

# D i g i t a l   n e w s

## Digital TV – one year on

After facing strict timetables and problems with channel capacity in 2000, the ABA has now moved into the second phase of the digital television roll-out program – planning for regional markets. Planning television channels is a large component of the ABA's work in ensuring the successful roll-out of digital TV. However, there are also a number of other requirements which the ABA is responsible for – such as, determining simulcast start dates, ensuring that where new digital services interfere with analog services, resolution of such problems occurs in a timely manner, and that viewers have access to information on what digital television will mean to them.

In retrospect, 2001 has proved a busy year for the ABA, and this article reviews some of the major achievements for the year.

### Digital TV services commence in metropolitan markets

The beginning of 2001 saw the commencement of digital television in Australia in five metropolitan markets – Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. After 18 months of channel planning by the ABA, broadcasters in these markets commenced digital TV services at their main transmitter sites on 1 January 2001, thus meeting the requirements of Schedule 4 of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (the Act).

### Interference management

Issues relating to the commencement of digital television services in metropolitan areas led to the development of the Interference Management Scheme (the scheme).

Prior to the start up of digital television, the ABA examined several regulatory means to ensure that reception of analog television services was maintained once digital TV commenced in a market. The scheme placed an obligation on broadcasters to ensure that reports of interference to analog services were handled in an efficient and timely manner and that public education requirements were met by the broadcasters.

The Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) launched a public education campaign to assist viewers in metropolitan areas, with a focus on Brisbane, due to the potential for VCR interference from

the SBS digital channel 36.

The education campaign included:

- a brochure delivered to residents in the greater Brisbane area. The brochure outlined types of interference and re-tuning information;
- the establishment of an interference hotline (the hotline) for all States. This toll-free number provided advice to viewers on re-tuning arrangements, and provided access to technicians where required; and
- a media campaign, which included advertisements in the Courier Mail, national newspapers and on local television stations.

The hotline also provided viewers with advice and assistance in cases of reported adjacent channel or co-channel interference. By the end of January 2001, the hotline had registered over thirty-thousand complaints.

Since then, the FACTS hotline has continued to operate and has widened its operations to include all metropolitan and regional markets as digital services progressively roll-out.

By mid-November 2001, the hotline had received approximately sixty-thousand calls. Complaints from viewers ranged across several areas of concern:

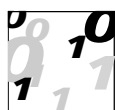
- interference to VCRs and pay TV set-top boxes;
- poor reception of national analog services in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney – a result of transmission site works, not digital transmissions; and
- interference to commercial free-to-air services – the Nine Network and the Seven Network.

The hotline will continue to manage these complaints as digital services roll-out around Australia, with viewers able to access technical assistance where required.

### Introduction of digital TV equipment

On 1 January 2001, consumers found it difficult to purchase digital TV set-top boxes where new services were available.

Since then, a number of different brand digital set-top boxes have been released, and manufacturers expect to have integrated receivers in the market place by the end of December 2001. Prices for the first standard definition set-top box was \$699 at the time of



release. Retail prices for integrated digital television sets will become known as they come on the market, however one leading manufacturer is expecting the entry point to be around \$4999. As with all new technology, it is expected that the cost of digital receivers will reduce as the volume of sales increase.

It is also interesting to note that the demand for widescreen analog TVs is continuing to grow. Industry sources report that 3000 analog widescreen TVs were sold in July, bringing the total for the seven months since the commencement of digital TV to 9000 sets. It is believed that the July figure would have been higher if suppliers were able to get more stocks. The prices of analog widescreen televisions currently available in Australia range from \$1099 to \$5276 RRP.

## **Determination of regional simulcast start dates**

In July 2001, after lengthy consultation with the broadcasting industry, the ABA determined the simulcast start dates for regional markets. Commercial digital television must commence simulcasting with analog television from 31 March 2003 in Darwin, eastern Victoria, northern NSW, regional Queensland, regional Victoria, southern NSW, Tasmania and western Victoria. Mildura/Sunraysia, in Victoria, must commence the simulcast period on 31 December 2003.

The simulcast period will run for eight years, with broadcasters required to provide simultaneously a standard definition television (SDTV) signal and an analog signal. However, viewers should be aware that legislation requires

the Federal Government to conduct a review into the length of the simulcast period by 1 January 2006. This review will assist the Government in determining the duration of the simulcast period.

In 2002, the ABA will consider determining the simulcast period for the regional licence areas of Broken Hill, NSW, Mt Gambier/South East South Australia, Renmark/Loxton (Riverland), and Spencer Gulf in SA. These markets were not previously considered as they have issues associated with second licences (under section 38A of the Act).

## **Digital TV roll-out in regional areas**

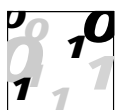
Regional broadcasters do not need to wait for the start of the formal simulcast period. As part of a Government initiative to roll-out digital services to regional and remote areas as soon as possible, a financial assistance package has been developed to help regional broadcasters commence digital television services before the formal simulcast period. The Federal Government will provide up to \$260 million over 13 years to assist eligible regional broadcasters with the digital conversion process.

