

Revamped digital radio trials policy issued

ACMA has released updated policy guidelines for digital radio trials using the broadcasting services bands.

The guidelines take account of the government's digital radio policy framework, broaden the scope of the guidelines to include the MF-AM band and set out a broader range of factors ACMA will take into account in considering whether to approve trials.

ACMA has also decided to make spectrum available in the MF-AM

band on 1386 kHz in the Wollongong region for a digital radio trial. TJH Systems, a broadcasting engineering consultancy firm, will operate a trial of digital radio technology using Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM) for six months from 1 April 2006.

The decision follows consideration of all requests to use the 1386 kHz frequency. There is interest in its use for community radio and open narrowcasting radio broadcasting, and competing applications to trial

digital radio technology.

Trialling digital radio technologies is an important informer of the introduction of digital radio in Australia, providing the government and ACMA with more information about the utility of spectrum and the performance of digital radio systems than the mere modelling of services will allow.

ACMA has decided not to re-open the Sydney licence area plan to further consider the use of 1386 kHz.

Instead, it has made spectrum available on a short-term basis for another use, while leaving the frequency in the licence area plan for potential use as an analog community radio service.

The policy on digital radio trials is on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to Radio & TV > Digital Broadcasting > Digital Radio).

Coverage of commercial radio services in Remote Central and Eastern Australia licence areas to be improved

ACMA is making changes that will improve coverage of the remote radio services within the remote licence areas, while limiting the level of signal overspill into any neighbouring licence areas. The changes are being made to the technical specifications at 17 transmitter sites for the Remote Central Zone commercial radio service, 8SAT and at five transmitter sites for the Remote North East Zone commercial radio service, 4RBL.

Only two of the planned new transmitters—those at Kapunda, South Australia and Lake Mountain, Victoria—will result in any spillage of a technically adequate radio signal into an adjacent radio licence area.

ACMA must strike a balance between the rights of listeners within the remote licence area to receive their 'local' remote service and the need to avoid excessive overspill into other markets. In the past, some overspill was permitted to ensure coverage of significant population centres within the licence area. While acknowledging the objections of some adjacent-area broadcasters,

ACMA decided not to change its general approach in this case.

The areas where changes to the 8SAT service have been made are Bourke in New South Wales, Jabiru in the Northern Territory, Ceduna–Smoky Bay, Coober Pedy, Coonalpyn, Kapunda, Karoonda, Kingscote, Kingston SE, Maitland, Minlaton, Padthaway East, Pinnaroo, Roxby Downs, Streaky Bay and Woomera in South Australia, and Lake Mountain in Victoria. The areas where changes to the 4RBL service have been made are Chinchilla, Dirranbandi, Taroom, Wandoan and Weipa in Queensland.

At Coober Pedy and Woomera, 8SAT requested further changes following the release of the draft licence area plan variation. As no objections were made to the previously proposed changes for these transmitters, the changes are minor and do not affect any neighbouring licence areas, ACMA decided to include the changes in the final variation to the licence area plan.

ACMA also decided to make FM channel capacity available for Rebel

Radio Network's second commercial radio service, 4BRZ, at Bourke (on 107.3 MHz), and Chinchilla (97.1 MHz) and Weipa (97.7 MHz). Rebel Radio Network had expressed interest in providing the service to these areas.

ACMA released a draft licence area plan variation in September 2005 and has taken into consideration all the submissions it received in response. Objections were received from Commercial Radio Australia and various broadcasters claiming the 8SAT signal would cause excessive overspill into adjacent licence areas from several sites.

With the exception of Kapunda and Lake Mountain, there is no predicted signal overspill of the 8SAT service into any urban areas in neighbouring licence areas.

At Kapunda, the estimated population expected to receive signal overspill in the Adelaide licence area is 12,000 people, which is one per cent of the total Adelaide licence area population. The estimated number of people in the 8SAT licence area who would benefit from the proposed service is 6,700, or 4.2 per

cent of the 8SAT licence area population.

At Lake Mountain, the estimated population expected to receive signal overspill in the Melbourne licence area is 1,100 people, or 0.03 per cent of the total Melbourne licence area population. The estimated number of people in the 8SAT licence area who would benefit from the proposed service is 2,400, or 1.5 per cent of the 8SAT licence area population.

There is also overspill the other way, from the Adelaide and Melbourne licence areas into the remote licence area. An estimated 2,800 people, or 1.7 per cent of the population, in the remote licence area are able to receive a signal from Adelaide services and an estimated 4,000, or 2.5 per cent of the population, are able to receive signals from the Melbourne licence area.

The decisions are contained in a variation to the radio licence area plan for Remote Central and Eastern Australia, which is on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to ACMA > Publications > Broadcasting > Planning > Final licence area plans).