

# Comments sought on proposed channels for digital television repeater services

ACMA has sought submissions on its revised proposals to allot and assign digital channels for television repeater services in 94 areas of remote central and eastern Australia.

Areas include Bourke, Lightning Ridge, Menindee and Wilcannia in far-west New South Wales; Bathurst Island, Groote Eylandt, Jabiru and Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory; Charleville, Cunnamulla, Longreach, Roma and Weipa in Queensland; and Ceduna, Coober Pedy and Roxby Downs in South Australia.

ACMA has also identified as yet unassigned channels that may be used for other purposes, including datacasting, in areas where channels for both national and commercial, or only commercial, services are identified.

The proposals appear in a recently released discussion paper and revised draft variations to the commercial and national digital channel plans.

Schedule 4 of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* requires ACMA to formulate legislative schemes for the conversion of commercial and national television broadcasting services from analog to digital mode.

Under the Commercial Television Conversion and National Television Conversion schemes, ACMA is empowered to develop and vary digital channel plans for areas throughout Australia. These plans determine which channels are to be allotted to each licensee for the purposes of transmitting services in digital mode and the technical characteristics of these channels.

In developing and varying digital channel plans, ACMA's objective is to create channel allotments that enable broadcasters to plan their digital transmission coverage to achieve the same level as existing analog services, as well as meeting various objectives of the Act.

ACMA Chairman Chris Chapman said: 'In developing these proposals, ACMA weighed up a number of important factors. These include spectrum efficiency, 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.'

'ACMA has at all times given viewers' interests a high priority. However, these plans may have some impact on the use of VCRs and set-top boxes, although any disruption is expected to be relatively minor. In most cases, all that will be required is re-tuning television sets and VCRs.'

'Before any changes take place, public information and education campaigns will provide timely advice for viewers on how to re-tune devices and alternative connection methods.'

## IMPACT ON VCRS AND SET-TOP BOXES

Devices such as VCRs can be connected to a television in a number of ways, one of which is to use a radiofrequency output channel. Channels 36, 37 and 38 have often been the default radiofrequency output channels for VCRs and ancillary devices such as set-top boxes, although since the advent of digital television, channel 69 has increasingly become the default channel.

Use of these channels for broadcasting services can result in interference to the television's reception of the VCR or ancillary device output.

However, in some instances ACMA needs to use these channels for digital television services to achieve the best possible overall public outcome.

Such interference can be overcome reasonably simply, and at no cost, by viewers following the instruction manual for the VCR, other ancillary device or television to tune into an alternative channel, or by connecting the television to the VCR through the audio and video (A/V) connections.

This potential interference problem has been significantly reduced over the last few years as many newer VCRs and set-top boxes default to channel 69 or use non-radiofrequency connections.

The discussion paper and revised draft variations to the digital channel plans are available by freecall 1800 226 667 or on the ACMA website at <[www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au)> (go to For licensees & industry: Service & technical requirements > Broadcasting: Digital TV > Planning digital TV > Draft digital channel plans (DCPs)). Comments closed on 2 August 2008.

