



New metropolitan radio licences likely by end of 1998

BRISBANE: Subject to any delays caused by legal challenges, the ABA should be in a position to allocate new commercial radio licences in some metropolitan markets by the end of next year, Mr Peter Webb, ABA Chairman, said at the Annual Convention of the Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters in Brisbane last month.

'Licence area planning in remote Australia is now complete. Planning for regional Australia is making good progress, and should be finalised by mid 1998. The ABA will commence consultation in metropolitan markets early next year,' said Mr Webb.

'Planning should be complete in some metropolitan markets in time for licence auctions to be held before the end of 1998. The remaining metropolitan auctions will probably take place in the first half of 1999.'

The ABA's planning process will continue to be characterised by consultation with the public and the industry, Mr Webb said. A channel availability paper for Perth, of the kind already released for Sydney, should be released in November this year. Such papers canvass the various options for utilising channels to best advantage.

The ABA plans to release zone information booklets, which contain information about the nature and extent of existing services in a market, details of channel availability and indications of interest in providing new services, for Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth early next year.

'General meetings in all metropolitan markets with aspirants and incumbents, as well as representative bodies like FARB, are likely to be held in March/April next year,' Mr Webb said.

Mr Webb also urged caution about the availability and cost of digital radio broadcasting (DRB) receivers.

'One of the imponderables about DRB is the cost, and therefore the acceptability, of receivers. They are starting to come on the market and should be available from the middle of next year. Initial estimates put the cost in the A\$1000-1500 range. Top of the range models come with digital screens on which high definition pictures and data can be shown. This facility may prove to have considerable appeal to the imagination of Australian operators.'

'The Americans have not really produced a viable system to rival the European Eureka 147 system. If they decided to go with Eureka 147,

one could feel more comfortable about the prospects for the world-wide success of digital radio broadcasting. But at the moment, the world is without American participation in the receiver market.'

'The ABA, as one of the planning agencies involved in the move to digital, will want to see what the receiver manufacturers can tell us over the next twelve months or so and what the vehicle builders in particular have to say about the prospects for drive time in digital,' he said.

Major rollout of temporary community radio stations

SYDNEY: The ABA has invited early applications for temporary community broadcasting licences in 38 radio markets (see tables opposite).

'The great majority of these communities have no community radio service at present,' said ABA Chairman, Mr Peter Webb. 'These are areas which meet a simple test for early licensing.'

'The ABA will consider early applications from aspirant community radio broadcasters who operate in areas which meet three criteria. The area must have a radio channel which is likely to be available for a new community radio service in the long-term. A temporary channel which does not cause interference must have been already identified and there must only be one applicant in that area,' he said.

The ABA is also working on a licensing policy to enable the extension of temporary community broadcasting licences to other areas where the licensing issues are more complex. The ABA has now received comments from interested parties on a range of issues in response to a discussion paper on the implementation of a new temporary community radio broadcasting licence scheme.

The key issues for the policy will be what channels can be used for temporary broadcasting, how the ABA will determine the amount of broadcasting air-time that should be made available and how to manage competition for access to limited broadcasting air-time.

New community radio licences

REMOTE AUSTRALIA: The ABA has allocated community radio broadcasting licences for the Halls Creek region of Western Australia, Torres