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ensure that it can no longer operate with a simply domestic regulatory agenda.

As the formerly distinct industry sectors of broadcasting, telecommunications and computing converge to create new products and markets, a number of powerful global communications companies are moving to form powerful strategic alliances and mergers to take advantage of the opportunities presented.

These new alliances and products transcend

regional meeting on international satellite television broadcasting in Japan.

As part of its drive to build closer relationships with other regulators, the ABA has signed a Memoranda of Understanding with the Federal Communications Commission of the United States and the Independent Broadcasting Authority of South Africa and will enter into a similar arrangement with the British Broadcasting Standards Council.



Colonel Ho Meng Kit (SBA) and Peter Webb (ABA) after the signing of the agreement

national boundaries and in doing so, they present challenges for regulators such as the ABA. Companies that might once have had a domestic focus and domestic ownership and control structures are increasingly shifting their focus to a regional or global level.

To keep abreast of the plans of such companies, particularly those not native to Australia, and the issues raised by the products they produce, the ABA has been forging links with regulators across the Asian region, Europe and in North America.

ABA executives and senior management have initiated negotiations with Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Africa, the United Kingdom, France, Canada and the United States to learn from the experiences of these countries and better understand the regulatory challenges facing them in a converging communications environment.

The ABA has also sought membership of the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union and attended a

Singapore Broadcasting Authority

The Singapore Broadcasting Authority was set up on 1 October 1994 under the SBA Act as a Statutory Board under the Ministry of Information and the Arts. It took over the regulatory and licensing functions previously exercised by the Ministry of Information and the Arts and the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation.

The SBA's key functions, in addition to its licensing responsibilities, are to establish guidelines on programming quality, balance and range in subject matter which cater to the multi-racial character and concerns of Singapore society; to encourage the development of broadcasting and related services through a regulatory framework which is conducive to broadcasters and the broadcasting industry; and to liaise with foreign broadcasters and film producers to promote and market Singapore as a regional hub.

The SBA regulates radio and television broadcasting services as well as narrowcasting services such as cable television, video-on-demand, in-house movie systems in hotels, audio text and videotext services.

ABA visits Queensland Central Coast for radio meetings

QUEENSLAND: ABA representatives visited the Central Coast region of Queensland in June to meet with existing radio broadcasters and those who want to provide new services.

The ABA visited Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Maryborough and Hervey Bay.

The ABA is meeting with these groups to discuss possible new radio services and options for improved reception of existing radio services.

'We are asking aspirant and existing broadcasters to make submissions to the radio planning process. With well prepared



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submissions, the ABA will be better informed of the interest in new and improved radio services prior to releasing our radio planning discussion papers for public comment,' said ABA member, Mr Tim O'Keefe.

The ABA's visit is part of a national planning process for radio services, which involves wide public consultation and follows release of the ABA's priorities for planning of radio and television services across Australia.

Written submissions are also invited from those interested in providing a new radio service in the area.

After considering submissions and all previous proposals made about the planning process, the ABA will release a draft licence area plan for public comment. Licence area plans describe the number and characteristics, including the technical specifications, of services to be available in particular areas of Australia.

An information booklet is available to help to prepare written submissions and can be obtained by writing to the address below or calling (freecall) 1 800 810 241.

Submissions, quoting file number 93/ 7712 should be addressed to:
Planning Officer for Queensland Central Coast,
Australian Broadcasting Authority,
PO Box 34,
Belconnen, ACT 2616.
The closing date for submissions is
29 September 1995.

ABA releases draft hearing guidelines

SYDNEY: The ABA has released draft guidelines for the conduct of public hearings.

'The ABA feels it will assist it in the evaluation of these guidelines to seek the views of stakeholders and has decided to circulate them to relevant parties for comment,' said Mr Peter Webb, ABA Chairman.

'The ABA would like to stress the preparation of these draft guidelines should in no way be construed as an indication that the ABA has decided to hold a public hearing as part of any of its current investigations,' Mr Webb said. 'The ABA will make any decision about whether to hold a hearing on the merits of each particular case.'

The guidelines are intended to apply to formal quasi-judicial hearings as part of investigations where the ABA is considering the use of its formal powers. The ABA will continue to use other forms of hearing to

inform itself on matters relevant to its functions.

Copies of the draft guidelines are available from the ABA on (02) 334 7881.

Convergence debate not focussed on outcomes says ABA Chairman

SYDNEY: The debate about convergence-the merging of telecommunications, broadcasting and computing-has, in some respects lost touch with the present and is disproportionately focussed on a future whose shape is too dim to make out, Mr Peter Webb, Chairman said.

Speaking at the Cable and Telephony Conference at the Hilton in Sydney.

'I think what we need to focus on are the socially desirable outcomes we want to achieve in a convergent future, rather than the regulatory arrangements by which we may be able to bring them about,' Mr Webb said.

The Government's Broadband Services Expert Group has identified many of these objectives in its report released earlier this year.

The regulatory agencies presently assigned to the areas of broadcasting, telecommunications and competition all have a particular core area of competency and skill and mostly deal with issues that are only of relevance to their particular area. For example, content regulation involves cultural, industry development and societal welfare objectives.

Where there are kindred functions, such as between the ABA and the Spectrum Management Agency in spectrum planning and the ABA and the Trade Practices Commission in relation to the allocation of pay TV licences, the agencies involved have recognised the potential for collaboration and the need to ensure the issues thrown up by convergence are addressed in a coordinated way.

The major regulatory issue arising out of convergence so far, that of the attitude of Optus Vision to service providers, was dealt with by Austel after all the regulators conferred and cooperated on the matter, each bringing its own perspective to bear on the issue.

'The ABA has found that this model of distinct but networked agency responsibilities has been effective in practice because it provides the necessary expertise and coordination,' Mr Webb said. 'This model does not mean more regulation, but more informed, coordinated and efficient regulation.'

For copies of Mr Webb's speech, please call (02) 334 7881. 