

Datacasting trial extended and new mobile TV trial approved

ACMA has authorised separate trials on the two unassigned digital television channels, known as channels A and B, for Sydney. As well as extending the current datacasting trial being conducted by Broadcast Australia on channel 35, ACMA approved an application by Irdeto Access Pty Limited to conduct a digital video broadcasting – handheld (DVB-H) mobile television trial in Sydney. Using channel 29, this trial is for a 'one-off' three-month period, commencing in early April 2007.

ACMA's decision to extend Broadcasting Australia's trial—known as DIGITAL FORTY FOUR—follows consideration of submissions about extending the trial beyond 31 March. The overwhelming majority of submissions supported an extension. In making its decision, ACMA balanced the public benefit from the continuation of the services until the long-term allocation of the channels, which is expected to be in the second half of 2007, with the public interest in ensuring that the eventual price-based allocation process of the channels is fair, with no one bidder favoured over another.

DIGITAL FORTY FOUR was officially launched in 2003 and trial information provided to date by Broadcast Australia is on the ACMA website. The apparatus licence will require Broadcast Australia to provide ACMA with more detailed reports during and at the completion of the trial, which will be published on the ACMA website. The same condition has been placed on the Irdeto Access trial.

Information gathered about the Irdeto Access trial will provide information about the technical

characteristics of the DVB-H system and market interest in new technologies such as mobile television. A major aspect of the Irdeto Access trial is a demonstration of its security solutions for content owners. This will enable secure delivery of high quality content over future DVB-H networks without fear of piracy. The trial will also be used to assess the degree to which the DVB-H system can operate using a variety of mobile handsets and mobile network operators.

Unallocated available spectrum in the broadcasting services bands has been used by ACMA and its predecessors to support trials of new technologies. ACMA's general policy on the conduct of these trials is to limit their duration to 12–18 months.

The datacasting trial in Sydney began almost three years ago following a call for expressions of interest. Only Broadcast Australia made a formal commercial trial application and it was approved to conduct a datacasting trial on the unassigned channel 35 in Sydney from October 2003. In September 2006, ACMA extended the trial until 31 December 2006.

The trial was not intended to go beyond 31 December 2006, the 'sunset date' after which the rules for use of the spectrum were to be liberalised and the statutory moratorium on new commercial television services was to end. Before that date, scheduled reviews under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* relating to the digital television regime

were to examine regulatory, competition and spectrum arrangements that might apply from 2007.

The government has now announced its decisions about the future use of the spectrum and enacted the *Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Television) Act 2006*. It has transferred the responsibility for decisions to allocate additional commercial television licences to the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, confirmed that it is not currently interested in planning additional commercial television broadcasting licences and announced that the two unassigned television channels in each market are to be offered Australia-wide through a price-based allocation process conducted by ACMA.

Channel A will be permitted for in-home services including datacasting and narrowcasting services and in Sydney will likely use the 533–540 MHz frequency band (channel 29). Channel B will be permitted for a wider range of

uses such as mobile television and will likely use the 575–583 MHz frequency range (channel 35).

In July 2005, ACMA approved an application from The Bridge Networks Pty Ltd (a subsidiary of Broadcast Australia) to conduct a DVB-H trial in Sydney on channel 29 from July 2005 to July 2006, later extending it until 31 December 2006. Broadcast Australia requested a further extension, but ACMA decided that sufficient time had already been available and the trial ceased on 31 January 2007.

The unassigned digital channels remain available for trials in other markets until the end of July 2007. Applications to conduct trials should be provided to the Manager, Allocations Administration, Australian Communications and Media Authority, PO Box 78, Belconnen ACT 2617. Guidelines for trials using the broadcasting services bands are on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to For licensees & industry: Service & technical requirements > Broadcasting: Digital radio).

