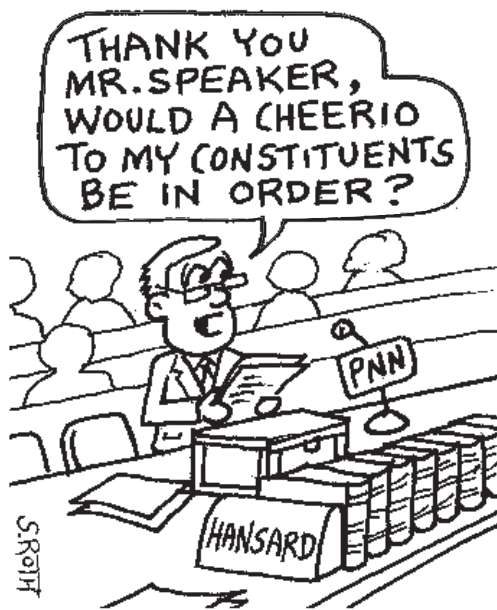


# Extension of **ABC NewsRadio** service and **SBS retransmissions**



## ACMA recently released a request for tender to select one or more broadcast spectrum planning consultant(s).

This consultancy is to determine the spectrum availability and technical specifications for FM radio broadcasting services around Australia for extending the transmission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Parliamentary News Network and for retransmission services for the Special Broadcasting Services (SBS).

The Australian Government is funding the extension of the ABC NewsRadio network to areas where the population is 10,000 or more. The targeted areas have been identified by the Department of

Communications, Information Technology and the Arts in consultation with the ABC.

The SBS self-help retransmission scheme is also supported by government funding under the auspices of SBS retransmission subsidy scheme.

## PARLIAMENTARY BROADCASTING AND ABC NEWSRADIO

In the early 1990s, the ABC NewsRadio service was introduced on a time-sharing basis, utilising the air-time available on the then Parliamentary Radio Network when parliamentary broadcasts were not on air. Since its inception, ABC NewsRadio has

become increasingly popular with Australian listeners.

Carriage of the parliamentary broadcast service was supported by unused medium wave transmitters vacated by commercial radio operators when they converted to the more popular VHF FM radio band. The vacant channels and transmission facilities were initially used by Parliamentary Radio and Radio for the Print Handicapped.

The Australian Government, acknowledging the popularity of the ABC NewsRadio service, pledged to extend its transmissions to more listeners, initially targeting the extension of the service to selected areas where the population was 10,000 or more. The government has allocated funding for transmission facilities in identified areas.

The former Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) was given the task of planning FM radio spectrum to establish these services in 73 areas across Australia. The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts allocated \$600,000 over three financial years from 2004–05 to the ABA for planning FM radio spectrum for these services. The ABA, through its broadcast licence area planning process, had already set aside FM spectrum for an additional national service in 24 areas.

To accelerate the FM radio spectrum planning in remaining areas of Australia, ACMA recently issued a tender to select one or more consultant(s) to plan FM radio spectrum for the ABC NewsRadio service along with other national FM spectrum requirements in the area. This will include SBS spectrum requirements for its self-funded retransmissions scheme in some regional areas.

The ACMA tender is to be awarded by September 2005 and the contractor would be required to complete the planning work for all services including the provision of technical specifications for the national services by the end of November 2006.

Allocation of FM spectrum for ABC NewsRadio will be on a priority basis, concentrating initially on higher population areas to meet the strong demand for the service. The ABC had already released a tender to select a contractor to provide transmission facilities in 42 areas.

## SBS RADIO RETRANSMISSIONS

Under the Self-Help Subsidy Scheme, SBS Radio is also assisting local communities in regional areas to establish and operate FM transmitting facilities. ACMA, in consultation with SBS and the Department of Victorian Communities, through the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs, has provided technical advice to enable town councils in regional Victoria to take advantage of the scheme.

A consultancy brief has been prepared to identify the candidate transmission sites and coverage requirements for the nine local government self-help facilities. The consultancy is to be funded by the Victorian Government.

SBS has also identified another 16 areas in Australia for assistance under the Self-Help Subsidy Scheme and all have been ear-marked in the current ACMA tender as requiring the determination of additional FM radio spectrum.

For more information about the tender, go to the ACMA website: Latest> Tenders.