before the end of 1994.

## **ALLOCATION OF CHANNELS FROM THE LICENCE AREA PLAN**

Once a licence area plan is completed for an area, there must be some method of providing the available channels for broadcasting use. For national and community services, the ABA will have reserved capacity as notified by the Minister for Communications and the Arts. The ABA may also have made additional reservations of capacity for these services within each frequency allotment plan and licence area plan.

Where the demand for community broadcasting services is greater than the available capacity, the ABA will use an allocation procedure for selecting the most suitable applicant(s).

The remaining channel capacity may be used for commercial broadcasting, within the terms of current broadcasting policy. The available capacity can be made available by the ABA, which would invite applications for additional commercial radio or television broadcasting licences in each area. Where demand exceeds capacity for commercial services, the ABA will use a price based allocation mechanism to allocate the available licence(s).

Any unused capacity in the licence area plan may be made temporarily available for alternative uses, including open or subscription narrowcasting.

