

Sydney datacasting trial to end in April

The Broadcast Australia-operated Sydney datacasting trial service has been granted a final extension until 30 April 2010.

Beyond this final extension, the ACMA has decided not to allocate a television channel for any future extensions of the trial.

'The reasonable prospect of a price-based allocation of datacasting transmitter licences, which could have provided a longer-term home for the Sydney trial service, underpinned past decisions of the ACMA to keep extending the trial of technology that would be used to provide these services,' said Chris Chapman, Chairman of the ACMA.

'As there is no likelihood of an auction of long-term licences for datacasting in the near future, the ACMA has decided the rationale for continuing a trial of such services no longer exists.'

Trials of new technology, authorised by way of a scientific apparatus licence, are ordinarily strictly limited in duration. The Sydney datacasting trial has been in operation, based on periodic extensions of its trial licence, since 2003.

The ACMA's decision follows recent clarification of the following aspects of the government's television digitisation policy:

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- > In mid-2008, the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, announced that the government was reconsidering policy relating to the two unassigned digital channels.
- > On 4 November 2009, the Minister announced that the community television sector was to be given access to one of the unassigned channels for the purposes of providing simulcasts of their analog services until the final switch-off of analog television services takes place in 2013. The decision commits one of the unassigned channels, Channel A, for community television in Sydney until 2013.
- > The government's *Digital Dividend Green Paper*, released on 5 January 2010, makes no mention of any future auction of a channel for datacasting.

Digital re-transmission of the existing Sydney community television service, TVS, commenced on 1 March 2010.

The ACMA has given Broadcast Australia one final licence period to assist in closing out its datacasting operations. As a consequence, the trial will cease on or before 30 April 2010. ☎

For more information on the trial and datacasting services, visit the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to News & media centre > Media releases > ACMA media release 16/2010 – 29 January).