



ABA allocates its first community radio broadcasting licence under its new merit-based assessment process.

New community radio licence for Mildura

The ABA has allocated its first community radio broadcasting licence under a new merit-based assessment process, to the Association for the Blind Ltd.

The licence will enable the provision of a service in the Mildura/Sunraysia area targeting people who have a print handicap. It will be broadcast on FM 107.5 MHz in Mildura and FM 89.1 MHz in Robinvale; the licensee has 12 months to get the service up and running.

'The proposed Mildura service will, to a great extent, meet the needs of the print handicapped community within the Mildura/Sunraysia region,' said Mr Peter Webb, ABA Chairman. 'No other service in the region presently satisfies those needs.'

The licence is the first to be allocated under the ABA's newly developed process for new community radio licences. The merit-based process determines the extent to which the proposed service will meet the existing and future needs of the local community.

The ABA has allocated this licence after a process of consultation with the local community, seeking its views on what additional broadcasting services were needed in the region.

The ABA completed the licence area plan for Mildura in July 1995. Two additional community radio broadcasting licences were to be made

available for the region. The application for the other community radio broadcasting licence is presently being assessed. The licence area of the existing community radio broadcasting service, 3HOT FM, was also extended to include the towns of Robinvale and Wentworth.

The ABA planning process

The release of licence area plans (LAPs) is stage three of the planning process. The first stage was completed in September 1993 with the release of the ABA's priorities for planning services across Australia. Stage two is also complete with the publication of the frequency allotment plan (FAP) in August 1994, setting out the number of radio and television channels in particular areas of Australia. With priorities set and the FAP in place, the ABA can now complete this third and final stage of the planning process.

Licence area plans

A licence area plan describes the number and characteristics of radio and/or television services to be made available for allocation in an area. A radio licence area plan contains all national, commercial, community and open narrow-casting radio broadcasting services to be available in the



broadcasting services bands of the radiofrequency spectrum (part of the spectrum used by AM and FM radio services) in the region.

Community licence allocation

Section 80 of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* provides for the allocation of community broadcasting licences.

The ABA uses a merit-based allocation process where applicants compete on the basis of merit for the licence. The process includes opportunity for the public to comment on applications received.

The ABA must also regard:

(a) the extent to which the proposed service would meet the existing and perceived future needs of the community within the licence area of the proposed service;

(b) the nature and diversity of that community's interests;

(c) the nature and diversity of other broadcasting services (including national broadcasting services) available within that licence;

(d) the capacity of the applicant to provide the proposed service;

(e) the undesirability of one person being in a position to exercise control of more than one community broadcasting licence that is a broadcasting services bands licence in the same licence area; and

(f) the undesirability of the Commonwealth, a State or Territory or a political party being in a position to exercise control of a community broadcasting licence.

The Minister may also give directions to the ABA to give priority to a particular community interest or interests.