



The ABA has called for public submissions to its inquiry into the future use of the sixth television channel.

ABA inquiry into the use of the sixth television channel

The Minister for Communications and the Arts, Senator the Hon. Richard Alston, has directed the ABA to conduct an inquiry into the use of the sixth channel and report to him by the end of February 1997. Some of the options specified in the Minister's terms of reference relate to use of the sixth channel for community television, educational television, arts television (including as an additional outlet for independent film producers) and a children's channel.

In examining the options, the Minister has directed the ABA to consider a broad range of objectives, but especially those that further the achievement of diversity, choice, competition and innovation.

The ABA has released an issues paper which sets out the background to the inquiry, its terms of reference, discusses some of the options and provides details on how to make a submission. The closing date for submissions is 30 August 1996.

Mr Peter Webb, Chairman of the ABA, welcomed the direction and said the ABA will be considering all options put to it in submissions over the next few months.

'For most parts of Australia, the sixth channel is the last terrestrial television capacity available for use under current

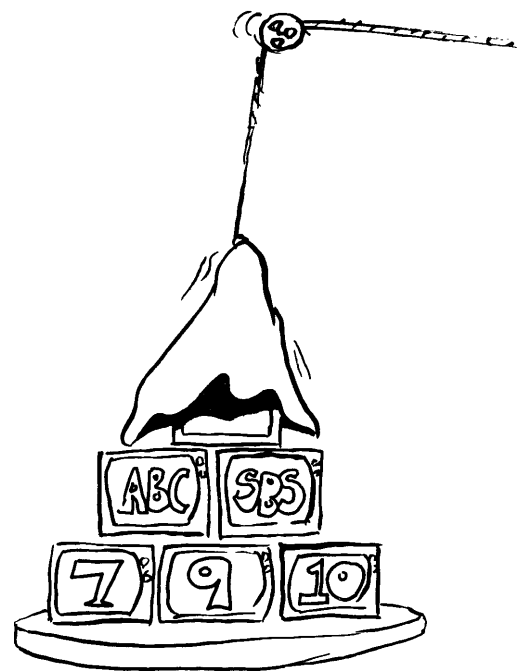
technology. This makes the sixth channel an important national asset and we encourage people to put forward proposals for its future use,' Mr Webb said.

In order to meet the Minister's terms of reference, submitters have been requested to address a number of issues, including funding and corporate arrangements; matters such as regulatory and implementation implications of options which emerge from submissions will be looked at later in the inquiry.

What is the sixth channel?

Most places in Australia have sufficient channels for six television services (SBS, ABC, three commercials and one spare). The nominally spare channel is colloquially known as the 'sixth channel'.

The sixth channel should therefore be seen as capacity for the provision of a sixth television service in those areas currently served by terrestrial television. The transmission plans for this sixth service generally provide for a main transmitter in each area, and where adequate coverage cannot be achieved with a single transmitter, associated transmitters (commonly known as translator stations) to fill in coverage gaps.



Where the sixth channel is not available

There are two locations in mainland Australia where the 'spare' channel capacity has already been used for commercial services. These are in the Central Coast of New South Wales, and the Gold Coast of Queensland. In these places, the metropolitan stations' licence areas overlap with the adjacent regional stations' licence areas, and for that reason, eight services are already being transmitted. This has used up the available capacity.

Current use of the sixth channel

A 1992 review into the use of the sixth channel, by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport, Communications and Infrastructure, gave priority to educational use. As educational interests were not ready to use fully the channel in capital cities, the Committee recommended that, rather than prevent use of the spectrum, the sixth channel should be made available for community television on a trial basis. Community television broadcasting services are those



which are used for non-profit community purposes and which can be received freely by the general public on commonly available equipment.

There is, however, no specific provision in the Broadcasting Services Act for the ABA to issue licences for temporary community television services. The ABA has managed this omission by making spectrum available for community and educational purposes and issuing apparatus licences to community broadcasting groups. The services are provided under open narrowcasting class licences. The ABA has determined a special condition that attaches to each apparatus licence issued for community purposes. This condition provides that the open narrowcasting service be used for community and educational non-profit purposes.

In order to safeguard community access to the sixth chan-

nel, the ABA developed an access statement which sets out the criteria an applicant must satisfy before an apparatus licence is issued. These criteria include the extent to which a service will be accessible to individuals and relevant groups within the area to be served.

Using these criteria, the ABA has made the sixth channel available on an area-by-area basis until 30 June 1997, and has issued temporary apparatus licences in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth/Mandurah, Adelaide, Hobart, Bendigo and Lismore.

There are great variations in how the community television broadcasters are constituted and the programs they provide. A major issue for community television services is the cost associated with providing programs of a quality attractive to viewers. Some of the aspirant community broadcasters have had difficulty obtaining the funding required for their programming needs and have limited capacity to transmit widely.

Submissions

Submissions from interested parties should reach the ABA by 5pm Friday 30 August 1996. These may be sent by e-mail to 6thchannel@aba.gov.au; on disk or in writing (six copies), to The Manager, Sixth Channel Inquiry, Australian Broadcasting Authority, P O Box Q500, QVB Post Office, NSW 1230, or faxed to (02) 9334 7799.

Unless specified as confidential, all submissions will be made available on the ABA's Web site, the ABA's offices in Sydney and Canberra and the Spectrum Management Agency's offices in the Northern Territory and other States. ☐

Debra Richards, ABA Director Programs, reports back on the Asian Summit on Child Rights and the Media which was held in Manila from 2-5 July 1996 as a follow-up to the World Summit on Children and Television held in Melbourne last year.

Asian declaration on child rights and the media

The Asian Summit on Child Rights and the Media was held in Manila from 2 to 5 July. The summit was a follow-up to the first World Summit on Children and Television held in Melbourne in March 1995. The theme of the Manila summit was, 'In the best interests of all children' and covered all forms of the media.

UNICEF was a major sponsor of the summit and the organising committee also included the Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU), Asia Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC), the Philippine Children's Television Foundation, Council for the Welfare of Children and commercial network in the Philippines, GMA 7.

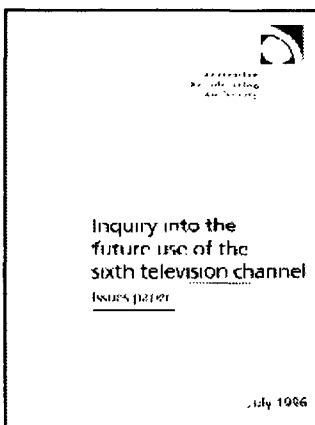
Main issues covered at the summit included access, the children's voice, cultural imperatives and protection of children—and how each coun-

try is dealing with these issues.

The official program was complemented by a series of 'Children's Voices' videos with children's views about all forms of media. These were from Malaysia, Cambodia, Korea, Philippines, Japan, Australia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Mongolia, Pakistan, India and Thailand. There were delegates from all these countries as well as from Vietnam, Bangladesh, Iran, Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan, Brunei, South Africa, New Zealand, the US and the UK.

The main outcome of the summit was the 'Asian Declaration On Child Rights and the Media' (see opposite) agreed to and endorsed by the delegations.

The declaration covers all media for and about children in terms of what it should do and how it should be achieved.



The Inquiry Into The Future Use of the Sixth Television Channel - Issues Paper may be obtained by calling Delphine Matthew at the ABA on (02) 9334 7830 or freecall 1800 226 667.

The issues paper is available at ABA's Web site at <http://www.dca.gov.au/aba/6chissue.html>