



New digital TV licences to be auctioned

ACMA is finalising arrangements for allocation of two licences for new digital television services. The two new national channels—referred to as channel A and channel B—will most likely be made available by auction.

ACMA plans to conduct a price-based allocation for channel A in the third quarter of 2007. The allocation of channel B is planned for the fourth quarter. Channel A is to be used for free-to-air datacasting, narrowcasting and community television that can be received on a standard digital television receiver. Channel B can be used for a wider range of services, including mobile television. Neither channel can be used to provide a commercial broadcasting service or a pay TV service that can be received by a

domestic digital television receiver.

An initial discussion paper released in March 2006 invited comments on the possible use of these channels, which form part of the platform for Australia's transition from analog to digital television broadcasting. A high level of interest was shown in using the channels for mobile television.

Provision for allocation of spectrum for the new services was in legislation passed in October 2006 and a second discussion paper, *Allocation of spectrum for new digital television services*, was released in December 2006, seeking views on the details of the arrangements for the licences.

The new legislation provides for allocation of two types of datacasting transmitter licences—a

channel A datacasting transmitter licence and a channel B datacasting transmitter licence. The datacasting transmitter licences will be allocated as separate, national licences for 10 years, with the possibility of renewal for five years. Licensees for both channels will be required to operate in digital mode.

Applicants for a channel B datacasting transmitter licence must have submitted and had accepted an access undertaking with the ACCC. The undertakings are to provide for access to services enabling or facilitating transmission of content services. Accepted undertakings will be binding on a channel B datacasting transmitter licensee. Adherence to the terms of an undertaking will be a condition of the

licence, will remain in force for the duration of the licence and will be transferred if the licence is transferred.

Potential applicants who wish to provide narrowcasting services on channel A or B are encouraged to seek an opinion from ACMA on the category their services falls into under section 21 of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*. It is advisable to seek opinions as soon as possible to ensure that a decision is reached prior to the auction.

The discussion paper is on the ACMA website. Comments on the proposed arrangements closed on 5 February 2007. For more information, contact ACMA by email to spectrumallocations@acma.gov.au.

Channels proposed for **digital TV repeaters** in regional Australia

ACMA has released proposals to allot and assign regional digital channels for television repeater services in New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. The proposals aim to balance spectrum efficiency with the need to minimise any 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.

The regions include inland and north coast New South Wales; Central Queensland; north-east and west Tasmania; and Darwin and Batchelor, Northern Territory. In each of these areas, ACMA has also identified as yet unassigned channels that may be used for other purposes, including datacasting.

The Commercial Television Conversion and National Television

Conversion schemes, formulated in 1999 and varied in December 2000 and January 2003, are legislative schemes for conversion of television broadcasting services from analog to digital mode. Under these schemes, ACMA develops and varies digital channel plans for areas throughout Australia to determine which channels are to be allotted to each licensee for transmission of services in digital mode and the technical characteristics of those channels. This

enables broadcasters to plan their digital transmission coverage to achieve the same level of coverage as their analog coverage.

The proposals were released in discussion papers and draft variations to the commercial and national digital channel plans in December 2006. Comments closed on 22 January 2007. The discussion papers and draft variations are on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au.