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ABA to accept late submission on plan for television in regional WA

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After an approach from regional television network operator Prime Television, the new owner of the Golden West Network (GWN), the ABA has given Prime until the Australia Day long weekend to make a submission to its public planning process.

'The ABA was hopeful licence area planning could be completed before the end of 1996,' said Mr Tim O'Keefe, ABA Member. 'The recent sale of GWN to Prime has, however, raised questions about whether GWN's position on planning issues has changed as a result. The existing television service provider is obviously an important submitter to the planning process and the ABA feels it is only fair to give it an opportunity to make its view known.'

Earlier this month, Prime approached the ABA seeking time to review GWN's sub-

missions to the planning process to date. Prime also indicated it might wish to make a submission itself. The ABA subsequently met with Prime and agreed to consider a late submission.

GWN is the provider of the only existing commercial television services throughout regional and remote Western Australia. It is also a potential provider of new television services, under s.38A of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*.

Planning for commercial television in regional and remote Western Australia

The ABA is currently preparing licence area plans for television in the parts of Western Australia currently served by commercial television broadcasting services SSW, GTW, VEW and WAW. All these licences are controlled by the Golden West Network (GWN). Between them these licence

areas cover virtually the entire State, excluding Perth.

In August 1996, the ABA released a discussion paper on planning issues in regional and remote Western Australia, entitled: *Planning for commercial television in regional and remote Western Australia*. At the time, the ABA expressed the hope that planning for television in Western Australia would be completed before the end of 1996.

The August 1996 paper invited submissions on the option of showing an additional commercial television broadcasting service as available with a licence area encompassing the present SSW, GTW, VEW and WAW licence areas.

The second service would have the same technical specifications as the second services previously proposed in draft licence area plans for the VEW and GTW licence areas and identified as an option in the SSW licence area. The technical specifications for the WAW part of the licence area would use UHF channels and

would be designed to match the technical specifications of the existing WAW service. The ABA would also review the current proposed technical specifications to remove any duplication caused by overlaps in the existing four licence areas.

The ABA asked that any expressions of interest in providing a second service should also address three key issues:

- the feasibility of increasing the number of commercial television broadcasting services in areas;
- whether or not any additional services would offer wide coverage comparable to existing services; and
- the likely impact of any increase in the number of services on the coverage of matters of local significance.

In its response to the August discussion paper, GWN supported the allocation to it of a second television licence under s.38A as a longer term option, but asked for the ABA to delay making an additional service available. 