

ON
AIR

ACMA to develop new community broadcasting representation guidelines

Following the recent release of the *Community Broadcasting Sponsorship Guidelines 2008*, ACMA has announced a further initiative to help community broadcasters better comply with their licence conditions.

With community participation and representation requirements a key provision of all community broadcasting licences, ACMA is developing a new set of guidelines to clarify the necessary level of performance broadcasters must meet to comply with these licence conditions.

The guidelines will:

- help community broadcasters understand and comply with the requirements to encourage community participation and continue representing their community interest
- raise community awareness about the ways in which individuals and community groups can enable community broadcasting services to continue to represent their community interests.

ACMA's analysis of 121 community broadcasting investigations between 2002–03 and 2006–07 revealed that over 20 per cent were for breaches of these licence conditions.

ACMA Chairman Chris Chapman said that 'ACMA has extensively reviewed community broadcasting investigations for the past five years and several related issues—indeed a trend—emerged as a principal concern for complainants. The areas of concern included community participation, governance issues and licensees failing to meet the needs of their community.

'Additional guidelines should also enable ACMA to further implement recommendations of the

House of Representatives Standing Committee report of June 2007, *Tuning into community broadcasting*, particularly those relating to governance arrangements.'

The House of Representatives report included recommendations that the Australian Government, in conjunction with the sector's peak bodies, develop a guiding template for the structure of boards and committees, and that ACMA improve its transparency of decision-making about community broadcasting services.

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In the March 2008 issue of its publication *CBX*, the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) examined the licence renewal process for community broadcasters and came to the conclusion that 'there is no conspiracy by ACMA or the Federal Government to take away community licences for commercial or any other purposes'.

The CBAA highlighted that, of 215 stations to

go through the renewal process to that point, only five were not renewed. In these five cases, the spectrum was nonetheless retained for community broadcasting purposes and temporary community broadcasting licences made available.

However, the CBAA also stressed the importance of close and continued industry scrutiny of the licence renewal process and outcomes, '... firstly to ensure that standards and decisions are applied consistently across the sector. Secondly, to learn from them'. It therefore

supports ACMA's decision to publish online all remedial actions taken at licence renewal and to develop relevant guidelines to help broadcasters better understand their obligations.

Following further analysis of available data, ACMA will consult with industry groups on the development of the draft community broadcasting representation guidelines and make them available for industry comment later in 2008.