

Request for tender for Telstra mobile networks service coverage audit released



In October 2006, ACMA released a request for tender for a benchmarking audit of service coverage for Telstra's CDMA and WCDMA networks. The tender closed on 13 November 2006.

In August this year, the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Helen Coonan, announced that ACMA would conduct independent national audits of the coverage of Telstra's CDMA mobile phone network for comparison with its new 3GSM850 network, which is also known as its 3G wideband CDMA (WCDMA) network.

Telstra is deploying the new 3G WCDMA mobile phone network to replace its existing CDMA network, which provides extensive coverage in rural areas of Australia. It was installed in 2000 to enable closure of the analog mobile phone network, which also provided extensive coverage outside metropolitan areas. It is anticipated that the new 3G

WCDMA network will continue to provide this extensive coverage. CDMA networks are better suited technically than GSM networks to provide extensive coverage from a given set of base stations.

At the time of the closure of the analog network in 2000, Telstra had an obligation to provide equivalent CDMA coverage in the areas covered by it. Network development since then has made that obligation effectively redundant because CDMA coverage has far exceeded the coverage provided by the analog network. The focus of the ACMA audit is on compliance with Telstra's publicly-stated commitment of providing 3G coverage at least equivalent to the coverage of its existing CDMA network.

ACMA sought a contractor to test the voice coverage for pre-identified representative sites provided by the

existing CDMA network, and by the WCDMA network once the rollout is sufficiently advanced. ACMA's preferred method is through field measurement in the representative areas. The results of these surveys, together with other relevant information from other sources, will be used to assess coverage of the two networks.

The 3G network will use the existing Telstra base-station infrastructure, so it involves an equipment rollout rather than one requiring a major development of new sites. The transition from CDMA to 3G WCDMA is considerably less complex than the previous transition from AMPS to CDMA, because of the similar technical characteristics of the technologies.

Telstra recently commenced the rollout of its 3G network, which will continue through 2007 and (possibly) into 2008.