



The ABA has released two new draft licence area plans covering the south west of Western Australia.

ABA proposals for TV and radio in south west WA

The ABA has proposed new television and radio services for the south west region of Western Australia in two draft licence area plans (LAPs) released for public comment. One draft LAP is for television and the other one is for radio.

Television

The ABA's proposals for television include a second commercial UHF television service, covering the same area as the Golden West Network (GWN) commercial television service; and reserving television channels for a future SBS and a national/community service throughout the south west region.

So far no interest has been expressed in running a second commercial television service for the south west area alone.

'If this lack of entrepreneurial interest continues during the public comment period, the ABA may consider other options available to improve services in south west Western Australia,' said Mr Bob Scott, Acting ABA Chairman.

Local television operator GWN may only provide a second service at the ABA's discretion. The Act does not allow the ABA to grant such a request automatically because of the 'one station to a market rule' for television.

'Under section 73 of the Act, the ABA would allow GWN to provide an extra service only if it is satisfied that no other

person is likely to be interested in, and likely to be in a position to, operate the second commercial television licence,' he said.

Radio

For radio, the ABA proposes new channel availability for:

- extension of ABC services throughout the region;
- at least one, or possibly two, additional AM and/or FM commercial services in Albany, Bridgetown, Bunbury, Katanning, Mandurah, Narrogin and Northam;
- community radio services in Bridgetown, Bunbury, Collie, Katanning, Mandurah, Margaret River, Narrogin, Northam, Wagin, Albany and York;
- new local or wide coverage open narrowcasting services in Albany, Bunbury, Busselton, Mandurah, Margaret River, Northam and Pemberton.

'Under section 39 of the Broadcasting Services Act, where two new commercial radio licences are available in a market, the existing sole operator can immediately apply to us for one of them,' Mr Scott said.

If the sole operator in any of the region's seven commercial radio markets is interested in applying for an additional licence under s.39, the ABA will offer two new commercial radio licences in that market when it releases the final LAPs.

However, if the sole opera-

tor does not want a second licence under s.39, the ABA may make one additional commercial radio licence available in that market, and it will be allocated to the highest bidder. The sole operator will be able to participate in this bidding process along with any other interested parties.

The number of FM radio channels available in the south west will be limited as the ABA proposes not clearing local television services, ABC and GWN, from the VHF broadcasting band because of the widespread loss of existing television services and the high cost to the public and broadcasters.

This will result in AM channels being offered to satisfy demand for additional commercial and community radio services in several of the markets in the south west.

If there is no interest in any one of the new commercial and community radio licences, the spectrum assigned to that licence could be used for other purposes, including narrowcasting.

Public comment

'The ABA's proposals will now undergo public comment and if confirmed will lay the groundwork for a new commercial television service, as well as additional radio services for the people of south west WA,' said Mr Scott.

'This is part of a national planning process which will

result in detailed blueprints for radio and television services Australia-wide.'

He said it was important to understand the ABA's planning role.

'The ABA identifies vacant radio and television channels in an area and determines the number and type of services to be made available in a particular area. We cannot fund extra services, make others fund extra services, or demand improved reception of existing services.'

Except for second licences for sole operators, the commercial licences (which must be renewed every five years) will be auctioned via a price-based allocation process now being finalised by the ABA. New community licences will be allocated via a merit-based process, also being completed.

'The ABA may decide to auction commercial licences from more than one area at the same time. This suggests we will start auctioning the first commercial licences in early 1996,' said Mr Scott.

Submissions

Written submissions should be sent to

Planning Officer for South West WA

ABA

PO Box 34

Belconnen, ACT 2616

by **31 October 1995**.

Final licence area plans for the south west region are likely to be announced in late March 1996.



The two draft LAPs, a discussion paper and microfiche copies of submissions are available at local libraries in Albany, Bridgetown, Bunbury, Collic, Katanning, Mandurah, Margaret River, Narrogin, Northam and Wagin, or on freecall 1800 810 241.

The planning process

The release of the two draft plans follows extensive public consultation by the ABA, which held public meetings in Albany, Bunbury, Busselton, Mandurah, Margaret River and Northam.

Almost five hundred written submissions were received and considered in preparing the ABA's discussion document.

Draft plans contain details of all government, commercial and community radio and television broadcasting services to be available on the broadcasting services bands of the radiofrequency spectrum (part of the spectrum used by AM and FM radio services and VHF and UHF television services) in the region.

