



The ABA has welcomed the Government's proposals for community broadcasting.

## Proposals for community television

- they would not be sufficient to deliver a change in the practice or outcomes of spectrum management
- they would increase the complexity of spectrum management, both for the regulators and for spectrum users
- they offer no savings or new efficiencies
- they would jeopardise the social and cultural dimensions of broadcasting policy, and
- they would weaken the capacity of the ABA to deliver broadcasting policy objectives.

Much of the background explanation in the discussion paper is concerned with alternative approaches to spectrum management. The paper sets out proposals for changing the treatment of the broadcasting services bands and raises questions as the merits of spectrum licensing.

The ABA recognises the public interest in the efficient use of what is a highly valuable asset. While current arrangements do make sure that the public receives a fair return for the use of broadcasting spectrum, a shift to a more direct charging mechanism will have benefits, especially in facilitating the transition to digital broadcasting and planning the

analog switch-off. In the ABA's view, spectrum licensing is likely to be an important policy instrument for the future.

A more flexible approach to spectrum management will be a critical component in building a convergent, digital broadcasting system, but questions of timing and implementation will be crucial to the success of a new system. Clearing and reallocating spectrum currently used for analog television will be a major challenge over the medium term, and in the ABA's view, this task is likely to require a range of new regulatory and policy instruments, including but not restricted to spectrum pricing.

**The ABA's submission to the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts discussion paper, *Options for Structural Reform in Spectrum Management* is available on both the ABA website, [www.aba.gov.au/aba/submissions/index.htm](http://www.aba.gov.au/aba/submissions/index.htm), and the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts website, [www.dcita.gov.au](http://www.dcita.gov.au) and go to Broadcasting and Online Regulation.**

On 16 August the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts invited comments on proposals to introduce legislation in Parliament to provide for community television licensing and to address related community broadcasting issues.

In its submission the ABA welcomed the Government's proposals. Specifically:

- changes to licensing arrangements for non-BRACS (Broadcasting for remote Aboriginal communities) and community television services, and
- discretionary powers in relation to the renewal of community broadcasting licences generally.

A main finding of the ABA's 2001 investigation into the community television trial was the need to provide a more appropriate regulatory framework for community television services than the present open narrowcasting licensing arrangements. Moreover, the current community broadcasting provisions in the Broadcasting Services Act are not entirely appropriate for community television services. Legislative amendment is required to ad-

dress the particular financial and governance issues that confront providers of community television services. The ABA sees the proposed amendments as necessary to underpin the development of an ongoing community television sector.

Of equal significance are the changes proposed to licence renewal provisions for community broadcasting generally. While renewal of most community radio broadcasting licences should continue to be an automatic process, the proposed amendments provide a mechanism for review, opening the possibility of reform and growth as new community groups emerge and community interests and needs change over time.

**The ABA's submission is available on the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts website, [www.dcita.gov.au](http://www.dcita.gov.au) and go to Broadcasting and Online Regulation, and the ABA's website at [www.aba.gov.au/aba/submissions/index.htm](http://www.aba.gov.au/aba/submissions/index.htm)**