

Ennio Ravanello, ABA Engineering and Information Services attended the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual meeting of the ABU General Assembly held from 2–10 November in Manila, the Philippines. This is his report of the meeting of the Engineering Committee and the General Assembly.

## Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union annual conference

The Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) is a professional association of broadcasting organisations in the Asia-Pacific region and has more than one hundred members in about fifty countries. It was founded in 1964 and has its Secretariat in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The ABU membership comprises private and public broadcasters of the region, and includes associate members—mainly the major broadcasting organisations of Europe and North America—and affiliate organisations, such as the ABA, which have an interest in broadcasting and the activities of the ABU.

The ABU is one of eight regional broadcasting unions in the world but is somewhat unique in the diversity of its membership, which ranges from some of the world's largest broadcasters in highly industrialised countries through to some of the smallest in still-developing countries. This diversity of membership poses significant challenges for the Union in addressing the differing needs and priorities of regional broadcasters.

The ABU Annual General Assembly and associated Committee meetings were held recently in Manila. The ABA was represented at the meetings along with a number of Australian broadcasting organisations include the ABC, SBSA, FACTS and the Nine Television network.

### **Engineering committee**

The Engineering Committee meeting, which preceded the General Assembly, addressed a broad range of topical is-

ssues, many of them arising from the current shift from analog to digital broadcasting and from communal based services to more personalised services. A number of international experts spoke on a variety of themes, including the choice of production formats for high definition television, opportunities for broadcasters in new distribution technologies, delivery of multimedia content and new personalised services. It was readily apparent from the presentations and associated discussions that the traditional concept of broadcasting is changing with broadcasters being presented with an increasing array of options in the area of production and distribution.

Recognising the need to be more responsive to technological changes the ABU has recently instituted new arrangements for technical studies based on a project management style with clearly defined tasks and timeframes. Under the new arrangements four topic areas have been established covering production, transmission, resources and services and spectrum issues. The ABU Technical Department was able to report on some twenty-seven study projects which have been established under these new procedures.

One of the highlights of the annual Engineering Committee meeting is the presentation of status reports by member organisations. These reports summarise recent achievements, future plans and activities, as well as the challenges and regulatory environment faced by broadcasters in the region. As expected developments in digital broadcasting,

particularly digital television, figured predominantly. Broadcasters in several Asia-Pacific countries including Australia, Japan, Korea and Singapore reported on the rollout of digital television services, while broadcasters in a number of other countries outlined plans for digital television trials.

### **Digital radio**

Digital radio developments in the region continue to be slow: only Singapore has launched terrestrial services to date. Most respondents to a recent ABU questionnaire indicated the Eureka 147 system as their countries' selected or 'preferred' standard with some also expressing interest in use of the Digital Radio Mondial system for broadcasting in the HF band. This system is potentially a cost-effective solution for many broadcasters seeking to provide digital radio services to widely dispersed populations or to large geographical areas. Along with the American iBiquity in-band on-channel AM system, it is currently under consideration for adoption as a system standard by the International Telecommunications Union.

The meeting concluded with participating delegates endorsing a number of Decisions and Recommendations. Amongst these are statements in support of a single world standard for digital sound broadcasting in the bands below 30 MHz, and support for the establishment and linking via the Internet of regional training centres to facilitate access to training resources by ABU members.

This year, the special topic at the General Assembly was 'Cybercasting—Seizing the Opportunities'. As the Internet continues to evolve at a rapid pace, questions arise as to the impact it will have on broadcasting and the potential opportunities it will offer broadcasters. Audio via the Internet is already a reality. Video delivery is still in its infancy and the existing quality problems and bandwidth constraints will in time be overcome. This will pose both new challenges and opportunities to service providers. For the broadcasters, the opportunities will go well beyond just 'more of the same' to new forms of service that seek to complement the traditional viewing experience of television with the interactivity of the Internet. One speaker described the Internet as the right interactive medium and television as the right broadcast medium. He also noted that while the Internet afforded many new opportunities it should not be used as a poor imitation of broadcasting.

**Shortwave broadcasting**

In one of the final sessions, the General Assembly discussed the future of shortwave broadcasting in a world of satellite radio and Internet broadcasting. It was noted that as much as 40 percent of the world's population has access to shortwave radio and no other medium was likely to match this figure for quite some time. Also, despite some predictions, recent statistics had shown that reception of shortwave was actually growing. Although some international broadcasters made use of additional delivery platforms to reach their audiences, all agreed that shortwave remained the mainstay of their services. It appears that the traditional strengths of this medium—the ability to independently reach distant audiences, as well as the simplicity and inexpensive cost of reception—will ensure its continued role. Subject to the availability of reasonably priced receivers, the onset of digitalisation will only serve to further boost the prospects for shortwave.

**International Forum of Researchers on Young People and the Media**

The ABA was a major sponsor of the International Forum of Researchers on Young People and the Media. The forum, held in Sydney from 27–29 November, examined young people's use of the Internet, media in the home environment, video games, screen violence, television content regulation and policy, and policy and regulation in the global environment.

'The ABA has been honoured to be associated with this international forum,' said Professor Flint. 'It has given researchers from all over the world the

opportunity to share the findings of their studies and to debate the issues that emerge.'

The Australian National Commission for UNESCO hosted the forum, which was organised by the ABA. The Governor of New South Wales, H.E. the Hon. Gordon Samuels opened the forum on Sunday 26 November.

'The forum gave all of us from the research community and representatives of research user groups such as regulators, producers and educators the opportunity to discuss our needs and the contributions that we can make to better inform each other's functions,' said Professor Flint.

The Australian National Commission for UNESCO also hosted the Asia-Pacific Youth and the Media Conference in conjunction with the forum.



Tom O'Regan, of the Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy with Virginia Nightingale, University of Western Sydney, with Phyllis Fong, Manager, Research and Policy, ABA



Lori Lemon (left) and Phyllis Fong (right), of the ABA, with Ubonrat Siriyuvaasak of Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.

For more information about the forum, including the forum papers, go to the forum web site: [www.sydneyforum.com](http://www.sydneyforum.com).