



# News Update

## **New commercial radio licence for Port Lincoln**

The ABA has allocated a second commercial radio licence to Lanson Investments Pty Ltd, licensee of 5CC, Port Lincoln, South Australia.

This is the 54th commercial radio licence allocated by the ABA to a regional operator providing the only commercial service in a market.

The new service, 5CCG, will cover the same area as the existing AM service and will broadcast on FM 89.9 MHz in Port Lincoln.

The fee for the licence was \$10 000. Lanson Investments Pty Ltd now has 12 months to get the new service up and running.

## **Adult verification systems for Internet content**

The ABA has decided on minimum system requirements for restricted access systems for Internet content. An ABA declaration setting out the system requirements was tabled in Parliament on 7 December.

Restricted access systems are adult verification devices that allow people who are 18 years or older to access adult material on the Internet, whilst protecting children from exposure to material that may be unsuitable for them.

'The declaration provides commercial certainty for the Internet industry,' said Professor David Flint, ABA Chairman. 'The requirements set by the ABA are consistent with Internet practices used throughout the world.'

The declaration sets out the process by which a person can gain access to Internet content that is likely to be rated 'R' by the Classification Board. It relies on credit card validation as a means to check that a person is 18 years or older.

Internet content hosted in Australia that is likely to be classified 'R' and not protected by a compliant restricted access system is potentially prohibited content. It may be taken down from the Internet if the ABA receives a complaint about that content after 1 January 2000.

The declaration was based on submissions to the ABA from industry and community groups and individual users. The submissions were in response to a consultation paper that set out draft system specifications. The declaration also provides for off-line registration processes and anticipates the future use of digital signatures as an electronic means of identity authentication.

## **Review of time sharing policy**

The ABA is reviewing the time share arrangements for temporary community broadcasting licences.

The ABA is proposing to limit time periods for new groups and provide more established groups with longer time frames.

The ABA will consult with the community sector and affected groups before implementing any such changes. The ABA is aware that a number of temporary community broadcasters have experienced financial and operational difficulties because of the requirement to share spectrum with other groups.

'The legislative provisions for temporary community licences require the ABA to licence all eligible applicants. In practice this means that if the number of applicants exceeds the number of available channels, the groups are required to share,' said Professor David Flint, ABA Chairman.

ABA General Manager, Mr Giles Tanner explained, 'The ABA's current policy is that all groups sharing a channel will be given equal time periods.'

The ABA is aware that this policy gives no incentive for groups to merge and may actually encourage groups to splinter. Moreover, established groups who may have had full use of a channel can find their access to airtime suddenly halved when a new group emerges.

## **Applications invited for new community radio licences**

The ABA has invited applications for six new community radio broadcasting licences in the Australian Capital Territory and adjoining areas of New South Wales.

'Allocation of new community broadcasting licences has begun in Canberra, Tuggeranong, Queanbeyan and Yass as a result of the ABA's public planning process being finalised in these areas,' said Professor David Flint, ABA Chairman. 'The planning process identified a demand for community services that are operated by people living in these communities.'

Free-to-air community broadcasting service licences must be allocated on the basis of merit. Under this system, in areas where there is only one applicant for a community broadcasting licence, the ABA need only decide if the applicant merits a licence.

**The Restricted Access Systems Declaration 1999 (No. 1) is on the ABA web site**  
<[www.aba.gov.au](http://www.aba.gov.au)>.



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When there is more than one applicant, the ABA may also have to choose on the basis of comparative merit. Alternatively, applicants could combine to present a unified application.

Prospective applicants should obtain a copy of the free information booklet, *Allocation of Community Broadcasting Licences (Broadcasting Services Bands)*. The booklet also contains the application form, Form ABA 32, *Application for the Allocation of a Community Broadcasting Licence (Broadcasting Services Bands)*. For copies of the booklet and information about how to apply for a community broadcasting licence, call the ABA's Licensing Section on (02) 9334 7700.

Applications for the licences must be received before 5.00 p.m. Friday 4 February 2000. From 11 February, copies of any applications received will be placed in the following relevant public libraries; Belconnen Town Centre Library; Civic Library, Canberra; Tuggeranong Town Centre Library; Woden Town Centre Library; Queanbeyan Council Library; and Yass Library. The ABA welcomes written submissions from members of the public in relation to the applications received. Submissions should be lodged with the ABA by 5.00 p.m. on Friday 25 February 2000.

## **GWN analog to digital digital conversion in remote WA**

The ABA believes it is undesirable for any free to air television broadcaster to be able to choose a means of transmission that requires a large investment by viewers and that does not allow viewers to access other services licensed to serve their area.

This is the ABA's conclusion following the completion of its investigation into whether the legitimate needs of viewers were addressed during the transition of the Golden West Network television service WAW Remote Western Australia from an analog to a digital satellite delivered signal last year.

'While this kind of strategy may be legitimate in the case of pay TV, it should not be part of the free to air system. Free to air broadcasters have unique obligations to the community and as a result enjoy special dispensations, including a degree of protection from competition,' said Professor David Flint, ABA Chairman.

There are various ways in which access to the

full suite of services could be achieved, depending on the circumstances. These include: (i) that all free-to-air broadcasters could use the one satellite; or (ii) that each satellite could carry the full range of free-to-air services for that area; or (iii) that all service providers could ensure, in some other way, that reception equipment is able to receive all services.

At present, there is no person or federal government agency with the power to ensure this outcome. This is because there is no single regulatory body to regulate all the broadcasters, satellite service providers and intermediaries involved, including commercial and national broadcasters, telecommunications carriers and satellite service providers.

The ABA believes that it is in the long term public interest of viewers that such power should reside in a single regulatory body and will be referring this matter to the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts pursuant to its function to report on the operation of the Act.

In the ABA's view, there were three major factors which influenced whether or not GWN viewers in regional and remote Western Australia made the transition from the analog signal delivered by the Optus satellite to the digital signal delivered by the Telstra satellite during the period when the services were simulcast.

The first was the length of time set aside for simulcasting and the specific timing of that simulcasting. The second was the belief among many viewers that Optus would continue to provide the WAW service in analog until Optus also converted to digital. The third and most important reason is that most direct-to-home viewers and self-help viewers wanted to be able to receive all available broadcasting services with the purchase of one decoder.

A copy of the ABA's investigation report is available on the ABA's web site, <[www.aba.gov.au](http://www.aba.gov.au)>.

## **2001—A Digital Odyssey**

The 1999 ABA Broadcasting Planning Seminar on 8 and 9 November provided more than 120 participants with the opportunity to focus on the digital future. Giles Tanner, ABA General Manager introduced the seminar and captured the audience's attention with remarks on the new and exciting digital age we are all entering.