



# ACMA seeks to improve its interaction with the community broadcasting sector

ACMA has announced a number of ongoing initiatives to improve its interactions with the community broadcasting sector. This new approach will be more proactive, entail a review of processes and procedures, and focus on improved information, consultation and transparency.

'This sector is incredibly diverse and its several hundred members vary widely in their size and resources, and the quality of their governance arrangements,' said ACMA Chairman Chris Chapman. 'We have gone back to first principles and are looking for better ways to do business with the sector. The aim is to ensure sector members continue to serve the community while at the same time making the regulator more accessible and more accountable.'

The first step is the establishment of a new ACMA team, the Community Broadcasting Group (CBG). One of its aims is to interact with the community broadcasting sector—in particular, its peak bodies—in a highly consultative manner.

The CBG's work encompasses all licence allocations and renewals, complaints and investigations, compliance and enforcement, and the monitoring and review of the codes of practice that govern community radio and television broadcasting services. A single group dealing with this range of matters will ensure a more consistent and efficient approach to the varied issues the community broadcasting sector faces. This, in turn, should minimise overlap or delay.

As at 1 May 2008, there were 353 community radio broadcasting services, compared with 273 commercial radio broadcasting services (see status table below).

'This is a large number of community radio broadcasting services. As they obtain access to valuable free-to-air spectrum at little cost, it is important for ACMA to administer the legislative provisions in accordance with the public interest and in the manner intended by parliament,' said Mr Chapman.

'The emphasis in the past has been on licence renewal decisions and investigations arising from specific complaints. While these processes will remain important, the majority of community stations are likely to benefit from an increased emphasis on information and education throughout the life of their licences.'

'This could take the form of more comprehensive and up-to-date guidelines on the various regulatory requirements of the sector, and a speedier dissemination of information about decisions that set precedents for the sector.'

The requirement that ACMA reviews each community broadcasting licence every five years before a decision is made on whether to renew the licence came into effect in December 2002. Between 1 July 2004 and 29 February 2008, ACMA assessed 276 community radio renewal applications. Of this number, 271 licences were renewed and five licences were not renewed due to serious problems with their services.

These figures suggest that the community radio sector as a whole is operating reasonably effectively, although several non-renewals have been unpopular in the affected communities. Overall, however, the process has ensured that community radio remains open and accountable to the communities they are licensed to serve.

A highlight of ACMA's improved communication with the sector is the establishment of a dedicated section on the ACMA website, providing a single point of access to a broad array of information on community broadcasting services. The publication of a greater range of reports and information relevant to community broadcasting will be a feature of this resource.

ACMA intends that the new approach will support the community broadcasting sector's growth by improved processes, procedures and resources. Licensees should benefit from the enhanced transparency and greater accessibility. Greater compliance with the relevant licence conditions and codes of practice is expected to be one notable outcome.

The *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* states that community broadcasting services:

- are provided for community purposes
- are not operated for profit or as part of a profit-making enterprise
- provide programs that are able to be received by commonly available equipment, are made available free to the general public, and comply with any determinations or clarifications under section 19 in relation to community broadcasting services.

More information is available on the ACMA website at <[www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au)> (go to For the public: Consumer & community advice > Broadcasting: Community broadcasting).

## Community broadcasting status, May 2008

	Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Services (RIBS)	Non-RIBS
Long-term community radio licences	78	275
Long-term community TV licences	78	4
Temporary community radio licences	41	
Temporary community TV licences	2	
Long-term community radio licences not renewed	8 (3 lapsed)	
Long-term community radio licences renewed with additional condition imposed	1	
Long-term community radio licences renewed with voluntary undertaking	26	