Assistance will be provided in the form of a capped annual rebate against licence fees payable, and was available from December 2000, with eligible regional broadcasters able to access assistance in the financial year in which the broadcaster commences digital transmission. These eligible regional licensees, that sought ABA approval to commence digital transmission by 30 June 2001, were able to access their rebates in December 2001.

In 2002, viewers can look forward to the continual roll-out of digital television services in regional

Roll-out of regional digital TV services in 2001				
Service	Area	Channel	Transmitter site	Start date
TNQ (reg Qld)	Sunshine Coast	47	Bald Knob	30 June 2001
STQ (reg Qld)	Sunshine Coast	65	Bald Knob	30 June 2001
RTQ (reg Qld)	Sunshine Coast	68	Bald Knob	30 June 2001
WIN (sthn NSW)	Stanwell Park	40	Bald Hill	30 June 2001
CTC (sthn NSW)	Stanwell Park	43	Bald Hill	30 June 2001
CBN (sthn NSW)	Stanwell Park	46	Bald Hill	30 June 2001
CTC (sthn NSW)	Canberra	6	Black Mountain	26 November 2001
WIN (sthn NSW)	Canberra	11	Black Mountain	22 November 2001
CBN (sthn NSW)	Canberra	12	Black Mountain	Late November
TVT (Tas)	Hobart	7	Mt Wellington	Both services were to commence from
TNT (Tas)	Hobart	10	Mt Wellington	30 June 2001. Due to a fire at the transmitter site destroying equipment and buildings, digital transmission will be delayed until late January 2002.

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# Digital news

licence areas such as Newcastle and Wollongong, NSW, and on the Sunshine Coast, Qld. The commencement of digital television in regional Australia will provide access to improved viewing quality, help maximise diversity of choice, provide the option of interactive television in due course and ensure that a similar range of entertainment and information services are available as in metropolitan licence areas.

## Digital channel planning

The second half of 2001 saw the ABA release a number of digital channel plans (DCPs) for regional areas. A digital channel plan requires ABA engineers to identify appropriate channels for the conversion of analog to digital mode. Although there are a number of channels available in each market, engineers must weave their way through the complexities of planning by taking into account channel availability in adjacent markets. DCPs are made available for public consultation, with the plan being finalised after submissions close. See table below for draft DCPs released in 2001.

In 2002, the ABA will continue to plan high power services for Western Australia, subject to variation of Part B of the relevant Conversion Schemes. The focus will then shift to repeaters in regional Australia - the ABA is currently consulting with the broadcasting industry over planning priorities for 2002.

## Changes to analog services

While digital technology allows the ABA to plan for the use of channels previously

unavailable for analog broadcasting services due to adjacent or co-channel interference, some adjustment to the current assignment of analog television channels has been required.

In 2001, the areas of Ballarat (Vic), Merewether, Stanwell Park and Wollongong (NSW), Woden/Weston Creek (ACT) and Taroona (Tas), experienced analog channel changes to accommodate digital television. Broadcasters in these areas, in consultation with the ABA, undertook extensive public relations campaigns to assist viewers with re-tuning their television sets and VCRs.

Over the next few years, changes to analog services will occur in a number of areas, such as Gympie Town and Tweed Heads (QLD), Cowell and Port Neill (SA), Bicheno, King Island and Launceston (Tas). The ABA is committed to working with industry to ensure that the public is provided with relevant and timely information on analog changes proposed in these areas.

### Further information

Are you seeking further information on digital TV channel allocations or when digital television will start in regional areas?

Contact the ABA on Freecall 1800 810 241, or try the ABA web site at [www.aba.gov.au](http://www.aba.gov.au).

Information on digital television product availability can be found at the web site of Digital Broadcasting Australia - [www.dba.org.au](http://www.dba.org.au).



Digital channel plans - 2001			
Market	Areas planned	Draft DCP release	Finalisation date
Regional Queensland	Southern Downs, Darling Downs, Toowoomba, Wide Bay, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville and Cairns	August 2001	October 2001
Regional Victoria	Upper Murray, Latrobe Valley, Bendigo, Goulburn Valley, Ballarat, Murray Valley, Western Victoria, Horsham region, Nhill region, Mildura/Sunraysia	September 2001	December 2001
Tasmania	NE Tasmania	September 2001	December 2001
Riverland, SA	Renmark/Loxton	September 2001	February 2002
Spencer Gulf, SA	Spencer Gulf North	September 2001	February 2002
South east SA	SE South Australia	September 2001	February 2002
Broken Hill NSW	Broken Hill	September 2001	February 2002
Southern NSW	South Coast - Nowra, Ulladulla, Narooma, Bega, Batemans Bay/Moruya, Eden and Cooma	October 2001	December 2001
Northern NSW	North Coast - Richmond/Tweed, Murwillumbah, Grafton/Kempsey, Coffs Harbour, Manning River	November 2001	December 2001