

A change ahead for programming rules for remote commercial radio services?

ACMA has started an investigation into the appropriateness of changing programming rules to enable remote commercial radio licensees to provide different services to different parts of their licence areas.

'This is a significant issue because remote commercial radio licence areas are very large and have small, widely scattered populations,' said Chris Chapman, ACMA Chairman. 'Under the current rules, a licensee may provide only one service under its licence. Amongst other things, ACMA will be considering whether it would be appropriate to relax this restriction so that remote commercial radio licensees could provide different services to different communities within their licence areas.'

REMOTE LICENCES

Remote licences were introduced as a separate category of commercial broadcasting licences in the late 1980s. The licences were introduced as part of the then government's policy of equalisation of broadcasting services throughout Australia. Services provided under the

remote licences were referred to as remote commercial radio services (RCRS).

In broad terms, the objective of the policy was that all Australians should have access to as wide a range of broadcasting services as possible, and that people in areas without any, or with an inadequate level of, broadcasting services should have access to a similar range of services as people in better served areas.

The RCRS licence areas were the same as the licence areas for the then recently established remote commercial television services, excluding any existing terrestrial radio service licence area. In effect, this meant that the RCRS licence areas were the areas of Australia not already included in an existing commercial radio licence area.

The RCRS licence areas include not only geographically isolated areas of Australia, but also areas that were not able to receive commercial radio services because of terrain which made the provision and/or reception of a signal difficult or uneconomical. Some of these latter areas are in fact adjacent to, or overlap, densely

populated metropolitan areas, for example, the Gold Coast in the case of the north-east zone licence area, and the outer northern suburbs of Melbourne and Adelaide in the case of the central area.

Remote licences were converted to normal commercial broadcasting licences when the Broadcasting Services Act came into effect in 1992.

During the 2004 election campaign, the government gave a commitment that it would ask ACMA's predecessor, the Australian Broadcasting Authority, to consider the feasibility of relaxing programming rules to allow RCRS licensees to provide different services to different parts of their licence areas.

On 7 December 2005, the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts wrote to ACMA asking it to give consideration to, and report on, the following issues:

- the appropriateness of, and the options for, relaxing the programming rules to enable an RCRS licensee to provide different services to different parts of its licence area
- the nature of the proposed local programming variation

and the limitations, if any, that should apply, and

- whether such changes should apply to other categories of commercial radio broadcasting licences.

The RCRS licence areas are:

Western zone: remote Western Australia (excluding centres such as Broome, Kalgoorlie, Port Hedland, Karratha and Geraldton)

Central zone: remote Northern Territory (excluding Alice Springs), remote South Australia, and parts of remote New South Wales and Victoria

North-east zone: large parts of remote Queensland (excluding major centres such as Mt Isa, Charleville, Roma and Longreach) and north western New South Wales.

SUBMISSIONS

ACMA invites public submissions on the issues to be considered in the investigation. An issues paper is on the ACMA's website, go to Latest > For comment > Issues for comment.

The closing date for submissions is 31 March 2006.

Send submissions to:

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Proposal to extend reach of Wagga Wagga community radio services

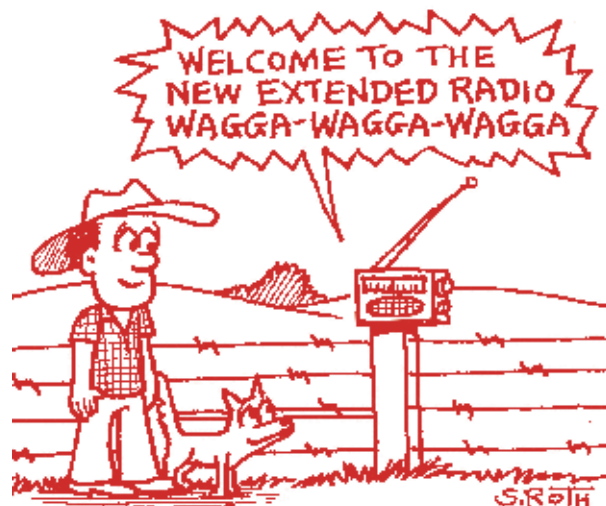
ACMA is proposing to make channel capacity available to improve services in the Wagga Wagga region of New South Wales.

The proposal follows consideration of a request from the licensees of Wagga Wagga community radio broadcasting services 2AAA and 2TVR to extend their services.

2AAA requested that translators be made available to extend their service to Gundagai and Coolamon. It also requested channel capacity for translators in Wagga Wagga South and Junee to rectify signal deficiencies of the service within its licence area.

2TVR requested that translators be made available to extend its service to Gundagai and Talbingo.

The proposals are in the draft variation to the Wagga Wagga radio licence area plan (the deadline for comment was 25 February 2006).



The variation to the Wagga Wagga licence area plan and explanatory paper are on the ACMA website,

www.acma.gov.au (and go to Latest > For Comment > Broadcasting > Draft licence area plans (LAPs)) or telephone 1800 810 241 for a copy.