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ABA proposes new radio licences

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The region includes the cities of Bendigo and Ballarat and the towns of Castlemaine, Echuca, Kyneton, Kerang, Maryborough and Swan Hill.

The ABA proposes to make licences available for two new commercial radio services, seven new community radio services and three new open narrowcasting radio services.

'These proposals lay the groundwork for a significant expansion of radio broadcasting services in the Central Victoria and Central Murray region,' said Mr Peter Webb, ABA Chairman.

Commercial radio

The ABA has proposed two new commercial radio licences, one in Ballarat and one in Bendigo, because of interest expressed by potential service providers. If these proposals are taken up, Ballarat and Bendigo would each have three commercial radio services.

Community radio

The ABA has proposed two new FM community radio licences for Bendigo, and one new FM radio licence for each

of Ballarat, Barham, Kyneton and Echuca.

If there is interest from the public, the ABA will make a licence available for a community radio service in Swan Hill, no earlier than 12 months after the licence area plan (LAP) for this area is finalised.

Open narrowcasting radio

The draft licence area plans also contain proposals for one new FM open narrowcasting radio service in each of Ballarat and Swan Hill, and an AM open narrowcasting radio service in Bendigo.

Public comment

The public is now invited to comment on the suggestions made in the draft radio LAPs. Mr Webb said it was important to understand the ABA's role.

'The ABA's job is to identify vacant radio channels and

decide the number and type of new licences to be made available. Then it's for business and the community to take up these opportunities.'

'We cannot fund or make others fund extra services. We cannot demand improved reception for existing services,' he said.

The release of the draft licence area plans follows wide public consultation by the ABA, which held meetings in the Central Victoria and Central Murray region during October 1995. One hundred and fifty submissions were received about radio services in the Central Victoria and Central Murray region.

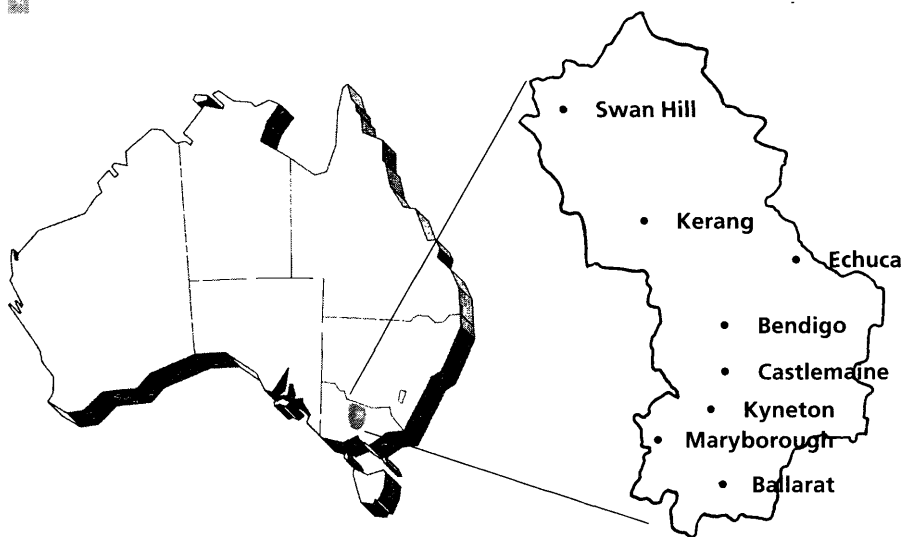
Main planning issues

The main issue resulting from the ABA's consultation process is the limited availability of spectrum to accommodate interest expressed by existing and potential radio broadcasters in providing new radio services.

There is interest from the public in increasing the number of radio services across the Central Victoria and Central Murray region, particularly community radio services.

There are a range of ABC radio services available throughout the Central Victoria and Central Murray region, two commercial services in each of Ballarat and Bendigo/Maryborough, and one commercial radio service operating in Swan Hill (with a second expected to commence shortly). Bendigo/Castlemaine and Ballarat are served by community radio.

While the ABA's proposals would substantially increase the number of radio services throughout the Central Victoria and Central Murray region, there is limited spectrum available. In making its proposals, the ABA has weighed up submissions from the public requesting additional radio services and the interest of those who wish to supply





additional radio services against the known vacant spectrum.

Commercial radio

Parties expressing ongoing interest in providing new commercial radio services, other than existing broadcasters, are:

- Boyd House & Partners, solicitors and conveyancers, made a submission on behalf of an unnamed client, with 'extensive experience in the provision of commercial FM and commercial AM radio services in non-metropolitan markets', interested in providing new commercial radio services in each of Bendigo and Ballarat;
- Central Zone FM Services Pty Ltd (CZFM) indicated interest in commercial FM licences to serve the Ballarat, Bendigo and Swan Hill markets;
- Mr Anton Vanderlely expressed interest in providing a commercial service to Ballarat, Bendigo and Swan Hill;
- 3UZ Pty Ltd, which currently operates racing radio services in Victoria, expressed interest in either a commercial or open narrowcasting radio service in Bendigo and Swan Hill; and
- Goldfields Community Radio Co-op, operator of existing community station 3CCC, expressed interest in establishing a commercial FM radio service in Bendigo.

The ABA has proposed two new commercial radio licences, one in Ballarat and one in Bendigo, but no additional (i.e. third) commercial radio service in Swan Hill.

