

Government provides extra funds for digital television switchover projects



At the Australian Broadcasting Summit in late March, the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator the Hon. Stephen Conroy, announced a further \$37.9 million in government funds to drive the national switchover to digital television, which is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2013. From this funding boost, ACMA will receive an additional \$8.5 million to undertake necessary technical switchover-related projects, such as an evaluation of digital television transmission and reception throughout Australia.

ACMA already plays a key role in allocating spectrum for digital television and ensuring television broadcasters roll out digital transmission facilities as soon as is practicable. The Minister's announcement allows for the extension of ACMA's research program, with the extra funding helping ACMA deliver its technical expertise to the switchover process.

One important task is to develop an understanding of the reception experience of viewers on the

ground—both in terms of the geographical coverage of digital signals, and the adequacy of the antenna and reception equipment at individual homes. This research will enable the government to consider if any remedial action is needed to ensure that all Australians will be adequately served by digital signals—and that such coverage will be equivalent to existing analog services.

ACMA is experienced in undertaking similar

assessments for other communications network transitions; for example, the AMPS and CDMA closures. ACMA staff have also been conducting limited field strength measurements for compliance and interference resolution.

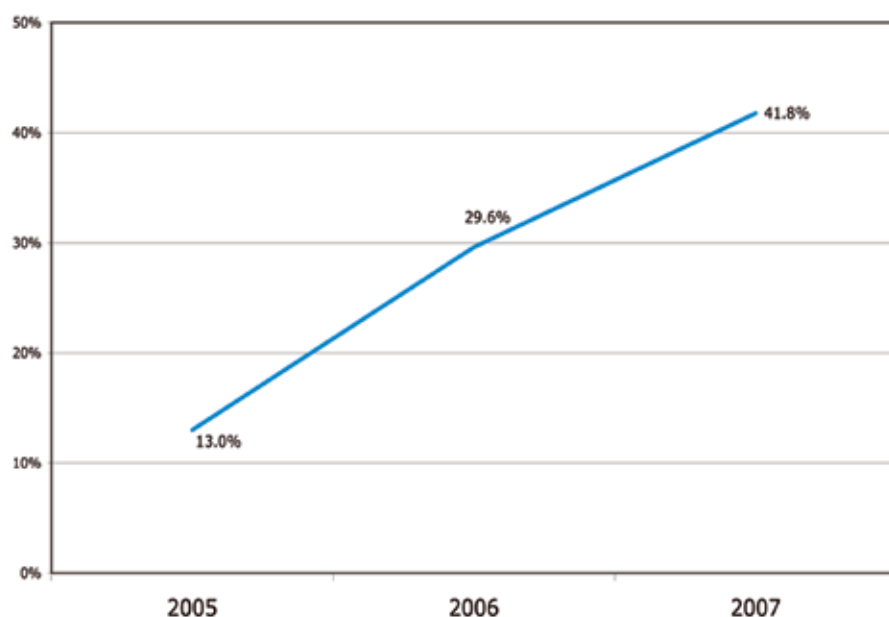
However, the digital television switchover timeline will require a sustained increase in such activities. ACMA will analyse measurements to date, and refine and expand the current program of 'exploratory' (planned and scheduled for possible problem locations) and 'spot' (responsive to complaints and emerging issues) measurement to a broader set of areas. ACMA also intends to selectively undertake more intensive 'planning' grade measurement of targeted areas using broadcast-level equipment.

The aim is to acquire a comprehensive set of data on digital terrestrial reception in marginal areas. The signal measurement data will be stored in a secure central data repository, and will be made available for reporting, mapping and analysis. This will provide empirical evidence of actual digital reception in the field compared with broadcast modelling and planning coverage predictions. It will also help staff to highlight and manage black spots.

Any major digital television black-spot intervention will require an intensive ACMA planning exercise. This is the result of current spectrum constraints and the need to consider different methods—such as single frequency networks (SFN)—to achieve coverage without excessively depleting spectrum resources.

More information on the digital switchover can be found on the ACMA website at <www.acma.gov.au> (go to For the public: Consumer & community advice > Broadcasting: Digital broadcasting > Digital television).

Growth in digital free-to-air television in Australia, 2005-2007



Base: All households N=1,945 (December 2007), 1,537 (October 2006), 1,148 (July 2005)