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Simulcast start dates for regional digital TV services

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Digital television will commence simulcast with analog television from 31 March 2003 for the regional licence areas of Darwin, Eastern Victoria, Northern NSW, Southern NSW, Regional Queensland, Regional Victoria, Tasmania and Western Victoria; and 31 December 2003 for Mildura/Sunraysia.

'I am pleased to announce that the simulcast start dates for regional licences areas has been determined by the ABA,' said Professor Flint. 'Since the start of digital television in metropolitan areas, the ABA has received numerous calls from viewers in regional areas who are inquisitive about what digital television services can offer them.'

'In many cases, access to digital television services will provide regional viewers with improved viewing quality; and provide a similar range of television services as are available in metropolitan areas,' said Professor Flint.

The simulcast start date triggers a number of obligations

on the part of regional licensees in relation to the provision of digital television services. These include the achievement of the same level of coverage and potential reception quality as the existing analog services as soon as practical; the commencement of HDTV (within two years of the simulcast date) and the opportunity to com-

mence datacasting (one year after the simulcast start or after datacasting commences).

Measures to facilitate early start-ups in regional areas include the Regional Equalisation Plan which allows regional broadcasters to claim licence fee rebates if they start regular transmissions before the simulcast dates.

'The determination of the regional simulcast start dates will encourage regional commercial broadcasters to continue the progressive roll-out of digital television services in regional Australia,' said Professor Flint.

The ABA consulted with industry on the simulcast dates, and received submissions from SBS, the Federation of Austral-

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Digital channel planning for high-power television services in regional areas

Licence area	Callsign(s)	Digital channel planning status
Northern NSW	NBN, NEN, NRN	Planned: Newcastle (New South Wales DCP); and Gold Coast (Queensland DCP). Other areas to be planned by December 2001
Southern NSW	CBN, CTC, WIN	Planned: Canberra (Australian Capital Territory DCP); and Wollongong (New South Wales DCP). Other areas to be planned by December 2001
Griffith/MIA*	AMN, MTN	To be planned by December 2001
Broken Hill	BKN	To be planned by September 2001
Regional Victoria	AMV, BCV, GLV, VTV	To be planned by September 2001
Mildura/Sunraysia*	PTV, STV	To be planned by September 2001
Regional Queensland	RTQ, STQ, TNQ	Planned: Sunshine Coast (Queensland DCP). Other areas to be planned by December 2001
Mt Gambier/South East	SES	To be planned by September 2001
Renmark/Loxton (Riverland)	RTS	To be planned by September 2001
Spencer Gulf	GTS	To be planned by September 2001
Tasmania*	TNT, TVT	Planned - Hobart (Tasmania DCP). Other areas to be planned by September 2001
Darwin*	NTD, TND	Planned - Darwin (Northern Territory DCP)

* The commencement of (third) digital television services under section 38B licences in existing two-station markets is not affected by the simulcast start dates determined by the ABA under section 48(1) of the Act.
DCP: digital channel plan



Proposed emergency response procedures code of practice for commercial radio

ian Commercial Television Stations on behalf of the regional broadcasters, and the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

The regional licence areas of Broken Hill, Mt Gambier/South East South Australia, Renmark/Loxton (Riverland), and Spencer Gulf were not considered at this time as they have issues associated with second licences (under section 38A of the Broadcasting Services Act) which will be addressed at a later date.

Regional licence areas

Regional licence areas are defined as those that are not met-

ropolitan or remote licence areas.

Metropolitan areas are:

- Adelaide; Brisbane; Melbourne; Perth and Sydney.

Remote licence areas are:

- ITQ Mt Isa; IMP and QQQ Remote Central and Eastern Australia; WOW Regional and Remote Western Australia; WAW Remote Western Australia; VEW Kalgoorlie; GTW Geraldton and SSW South West and Great Southern Western Australia.

Determination of simulcast date

Under the Commercial Television Conversion Scheme the start of the simulcast period for regional commercial licence areas must be between 1 January 2001 and 1 January 2004.

The ABA does not determine simulcast dates for the ABC and SBS. The simulcast period for the coverage areas of each national television service commences on the dates indicated in each broadcaster's relevant implementation plan.

The ABA has welcomed the proposed introduction by the Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters Limited (FARB) of a new code of practice that covers response procedures to be followed by commercial radio stations in the event of an emergency.

'The ABA has long regarded the introduction of a code of practice dealing with emergency response procedures as a matter of priority and has been negotiating with FARB for some time regarding the matter,' said Professor Flint. 'The ABA is pleased that FARB has released the draft code, which will provide all commercial radio broadcasters with clear guidelines on the minimum standards expected of them in responding to emergencies, thus establishing 'industry best practice' in this regard. These minimum standards should ensure that commercial radio service providers can be contacted at all times with a view to broadcasting important information should the need arise'.

While many individual stations have implemented their own procedures, the ABA has been concerned that there have been no agreed minimum requirements in place to assist

commercial radio broadcasters in fulfilling their responsibilities to the community in times of emergency or disaster recovery. In these situations, when other means of communication may be unavailable or impractical, the ABA believes that commercial radio stations offer a vital means of providing information quickly and effectively to the community at large, particularly in regional and remote areas.

The ABA encourages members of the public to participate in the consultation process by making submissions to FARB regarding the draft code of practice. In particular, the ABA believes that it is important for FARB to be made aware of the views of relevant state and national organisations such as the various state emergency services and the Bureau of Meteorology.

Submissions

FARB is seeking comment on the draft code: the closing date for comment is 4 September 2001. For details of the draft code and how to make a submission go to FARB's web site at www.commercialradio.com.au or call FARB on (02) 9906 5944.

For more information about digital broadcasting go to the ABA web site, www.aba.gov.au and the Digital Broadcasting Australia web site, www.dba.org.au.

The ABA maintains a public register of implementation plans, which is available either in hard copy or on the ABA web site at www.aba.gov.au/what/digital/policy/impregister.htm.

