



Community radio can provide digital radio under new proposal

ACMA recently released a draft determination for public comment that provides for specified community radio broadcasting licence areas to be taken to be the same as a specified commercial radio broadcasting licence area. In deeming these areas to be taken to be the same, the community radio broadcasting licensee becomes eligible to provide digital radio broadcasting services.

ACMA recently reviewed licence areas and eligible licensees for each state capital city. This review identified that the licence areas for the Radio for the Print Handicapped community radio broadcasting services that serve Sydney and

Melbourne—2RPH and 3RPH—are not currently the same as the specified licence area of commercial radio broadcasting licences in the same areas—licence areas Sydney RA1 and Melbourne RA1. Both the 2RPH and 3RPH licence areas include some regional population centres as well as the metropolitan commercial licence area. The proposed determination will mean that these community radio broadcasting services have the same licence area as the commercial radio broadcasting services.

Among other things, the *Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Radio) Act 2007* gives effect to the government's digital radio

policy announced in October 2005 and supports the introduction of digital radio services. This will be done initially in the six state capital cities, by commercial radio broadcasters, national broadcasters and wide-coverage community radio broadcasters. The Act amends the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, the *Radiocommunications Act 1992* and the *Trade Practices Act 1974* and provides ACMA with powers to undertake planning and licence allocation activities for digital radio services.

To ensure that wide-coverage community radio broadcasters will be able to provide digital radio services, subsection 8AD(3) of the

Broadcasting Services Act enables ACMA to determine, by legislative instrument, that a specified licence area of a community radio broadcasting licence is taken to be the same as a specified licence area of a commercial radio broadcasting licence.

Comments on the draft *Broadcasting Services (Deemed Digital Radio Licence Areas) Determination 2007* closed on 12 October 2007.

More information is on ACMA's website at www.acma.gov.au (go to For licensees & industry: Service & technical requirements > Broadcasting: Digital radio).

New digital radio services proposed

ACMA is seeking public comment on its proposals to make available three multiplex transmitter licences for digital radio services in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, and two multiplex licences for Adelaide, Hobart and Perth. The multiplex licences will provide for the digital transmission of existing wide-coverage national, commercial and community radio services.

The proposals are contained in draft digital radio channel plans, which include the number and categories of multiplex transmitter licences proposed for issue as well as the transmission frequencies and associated technical data for the main transmission sites. The digital radio channel plans will enable the radio industry and audio product manufacturers to start their planning for the introduction of digital radio with some degree of certainty.

The government's digital radio policy envisages existing commercial and wide-coverage community

broadcasters having the opportunity to control the multiplex licences for their initial services, with subsequent licence allocations to be undertaken via a priced-based method.

Digital radio offers better sound quality, reduced reception problems, the ability to pause or rewind, ease of tuning as channels are identified by name rather than frequency, the provision of still images (for example, a CD cover from which a song was played or a station logo or advertising), program associated text (for example, what song is playing, where it can be purchased, the name of the artist) and data services such as news, traffic and weather updates.

A variation to the frequency allotment plan and a variation to the (television) digital channel plan for the North Coast of New South Wales were also released for comment. These draft instruments respectively identify the number of radiofrequencies that will be required for digital radio and move a planned

but unused digital television channel to a different frequency to prevent interference with digital radio.

The government announced its policy framework for the introduction of digital radio services in October 2005, now implemented by the *Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Radio) Act 2007*. The initial roll-out of digital radio will be based on digital audio broadcasting (DAB) technology. Additional legislation may be required if alternative technologies are identified as being more appropriate for regional Australia and the legislation provides for a review of digital radio technologies appropriate for regional areas by 2011.

To meet the legislated start-up date for digital radio of 1 January 2009, the digital radio channel plans, frequency allotment plan and digital channel plan variations are scheduled for completion by the end of December 2007.

Digital radio services will initially

operate in the VHF Band III (174–230 MHz), although the use of additional spectrum such as L-band (1452–1492 MHz) or 'channel 13' (230–240 MHz) will be considered at a later stage, as will planning for transmission repeater sites.

Although a standard has not been formally set, industry intends to implement the services using the new DAB+ standard, which provides scope for licensees to provide additional services and enhanced features.

The draft frequency allotment plan variation would add a new schedule to the existing frequency allotment plan. This variation provides for either two or three new channels to be available for digital radio services in each state capital.

Comments close on 29 October 2007. The draft digital radio channel plans, frequency allotment plan and variation are on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au.