Under s.39 of the Broadcasting Services Act, the licensees of commercial radio services 3BA Ballarat and 3SH Swan Hill were entitled to apply in early 1996 to the ABA for a second licence.

Radio Ballarat Pty Limited, owner of 3BA Ballarat, was granted a second commercial licence by the ABA on 25 February 1996. The new service, 3BBA, already broadcasts on FM 103.1 MHz from Mt Warrenheip.

Ace Radio Broadcasters Pty Limited, owner of 3SH Swan Hill, was granted a second commercial licence by the ABA on 12 September 1996. The new service, 3SHI, will broadcast on FM 107.7 MHz from the Pental transmission site.

National services

The ABA has reserved a channel for one additional national radio service in Hopetoun, as well as reserving capacity for the nine existing national radio services throughout the Central Victoria and Central Murray region.

Improving existing radio services

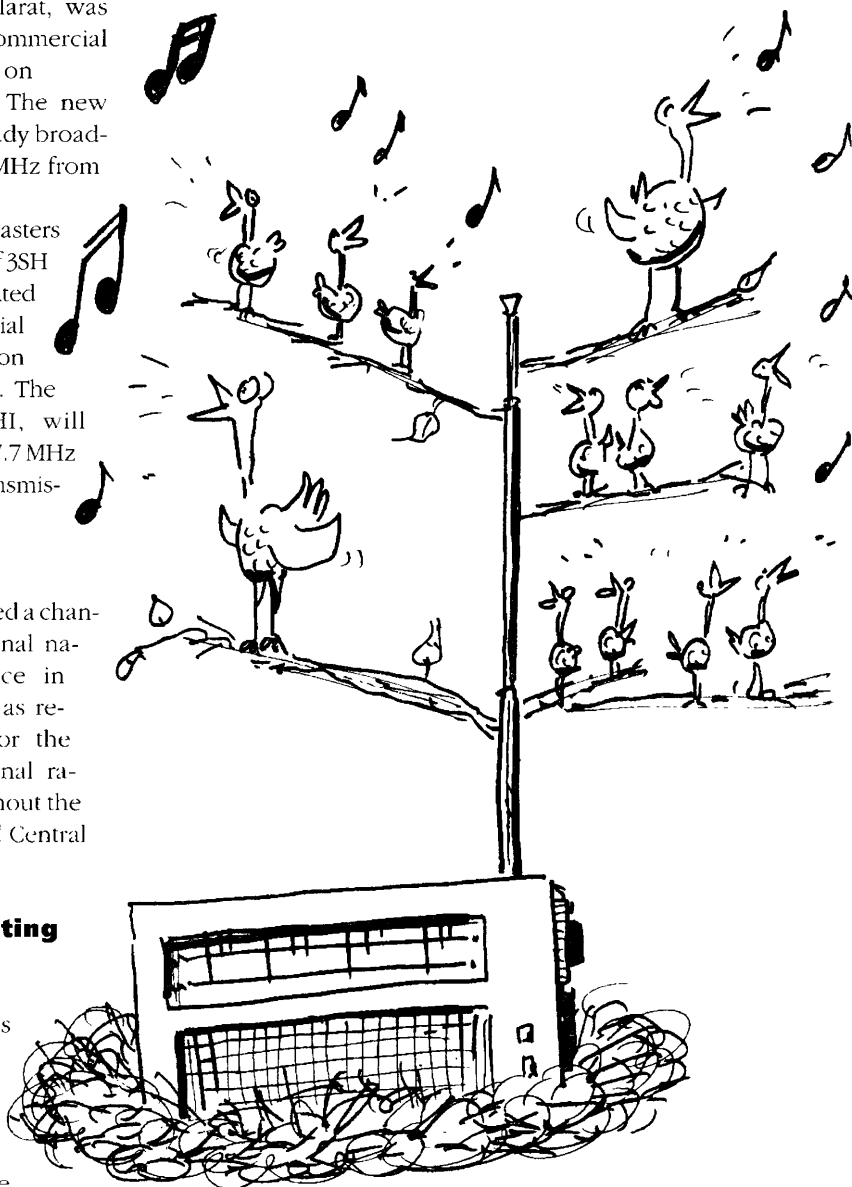
The ABA proposes to make a channel available at Daylesford for 3BA Ballarat's commercial AM radio service and a channel in Bendigo for 3CV Maryborough's commercial AM radio service. To improve reception of their services, the ABA also proposes to allow the community broadcaster in Ballarat (3BBB) to extend its licence area, move frequency and upgrade its power and the community broadcaster in Bendigo (3CCC) to upgrade its power.

Allocation of licences

With the exception of the capacity reserved for national

broadcasters and channel capacity made available for allocation to community broadcasters, other capacity set out in the LAP will generally be available for commercial licences and open narrowcasting services, under a price-based allocation scheme.

Capacity set out for community licences will be allocated by means of a merit-based system. The ABA will generally begin the allocation process after a final LAP for each area has been determined.



The ABA's plans and a discussion document are available at libraries throughout the Central Victoria and Central Murray region, or can be obtained from the ABA by telephoning Freecall 1 800 810 241.

Written submissions should be sent to the Planning Officer for Central Victoria and Central Murray, ABA, PO Box 34, Belconnen, ACT 2616, by 9 May 1997.