



The Sydney and Melbourne trials of the Eureka 147 digital radio system being conducted by Commercial Radio Australia and Broadcast Australia will continue for up to 12 months, the ABA has decided.

Digital radio trials extended in Sydney and Melbourne

The ABA has decided to continue current digital radio trials in Sydney and Melbourne for up to 12 months.

The Sydney and Melbourne trials of the Eureka 147 digital radio system are being conducted by Commercial Radio Australia and Broadcast Australia respectively. Both trial operators are interested in continuing the trials, which make use of VHF Band III spectrum administered by the ABA. The trials were scheduled to expire in May this year, with their continuation subject to a possible call for other expressions of interest in using the spectrum in question.

'Whether the trials will continue into the longer term will depend on government decisions about how digital radio is to be introduced into Australia,' said Lyn Maddock, Acting ABA Chair. 'Recent government and industry announcements suggest that decisions on a way forward are possible before the end of the year. With the situation changing so quickly, the ABA had no wish to disrupt current trial arrangements.'

The ABA has a general policy of encouraging trials of digital radio and any other systems that make use of available

broadcasting spectrum. The ABA will consider trial requests from any person for any proper purpose. It is important to note, however, that trial licences confer no longer-term rights over the spectrum in question. It is also important that people considering purchasing digital radio receivers understand the trial nature of current broadcasts and that no decisions have been made on the type of system or the spectrum to be used (e.g. VHF, L-Band) for digital radio in Australia. The utility of any digital radio receiver will depend on these decisions.

'The ABA remains willing to consider applications for digital radio trials using other spectrum, or the same spectrum in other localities,' Ms Maddock said. 'I am hopeful that information gathered through the trials will be useful in the development of the Government's digital radio policy.'

Purpose of the policy

The licensing of trials of digital radio is part of a wider ABA policy of facilitating technical trials of new technologies, including broadcasting technologies, where the trial does not cause interference to existing

mainstream uses of the broadcasting services bands spectrum.

Facilitation of digital radio trials is consistent with the ABA's general trial policy. However, the entitlement to conduct trials is not limited to commercial radio or indeed to incumbents of the broadcasting services bands. The ABA will consider legitimate requests to trial digital radio systems from any person. It will also consider requests to trial any digital radio technology that makes use of the broadcasting services bands of the radiofrequency spectrum. This potentially includes Eureka 147, Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM), In-Band On Channel (IBOC), ISDB-TSB and any other existing or emerging system that makes use of the broadcasting services bands. The ABA reserves the right to consider each particular trial proposal on its merits.

While the ABA takes a wide view of who may trial digital systems, permission to conduct a trial in no way pre-empts or constrains future policy. In particular:

- allocation of broadcasting services bands spectrum for a trial confers no rights to use of that spectrum other than

for the purpose and duration of the trial

- allocation of a part of the spectrum for a digital radio trial does not preclude trials of other systems using that spectrum or imply that digital radio will be the preferred user of that spectrum in future
- permission to trial a particular digital radio system does not imply the system will be introduced into Australia permanently or, if it is, that it will use the same part of the spectrum as the trial service
- the fact of participation in a trial does not imply the trial participant will be permitted to operate digital broadcasting services if permanent digital radio services are introduced, and
- people who acquire equipment in connection with trials, including retailers or members of the public who purchase digital radio receivers to participate in trials or receive trial services, do so at

Digital radio trial policy

Copies of the ABA's digital radio trial policy are available from the ABA's website at www.aba.gov.au/radio/digital/index.htm or tel: 1800 226 667.



their own risk that the trial may be discontinued.

The ABA has previously endorsed the conduct of consumer-focused digital radio trials in Sydney and Melbourne by Commercial Radio Australia and Broadcast Australia respectively. Both trials are on VHF channel 9A, and are due to expire in May 2005.

Trials are not limited to technical purposes and may be designed to test market or other aspects of digital radio. However, the ABA reserves the right to decide that a proposed trial does not have an appropriate trial purpose or that the location, duration or other attributes of the trial proposal are not consistent with the expressed purpose of the trial. Competing demand to conduct trials in a single location and part of the spectrum may also necessitate compromises. The ABA may reject a trial proposal or suggest a different location or duration for the trial.

Proposed trialists must clearly state, when making applications, the purpose of the trial and link that purpose to the tenure, location and bandwidth sought in the application.

To underline the temporary nature of trials and maximise the opportunities for participation in trials of digital radio and any other system, trials will be restricted to the maximum length required for the purposes of the trial and in any



case will not exceed an initial maximum period of 18 months. The policy states that an application for continuation of a trial beyond 18 months would only be considered if this is justified by the purpose of the trial. In considering whether to extend a trial beyond 18 months, it also states that the ABA may have regard to other requests to conduct trials or tests in an area. Before approving an extension beyond 18 months the ABA may invite other expressions of interest in using the spectrum in question. The ABA required all trial participants to sign a statement acknowledging that they understood and accepted the temporary nature of trials as set out in the introduction to the policy framework, including the maximum period before which fresh expressions of interest may be invited.

For the reasons set out here, the ABA has now decided to allow both existing trials, which are approaching 18 months' duration, to be continued for a further 12 months. The continuation is offered on similar terms to the initial 18 months. In particular, there is no legitimate expectation that the trials will necessarily continue beyond the 12 months. However, it is likely that digital radio policy decisions made in the interim will require a further review of the trials policy before the 12 months elapse.

Where appropriate, the ABA will also require that trial broadcasters inform consumers and trial participants of the digital radio trial policy and the temporary nature of the digital radio transmissions. In part, this is to ensure that the expectation of consumers is not falsely

raised as a consequence of a trial process.

Spectrum issues

During the 2004 Federal election campaign the government committed to working with industry to develop a policy for the introduction of digital radio. An issues paper has been released for comment on the Department of Communications Information Technology and the Arts' website (www.dcita.gov.au) together with the reports from the Digital Radio Study Group on work undertaken by the Department, the ABA and the Australian Communications Authority in 2003.

On 18 December 2004, the Minister for Communications Information Technology and the Arts directed the ABA and ACA to study spectrum availability in VHF Band III and L-Band and report by 30 September 2005.

Discussion paper

The ABA is currently developing a discussion paper for public release inviting submissions on whether or not there should be a moratorium in further spectrum allotments in light of digital radio. The paper will invite submissions on the VHF Band III and the MF Band, however other broadcasting services bands, for example VHF Band I, are not excluded from the discussion. □