

3D TV trials cover AFL and NRL grand finals

AFL and NRL fans with 3D-enabled digital television receivers were able to watch the grand finals in 3D this year following the ACMA's decision to issue licences to both the Seven Network and the Nine Network.

The trial broadcasts of the grand finals were available to viewers in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Newcastle, Adelaide and Perth. However, at the time of writing, it was unlikely that the Seven Network would also cover the AFL Grand Final replay in 3D due to Nine requiring the production equipment for the NRL Grand Final.

After issuing the licences, the ACMA indicated it will suspend consideration of any further 3D TV trials while it conducts a review of certain spectrum, licensing and consumer policy issues associated with 3D TV.

To assist in this review, the ACMA has released a discussion paper to seek public comment on the future of 3D TV and the use of temporarily available broadcast spectrum to conduct future trials of 3D and other broadcast technologies.

The discussion paper, *Temporary trials of 3D TV and other emerging technologies*, was released on 1 September to coincide with the latest trial announcement.

The first terrestrial trials of 3D TV in Australia were licensed to operate between 19 May and 19 July 2010 across the five mainland state capitals plus Newcastle and Wollongong. Their coverage of the rugby league State of Origin series and selected matches from the FIFA World Cup created considerable public and media interest in 3D TV.

'The world-first, free-to-air trials conducted by the Nine Network and SBS demonstrated some of the challenges of 3D TV technology,' said Chris Chapman, Chairman of the ACMA. 'There is still much for the industry in Australia and internationally to learn about 3D TV production, transmission and reception. Accordingly, the ACMA was pleased to facilitate these additional trials by the Seven Network and the Nine Network.'

Before considering applications for trial licences beyond the end of 2010, the ACMA decided it was timely to gauge the level of ongoing broadcasting industry interest in conducting further trials of 3D TV. It has sought to begin a public conversation by inviting comment from the industry and the public.

'The discussion paper is designed to assist interested parties to address policy issues and to offer views on the future of 3D TV, as well as other emerging technologies,' said Mr Chapman.

To help potential contributors from the industry and the wider community, the discussion paper gives a plain English overview of the technology that sits behind 3D TV. It also explains the ACMA's approach to issuing scientific licences and canvasses some emerging non-3D broadcast technologies for which such licences might also be used.

The paper seeks comment on important consumer protection issues, such as the effectiveness of public information in explaining the limited availability of the 3D TV trials. When a number of retailers failed to adequately inform consumers about the limited nature of the most recent trials, triggering investigations by the ACCC, this issue was shown to be a very real one. The discussion paper also invites comment on the risk to consumers that still-evolving technical standards may require costly transitions to successor generations of equipment. ☺

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Submissions

Submissions in response to the 3D TV discussion paper close on 15 October 2010.

Submissions should be sent via email to 3DTV@acma.gov.au or by mail to:

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A copy of the paper is available on the ACMA's website at www.acma.gov.au (go to About ACMA: News & media centre > Issues for comment > IFC 22/2010).

