



The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP

MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS

Dr Dennis Jensen MP  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Petitions  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

23 SEP 2014

## Petition Regarding Digital Television Reception

Dear Dr Jensen

Thank you for your recent letter concerning a petition lodged in relation to digital television reception on the Morisset Peninsular in New South Wales.

The Australian Government committed to the switch off of analog television in 1999, and since that time has invested heavily in digital transmission infrastructure. To manage the progressive switchover to digital television, the Digital Switchover Taskforce was established in 2007.

The first switchover to digital-only television occurred in Mildura on 30 June 2010 and concluded with the final switchover of the Remote Central and Eastern Australia region on 10 December 2013. The Northern New South Wales region switched to digital-only television on 27 November 2012.

There are some isolated pockets in the Lake Macquarie area that are predicted to have poor to no coverage from the Newcastle transmitter. Other transmitters are located at Belmont North, Wyong and Sydney, however they are unlikely to deliver better reception to the residents of some parts of the Morisset Peninsular.

Individual households can check their reception information by visiting the *mySwitch* facility online at <http://myswitch.digitalready.gov.au/> which can assist in optimising television reception for a specific address. Information provided by *mySwitch* includes:

- coverage that can be expected from a particular location
- the transmitters available for that location
- available digital services in the local area
- frequencies on which free-to-air service is transmitted
- possible reasons for poor reception
- suggestions for improving reception
- information on how to apply for the Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST) service
- frequently asked questions for the location.

Factors that can lead to poor reception of digital television services, even in areas where good coverage is predicted, can include old or poorly calibrated television reception equipment such as antennas, weather conditions, an inadequate signal, 'impulse noise' interference (as sometimes produced by electric motors in domestic appliances such as refrigerators) or signal obstructions, such as terrain, foliage, nearby buildings and trees.

In some areas of the Morisset Peninsular, the terrain will play a significant role in obstructing signals from the Newcastle transmitter.

Broadcasters are responsible for addressing transmission problems, service disruptions or coverage issues that may result in reception issues.

Licensed broadcasters may establish one or more terrestrial transmission facilities throughout their licence area, subject to the Australian Communications and Media Authority's (ACMA) planning guidelines. However, broadcasters are not obliged to establish transmitters and provide their services to every part of the licence area they have been licensed to serve. The extent to which broadcasters establish transmission facilities throughout their licence areas is a commercial decision for the broadcasters. In general, broadcasters are unlikely to establish transmitters in isolated regional areas with relatively small populations.

In relation to the provision of ABC services, the ABC's charter says that the functions of the ABC include '*...to provide within Australia innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard as part of the Australian broadcasting system....*' The ABC meets these obligations by providing its services both terrestrially and by satellite.

Consequently, for viewers who live in regional or metropolitan areas, including those on the Morisset Peninsular, and who are unable to receive adequate terrestrial television reception from the transmitters that serve the area in which they live, are able to receive their digital television services through the government-funded VAST service.

There are no eligibility criteria for access to the national services, the ABC and the SBS, and applications for these services may be made through *mySwitch* at any time. When a VAST set-top box is purchased, the smart card will permit immediate access to these services once enabled.

The approval of access to the commercial services on VAST is managed by the commercial broadcasters. If the commercial broadcasters do not grant permission to access the VAST service and a householder considers they have exhausted all reasonable avenues to gain terrestrial reception, they can have the decision reviewed by lodging a complaint with the ACMA.

Accessing the VAST service will mean that viewers have access to the same range of free-to-air digital television services regardless of where they live. For many households in regional and rural areas of Australia this represents a significant advancement from the number of television services previously available to them.

Across Australia, broadcaster programming is substantially the same, with the exception of the local news and advertising content. In order to ensure that viewers are not disadvantaged, the government has funded the VAST service for metropolitan news and regional news bulletins of local broadcasters to be rebroadcast on VAST. These news services are provided through dedicated news channels, which can be accessed by pressing 4 on the viewer's remote control and then selecting the appropriate service for their location.

No fee is payable to access the VAST service. It is important to note that any VAST equipment and installation is a one-off expense and there are no ongoing subscription or other costs to access the VAST service.

To ensure that the concerned residents of the Morisset Peninsular can access quality digital television, I encourage them to apply for access to the government-funded VAST service.

Thank you for bringing the petition to my attention. I trust this information will be of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Turnbull.