

The ABA is holding a conference on radio, television and new media issues on 3–4 May 2001.

Call for papers: ABA conference

Incorporating the successful ABA Planning Conference, last held in 1999, the program for the ABA's 2001 conference will be a lot wider—designed to keep the ABA and its clients in industry well informed about the forces driving change in broadcasting and new media.

While we are only at the stage of calling for papers, promising themes already identified include:

The future of Australian content regulation

The mandatory Australian content requirements on commercial television broadcasting services are a centrepiece of the current regulatory regime. In the future, greater convergence of broadcasting with other media is widely expected to dictate major changes to the ways that governments 'promote the role of broadcasting services in developing and reflecting a sense of Australian identity, character and cultural diversity', to quote an object of the Broadcasting Services Act.

But what are some of the options? And what might the transition look like? The ABA has commissioned research to inform it in its task of keeping the current standards up to date. You can hear about it first—and get your chance to discuss it with the regulator—at the ABA's conference.

Digital television receivers

How many boxes can be fitted on one television set? With digital television barely four months old, the ABA's April 2001 conference should be well timed to consider emerging issues about digital sets and set top units. This could include issues about APIs and interoperability, evolution of interactivity and how software upgrades might be organised in a market where

individual consumers must purchase their own receivers. And what role might personal digital recorders play in driving the take up of digital television?

Analog/digital conversion

The ABA now has the legal power to determine channel allotments of broadcasting services bands spectrum *after* the analog television system is switched off. But work internationally on the long term future of this spectrum is just getting under way. What does this early work tell us about the issues and options facing Australia as digitalisation proceeds and how should government and industry be organising themselves to tackle these issues?

Single frequency networks

Spectrum planners in Australia are working at the boundaries of what can be achieved with single frequency net-

works. In the course of 2001, a number of broadcasters and datacasters should begin grappling with technical implementation issues.

Radio and the new digital audio media

As radio digitalisation awaits a clear direction, industry and government face a proliferation of new technologies with as yet no clear winners. The ABA hopes to learn more about some of the most promising, such as the US IBOC (in-band, on-channel) and DRM (Digital Radio Mondiale). As the body responsible for planning the FM bands, the ABA will be asking the question, 'Are there technical or legal constraints that would prevent immediate introduction of IBOC?'

Internet streaming

Streaming was surely the hottest topic at broadcasting industry conferences world-wide during 2000. How will the galloping evolution of Internet services from 'still life' to moving pictures affect regulatory and other public interest responses to concerns about offensive or illegal content?

What else is hot?

This month's call for papers is an opportunity to help shape the agenda for the next ABA conference. All constructive proposals are welcome—papers can be technical, multidisciplinary or pitched at a 'generalist' audience.

With all its members freshly appointed—or reappointed—the conference should also be a chance to meet the ABA and influence its strategic thinking.

Mark these dates in your diary:

When? 3–4 May 2001

Where? Hyatt Hotel Canberra

How much? As cheap as possible, consistent with full cost recovery. In addition to concession rates for non-profit industry sectors, we hope to encourage multiple attendance from within the one organisation by offering a discount to second and further attendees.

Contact: Conference Co-ordinators, tel 02 6292 9000, fax 02 6292 9002 or go to the ABA

Web site: www.aba.gov.au/whats_new/index.htm