



News Update

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>.

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.