

ABA OFFERS AM RADIO CHANNELS TO NARROWCASTERS

The ABA has announced it will be offering a number of currently unused high power AM radio channels for open narrowcasting purposes.

Advertisements detailing the procedure to obtain these licences have been placed in the national media and applicants had until 27 May to register their intention to bid with the ABA.

The ABA will conduct a series of open bidding processes to issue the short-term licences in mid June.

'The ABA wants to encourage further diversification in radio services by offering these channels to narrowcasters,' said Mr Peter Webb, ABA Deputy Chairman. 'We have had a number of enquiries from people wanting to provide narrowcasting services using high-power transmitters. Making these channels available will open up opportunities for them to meet community demands for services which are currently not being provided.'

Three licences will be offered in Melbourne for a two and a half year period. One licence will be offered in each of Newcastle, Wollongong and Townsville for a two year period while Sydney, Perth, Adelaide, Geelong, Penrith, Gosford, Katoomba, the Gold Coast and Southport will each have one licence available for a two and a half year period.

The channels will be made available until the completion of the ABA's planning of broadcasting services in each of the relevant areas.

PLANNING

The ABA is currently undertaking a planning process for radio and television services which involves the determination of planning priorities (completed in September 1993), the preparation of frequency allotment plans (FAPs) and licence area plans (LAPs). The ABA will not make any decisions about the permanent allocation of spectrum until after LAPs have been completed so as not to pre-empt planning decisions.

However, there are a number of vacant high-power AM radio channels which do not need any further technical planning (e.g. AM frequencies which have been vacated by commercial licensees after conversion to FM) and which could be used immediately by service providers without diverting ABA resources from the planning process. The ABA is making these channels available for short-term use until the completion of planning in the relevant areas.

The channels being made available are in areas which are low on the list of planning priorities. This means that it will be at least two years before planning is completed in these areas. Rather than leave spectrum vacant which could be used, and for which there is demand, the ABA is releasing the spectrum for use by narrowcasters.

High-power services are services which are licensed to use transmitters with a coverage of more than two kilometres in urban areas and ten kilometres in rural areas.

NARROWCASTING

Narrowcasting services are services which are limited in some way: because of the limited appeal of programming offered; by being offered in a limited location; or for a limited period of time.

The licences to cover the services to be provided will be issued under the *Radiocommunications Act 1992*.

The Spectrum Management Agency (SMA), in consultation with the ABA, has determined the price based system which is to be used by the ABA.

The price based allocation system has been developed because of the level of interest in the provision of narrowcasting services. Some licences were issued for narrowcasting on a first come first served basis immediately after the commencement of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* which introduced the category of narrowcasting services.

As demand increased the ABA decided that the most equitable way of issuing transmitter licences for which there is high demand is through a competitive price-based system.

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Location	Frequency	Date of allocation bidding process	
Perth, WA	(1206kHz)	Tuesday	14 June
Adelaide, SA	(1539kHz)	Wednesday	15 June
Melbourne, Vic	(1593kHz)	Thursday	16 June
Melbourne, Vic	(1422kHz)		
Melbourne, Vic	(1116kHz)		
Geelong, Vic	(1341kHz)		
Sydney, NSW	(1539kHz)	Monday	20 June
Newcastle, NSW	(1413kHz)		
Gosford NSW	(801kHz)		
Penrith, NSW	(1476kHz)		
Katoomba, NSW	(783kHz)		
Wollongong, NSW	(1575kHz)		
Gold Coast, Qld	(1197kHz)	Wednesday	22 June
Southport, Qld	(1593kHz)		
Townsville, Qld	(891kHz)		