

Extension of DIGITAL RADIO TRIALS in Sydney and Melbourne

ACMA will extend the current Eureka 147 digital radio trials in Sydney and Melbourne until 30 June 2007. The trials, using VHF Band III spectrum, are being conducted in Sydney by Commercial Radio Australia and in Melbourne by Broadcast Australia.

The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Helen Coonan, announced the policy framework for the introduction of digital radio in Australia in October 2005. Information gathered in the digital radio trials is informing development of the government's digital radio policy. The trials will test new coding and an advanced version of Eureka, which, if successful, will significantly improve the quality of digital radio sound available to each broadcaster.

ACMA has already been provided with some useful information and data as a result of the current digital radio trials in Sydney and Melbourne. In Sydney, Commercial Radio Australia has conducted an investigation into the comparative signal strength inside and outside different types of buildings. Two key findings are that brick and wood dwellings have the lowest signal losses while shopping centres have the highest. There is also little difference between L band and VHF band III penetration for steel and

concrete structures. This kind of empirical data is invaluable if ACMA is to add value to long-running discussions about the respective merits and use of L band and VHF band III for Eureka coverage.

In Melbourne, Broadcast Australia is currently trialling the Eureka 147 system and wants to trial a system incorporating AAC+ coding and its variants. The use of AAC+ coding is of particular relevance to Australia, given that the government has indicated it will give radio broadcasters 128 kilobits per second (kbit/s) for Eureka 147, which can currently deliver FM-like quality with 128 kbit/s. If the AAC or its variant the AAC+ codec is used for Eureka 147, near-CD quality may be able to be achieved with around 64

kbit/s. This means broadcasters would obtain at least equivalent benefit from 128 kbit/s as they currently obtain from more than 200 kbit/s.

ACMA remains committed to facilitating trials of all digital radio technologies, including Eureka 147, Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM), In-Band On Channel (IBOC), ISDB-TSB and any other existing or emerging system that makes use of the broadcasting services bands.

Capacity remains for other Eureka 147 trials in Melbourne and other major markets (VHF bands) and ACMA encourages those with an interest in trialling new or improved aspects of digital radio delivery to apply to do so. Applications to conduct digital radio trials should be provided to the

Executive Manager Allocations, Australian Communications and Media Authority, PO Box 78, Belconnen ACT 2617.

The guidelines for digital radio trials using the broadcasting services bands are on the ACMA website www.acma.gov.au (go to Industry > Broadcasting > Digital Radio) or contact ACMA on telephone (free call) 1800 810 241.

ASSESSING COMPETING APPLICATIONS

In assessing competing applications for digital radio trials, ACMA takes the following into consideration:

- the purpose of the trial
- the date and order in which the applicant expressed interest in conducting a trial
- the preparedness, and supporting evidence, of the applicant to commence a service on the nominated date
- the nominated date and duration of the trial
- whether the trial could practicably proceed using a different location or channel
- the willingness of the applicant to sign an undertaking about the short term nature of trials
- in light of government policy for the introduction of digital radio, the utility of the trial proposal
- willingness to work with ACMA where information gathered from the trial could be of interest to ACMA or the government as well as the triallist or
- such other matters as ACMA considers relevant including information that will enable ACMA to have regard to the objects of the legislation and the regulatory policy.