Changes to radio transmitter sites in the Innisfail region proposed

ACMA recently proposed changes to transmitter sites for three radio services in the Innisfail region of Queensland. It is proposed to vary the transmitter site for the 4KZ and 4ZKZ commercial radio services at Hinchinbrook to allow the installation and commissioning of a transmitter planned for Hinchinbrook as part of the Australian Government's Commercial Radio Blackspots Program.

ACMA is also proposing to vary the transmitter site for the high power open narrowcasting service licensed to United Christian Broadcasters at Tully. United Christian Broadcasters requested an alternative transmitter site because of problems commencing its service at the previously nominated site.

ACMA prepares and varies licence area plans under section 26(1) of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*. Licence area plans determine the number and characteristics, including technical specifications, of broadcasting services using the broadcasting services bands that are to be available in particular areas of Australia. The Innisfail licence area plan was determined in 1997, and varied in 1998 and 2003.

The draft variation to the Innisfail licence area plan proposes:

- that 4KZ operate on 97.7 MHz from the Casual Cassowary Tea House, Bruce Highway, Hinchinbrook, with a maximum effective radiated power (ERP) of 50 watts in a directional radiation pattern
- that 4ZKZ to operate on 96.1 MHz from the Casual Cassowary Tea House, Bruce Highway, Hinchinbrook, with a maximum ERP of 50 watts in a directional radiation pattern and
- that the high power open narrowcasting service at Tully operate on 92.7 MHz from Euramo, seven kilometres south of Tully, with a maximum ERP of 300 watts in an omni-directional radiation pattern.

Comments on the changes close at 5:00 pm on Tuesday 28 June 2007. The draft variation and an explanatory paper are on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to For licensees & industry: Service & technical requirements > Broadcasting: Analog planning > Licence areas > Licence Area Plans > Draft Licence Area Plans).

Channels proposed for digital TV repeater services in regional and remote Australia

ACMA recently released for public comment proposals to allot and assign digital channels for television repeater services in 149 locations in remote and regional Australia.

As yet unassigned channels that may be used for other purposes such as datacasting have also been identified in areas where channels for national and commercial or only commercial services are identified.

The areas affected include:

- Bourke, Lightning Ridge, Menindee and Wilcannia in far west New South Wales
- Bathurst Island, Groote Eylandt, Jabiru and Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory
- Charleville, Cunnamulla, Longreach, Roma and Weipa in Queensland
- Ceduna, Coober Pedy, Kingscote, Roxby Downs and Woomera in South Australia and
- Derby, Exmouth, Katanning, Mandurah and Margaret River in Western Australia.

IMPACT ON VCRS AND SET-TOP BOXES

Devices such as VCRs can be connected to a television in various ways, one of which is to use a radiofrequency output channel. Channels 36, 37 and 38 have often been the default radiofrequency output channels for VCRs and ancillary devices such as set-top boxes. However, since the advent of digital television, channel 69 has increasingly become the default channel.

Use of these channels for broadcasting services can result in interference to the television's reception, VCR or ancillary device output. However, in some instances, ACMA needs to use these channels for digital television services to achieve the best possible overall outcome for the public.

Interference can be overcome reasonably simply, and at no cost, by viewers following the instruction manuals for the VCR, other ancillary device and television to tune in to an alternative channel or by connecting the television to the VCR through the audio and video connections. This potential interference problem has significantly reduced over the last few years as many newer VCRs and set-top boxes default to channel 69 or use non-radiofrequency connections.

In developing the proposals, ACMA considered factors such as spectrum efficiency, the need to minimise changes that viewers will have to make to their existing reception equipment to receive digital broadcasts and the desirability of broadcasters being able to use their existing infrastructure to broadcast their digital television services.

ACMA gives viewers' interests a high priority and these plans may affect the use of video recorders (VCRs) and set-top boxes. However, disruption is expected to be relatively minor and, in most cases, will only require retuning of television sets and VCRs. Before any changes take place, public information and education campaigns will advise viewers about retuning devices and alternative connection methods.

The Commercial Television Conversion Scheme and National Television Conversion Schemes provide for the conversion of commercial and national television broadcasting services from analog to digital mode. The schemes were formulated in 1999 and varied in December 2000 and January 2003.

Under each scheme, ACMA can develop and vary digital channel plans for areas throughout Australia that determine which channels are to be allotted to each licensee for the purposes of transmitting services in digital mode and the technical characteristics of those channels. ACMA's aim is to enable broadcasters to plan their digital transmission coverage to achieve the same level of coverage as the existing analog services, as well as meeting various objectives in the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*.

The *Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Act (No. 1) 2006* allowed remote television broadcasters, which are allocated a third digital-only service under section 38B of the Broadcasting Services Act, to multiplex. This provides a way for a third commercial television service in areas where only two services currently exist.

Submissions on the proposed channels closed on 19 June 2007. The discussion papers and draft variations to the digital channel plans are on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to For licensees & industry: Service & technical requirements > Broadcasting: Digital TV > Planning digital TV > Draft digital channel plans (DCPs)).