

Digital TV conversion schemes to be varied

ACMA recently sought public comment on proposed variations to the schemes that regulate the conversion of broadcast television from analog to digital mode.

The *Commercial Television Conversion Scheme 1999* and the *National Television Conversion Scheme 1999* set out the process for conversion from analog to digital and apply to commercial and national (the ABC and SBS) television broadcasters. The variations have been proposed following a series of amendments to the *Broadcasting*

Services Act 1992 in 2006 that changed some provisions relating to the schemes, including some applying to remote areas.

The proposed changes include new provisions relating to multi-channelling of digital television services in non-metropolitan areas, and changes designed to progress the digital conversion process in remote areas of Australia.

Schedule 4 to the *Broadcasting Services Act* requires ACMA to formulate schemes for the conversion, over time, of the

transmission of commercial and national television broadcasting services from analog to digital mode. The schemes, which were first made in 1999, are divided into two parts, A and B, which relate to television broadcasting services in non-remote—metropolitan and regional—and remote areas respectively.

The *Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Act (No. 1) 2006* and the *Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Television) Act 2006* amended Schedule 4 to the

Broadcasting Services Act and the proposed variations to the schemes reflect these changes. Under clauses 18 and 33 of Schedule 4 to the Act, ACMA must make provision for public consultation when varying the schemes.

The draft variations and explanatory statement are on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to For licensees & industry: Licensing & regulation > Legislation, codes & standards > Subordinate regulatory instruments > Digital TV conversion schemes).

Changes to improve Hobart radio services

ACMA is proposing changes to the ABC News Radio service 7PB and the community radio service 7THE in Hobart, following consideration of requests from the ABC and the licensee of 7THE, Hobart FM Incorporated, for changes to their services.

After finding that there are no impediments to the requested changes and that they will improve the coverage of these services, ACMA is proposing that the 7PB service implement day/night switching using a directional radiation pattern. The change will allow the 7PB service to improve its coverage in the Hobart area during daylight hours without causing interference to other co-channelled AM services at night.

ACMA is also proposing that the community radio service 7THE swap the FM frequencies on its main and translator services and that it operate from new sites, at Mt Faulkner and Droughty Hill. The move to Mt Faulkner is a result of 7THE

being required to vacate its existing site at Mt Nelson. 7THE has also requested a translator service from Droughty Hill to maintain its coverage in the south of Hobart. Under the proposals, the main service would operate from Mt Faulkner on 96.1 MHz, with the translator service on 92.1 MHz.

The proposed changes are in an explanatory paper and draft variation to the Hobart radio licence area plan, which 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).

Day/night switching

Daytime coverage of AM radio stations is limited by atmospheric and man-made noise. Night-time signal strengths within the licence or coverage area are equal to or less than those in daytime because of possible interference from distant AM stations operating on the same or adjacent channels.

The interference from distant AM radio stations is produced by signals reflecting off the ionosphere. The level of interference is only significant at night because, during the day, the sun's radiation changes the characteristics of the ionosphere. This may reduce the night-time coverage area of an AM radio station because signals at night can travel over great distances (sometimes more than a thousand kilometres).

Long-distance night-time propagation and consequent interference to other AM services prevents most AM services from being able to increase the power full time (day and night). Increasing the power only during the day (day/night switching) is a way of increasing the coverage of the AM signal in the daytime, while not sending the signal too far at night.