The discussion document provides background and detailed explanation of the plans.

Issues

Band I clearance costs

The main constraint on the future development of broadcasting in the south west region is a shortage of FM channels for radio services due to the operation of GWN and ABC within Band II of the VHF-FM spectrum, which is used internationally for FM radio.

The ABA has considered the advantages and disadvantages of moving GWN and/or ABC to alternative channels on the UHF band.

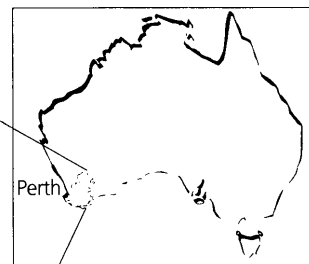
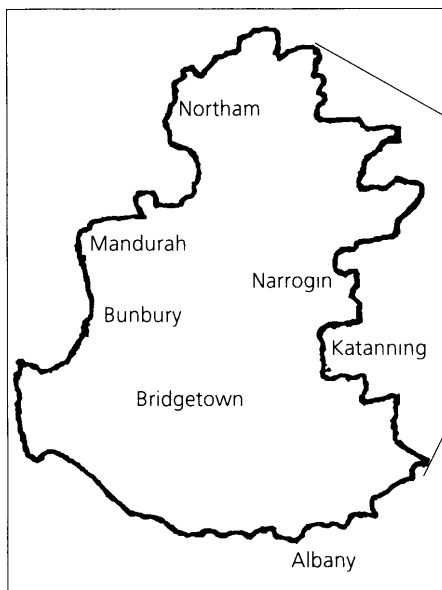
Moving the GWN and ABC services would enable the ABA to plan up to 15 high power FM services throughout the south west region. On the other hand, moving GWN and ABC would mean a cost to many television viewers, who would need to purchase new antennas or other receiving equipment to receive television adequately on UHF.

Such a move would also result in costs to the broadcaster who would have to provide new transmission equipment.

The ABA's preliminary investigation into the likely coverage of a high powered UHF service located at Mt Lennard, suggests that about 20 000 people would be likely to lose television services they enjoy at present.

The ABA estimates the possible costs of the move from VHF to UHF transmissions could be up to \$9M for the 46 000 households affected to purchase UHF antennas, and up to \$4M for each existing television broadcaster.

The ABA's preferred option is to leave GWN and ABC television on VHF for at least ten years. This decision was reached after comparing the considerable costs to viewers and broadcasters and the inferior coverage qualities of a UHF signal in the heavily timbered and more isolated areas of the south west compared with the existing Band II VHF, against the levels of demand for additional national, commercial and community radio services.




Bunbury, Collic, Katanning, Mandurah, Margaret River, Narrogin, Northam and Wagin, would not be allocated for at least two years after the final LAP, as there are not yet any groups holding temporary transmissions these areas.

The proposed community radio licences in Albany and York would be allocated as soon as the LAP is final, as local groups are already holding temporary transmissions.

If channel capacity for additional commercial radio services in Albany, Bridgetown, Bunbury, Katanning, Mandurah, Narrogin and Northam is required, the new services will be on either the AM or FM band due to the scarcity of FM channels in some areas of the region.

It is proposed to offer commercial AM channels in Bridgetown, Katanning, Mandurah and Narrogin. It is also proposed that AM channel capacity be planned for community broadcasting in Bunbury, Collic, Katanning, Mandurah, Margaret River, Narrogin, Northam and Wagin.

FM channel capacity will be offered for commercial radio services in Bunbury, Albany and Northam and for community broadcasting in Albany, Bridgetown and York. In the event that a second additional commercial radio licence were to be made available in Bunbury, it would be on the AM band.

All new commercial services would have the same licence areas as existing operators. 

Television services

In the south west region, channels will be reserved, in accordance with the Minister's s.31 notices, for two national and a national or community television service, at the main transmitter sites Mt Lennard, Mawson Trig, Mt Barker and Mt Latham and at 13 related transmitter sites.

The ABA proposes to make a low power UHF channel (channel 51) available at Mandurah for an open narrowcasting television service (for community and educational non-profit purposes).

This would be available for the same period of time the sixth high power channel is available for this purpose in other areas of Australia.

Television options

The ABA also canvassed options operators could use to improve reception of GWN and ABC services at Bridgetown, Manjimup, Margaret River, Nannup, Northam, Pemberton, Walpole and Yallingup.

Radio services

The proposed community radio licences in Bridgetown,