

# TENDERS INVITED FOR 2007 RESEARCH INTO DIGITAL TV ADOPTION

**ACMA recently invited proposals to conduct research in 2007 into the adoption of free-to-air digital television in Australian households, to update data collected in surveys conducted in 2005 and 2006.**

The research will be the final in this series of adopter surveys and will inform future studies to be conducted by ACMA in the lead-up to the switch-off of analog free-to-air television. It will be a valuable resource for government, the public, industry and the media in the context of the Australian Government's Ready, Get Set, Go Digital - A Digital Action Plan for Australia.

The focus of ACMA's research into digital media has been on consumer attitudes and behaviour towards digital free-to-air television, particularly the attitudes and behaviour of non-adopters.

Key issues addressed in the research are:

- household take-up of digital television
- consumer knowledge about digital television
- community awareness of analog television switch-off
- the drivers and inhibitors to take-up of digital television, and
- attitudes of current non-adopters of digital television in terms of intentions, awareness and impediments to adoption.

The 2006 (2005) research found that 30 (13) per cent of Australian households had adopted digital free-to-air television, with 37 (26) per cent saying the reason was 'better or clearer picture', 28 (11) per cent 'television upgrade or replacement' and 20 (25) per cent 'improved reception or signal'.

Other key findings of the previous studies were:

- 14 (17) per cent of non-adopters had not heard of digital free-to-air television at all and 57 (45) per cent did not know if digital free-to-air services were available in their area
- 17 (six) per cent of non-adopters who were interested in digital television planned to purchase within 12 months, 13 (17) per cent said they were interested but had no plans to purchase and 71 (61) per cent were either not interested, or not sure if they were interested.

The earlier studies involved nationally representative telephone surveys of Australian households—samples were 1,148 in 2005 and 1,537 in 2006. The 2007 research will essentially replicate the earlier studies to ensure statistically valid comparisons. A small number of new questions will be included that focus specifically on the different types of display devices used to receive free-to-air television, the recording of free-to-air TV programs by digital adopters, community awareness and take-up of high definition television, and differentiating digital free-to-air adopters from adopters who access digital free-to-air services through subscription a TV service.

Digital television offers benefits for viewers including improved picture and sound quality and wide-screen images. Other potential benefits include more channels, and a variety of program enhancements such as electronic program guides, multiple camera angles, interactivity, time-shifting, alternative audio commentaries and program-related information.

To receive digital television, viewers need either a digital set-top box (to attach to an analog television set or a monitor) or a television set with an integrated digital tuner. Digital television uses a standard-definition signal in a wide-screen format. High definition television provides superior picture quality and is also available, but cannot be received on a standard definition receiver—viewers must have a monitor and receiver capable of processing and displaying a high definition signal.

The report of the third survey into digital television adoption is expected to be published early in 2008. The two previous reports, *Digital media in Australian homes* and *Digital media in Australian homes – 2006*, are on the ACMA website at [www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au) (go to About ACMA: Publications & research > Broadcasting publications > Research > Broadcasting research publications index).



## INTRODUCTION OF FREE-TO-AIR DIGITAL TELEVISION IN AUSTRALIA

Free-to-air digital television is currently being introduced in Australia, simulcast with existing free-to-air analog television services in most areas, and will eventually replace analog services. The government announced in 2006 that analog switch-off will begin in the period 2010–12.

Transmission of free-to-air digital television began in January 2001 in the five mainland state capital cities. At least one free-to-air digital television service is now available to about 96 per cent of Australians and more than 91 per cent has access to the complete set of digital television services for their region or area, including most metropolitan state capital and major regional centres.

Regional areas presently without digital services will be able to receive digital transmission signals by the end of the regional simulcast period. A simulcast start date or duration has not yet been set for remote areas.

Commercial and national free-to-air television broadcasters must have implementation plans to provide, by specified dates, a standard definition digital service with the coverage and reception quality as the analog service, as soon as practicable after the digital service begins transmission in a licence area. This allows audiences to convert to digital at their own discretion during the simulcast period.

Commercial and national broadcasters must simulcast their services in both analog and standard definition digital mode. Broadcasters must provide all their programming in standard definition. Until the end of the simulcast period, they are also required to provide an annual minimum of 1,040 hours (20 hours per week) of high definition programming. This obligation is phased in for each licence area.

The November 2006 amendments to the legislation removed the requirement that the high definition version of a broadcaster's digital television service must be a simulcast of their standard definition and/or analog service, which means broadcasters can multi-channel one (high definition) service.

The amendments also allow commercial free-to-air television broadcasters to provide, from 1 January 2009, a single multi-channel standard definition service in addition to the standard definition simulcast of their analog service. All regulatory restrictions on the number of multi-channels that commercial free-to-air broadcasters may provide will cease at the end of the simulcast period.

The national broadcasters (the ABC and SBS) may provide multichannel services. Genre restrictions on the type of programming that the national broadcasters may provide on their digital channels were removed under the November 2006 legislative amendments. The ABC's digital channel, ABC2, shows new and time-shifted ABC programming, and SBS provides international news on its digital channel.