



On 24 March 1998, Senator the Hon. Richard Alston, Minister for Communications, the Information Economy and the Arts, made the following announcements about the future of broadcasting in Australia.

# Digital broadcasting in 2001

## Television

Commercial and national free-to-air broadcasters will be required to commence digital terrestrial television broadcasting (DTTB) in metropolitan areas by 1 January 2001, and in regional areas from that date onwards so that all areas have DTTB by 1 January 2004.

DTTB will enable access to a wide array of new and enhanced programming and datacasting services such as viewer-initiated multiple views of sporting events, advanced information services which are linked to television programs, and direct terrestrial television access to material provided via the Internet.

Free-to-air broadcasters will be loaned 7MHz of spectrum free of upfront charge. After the eight year simulcasting period they will be required to return the equivalent of their loaned spectrum to the Commonwealth.

Broadcasting in high definition television (HDTV) will start from a specified date. The free-to-air broadcasters will be consulted on the start-up date and the required amount of programming.

Loaned spectrum will return to the Commonwealth if the free-to-air broadcasters do not start DTTB by the designated start-up date, or if they do not comply with the HDTV requirements.

Unused portions of the loaned digital spectrum may be used to provide datacasting services. Fees will be charged for providing these services.

Available broadcasting spectrum not required by the free-to-air broadcasters for digital conversion will be allocated on a competitive basis for datacasting services. Existing free-to-air broadcasters will be precluded from bidding for this additional spectrum.

Commercial free-to-air broadcasters will not be able to use their digital spectrum to provide multichannelling or subscription television services.

The community television sector will be guaranteed free access to the spectrum needed to broadcast one standard definition digital channel.

The Government is extending the prohibition on new commercial free-to-air entrants until December 2008.

Local content requirements will apply in the digital environment. All free-to-air broadcasters will be required to provide a closed captioning service for all prime time programming as well as for news and current affairs broadcast outside prime time.

## Report

Before 1 January 2001, the Department of Communications and the Arts will inquire into and report to the Minister on:

- regulations governing allowable enhanced programming and television datacasting services;
- possible legislative amendments to respond to convergence between broadcasting and non-broadcasting services;
- whether the ABC and SBS should be allowed to transmit

multichannel programming; and

• rules governing the retransmission of free-to-air digital services on subscription television.

## DTTB Planning and Steering Committee

The Department will also convene a DTTB Planning and Steering Committee with the ABA, the ACA and all relevant industry sectors which will:

- advise on transmission standards and compatibility requirements (including issues relating to conditional access systems);
- commence detailed technical planning; and
- identify broadcasting spectrum not required for the digital conversion of free-to-air broadcasters.

## Working group

The ACA as Chair and the ABA will report to the Minister on the structure and the conditions of the allocation of the television datacasting spectrum.

## Digital television review

In 2005, the Department will conduct a review of digital television, and will report to the Minister on whether:

- all spectrum available for allocation has been identified and efficiently structured;
- new commercial free-to-air entrants should be allowed after 31 December 2008;
- free-to-air broadcasters should be allowed to provide multichannel and/or pay TV services; and

- a simulcasting period other than eight years should be prescribed.

## Radio

The Government has put planning processes in place which will allow the start up of digital radio services in Australia in 2001.

Commercial, community and national (ABC and SBS) radio broadcasters will be able to convert to digital, but will be required to simulcast for a period to ensure that listeners are not disadvantaged.

There will also be opportunities for new digital commercial radio services, with the number and timing of new entrants to be determined as part of the planning process.

## Planning and Steering Committee

The Minister will be inviting the ABA, the ACA and industry representatives to participate in a Planning and Steering Committee to develop a comprehensive planning framework which will enable digital radio services to commence transmission in Australia in 2001.

Planning will proceed on the basis that the Eureka 147 system will be used to provide digital services, operating generally in L band spectrum but with consideration of VHF spectrum in regional areas. Existing broadcasters will share a multiplex facility which can provide five CD quality radio services.