



Our ref:
Enquiries:

The Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
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Parliament House
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Dear Secretary

**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATIONS
AND THE ARTS INQUIRY INTO THE BROADCASTING LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT (DIGITAL TELEVISION) 2010**


I hereby attach a submission to the committee on behalf of the State Government of Western Australia's Westlink Satellite Service.

As the consultation process for the above legislation did not include the views of the current Westlink Narrowcast Network we believe the committee needs to consider the concerns expressed in our submission.

This submission can be made available as a public document alongside all other submissions on the Senate Committee website.

I ask the Senate Committee to keep myself and our Westlink Manager informed of the outcomes of your deliberations as these outcomes will have a large impact on the future of our Westlink service.

Yours sincerely


Paul Rosair
DIRECTOR GENERAL
LU April 2010

Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts from the Western Australian Department of Regional Development and Lands representing the Westlink Satellite Network

The Western Australian Government, Department of Regional Development and Lands has concerns that due to omissions in the proposed Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Television) Bill 2010, it appears that the State Government Satellite Narrowcasting Service (Westlink), will be unable to provide its vital services to Western Australians and others across the nation from 2013 when analogue services are switched off and the closure of the Optus Aurora platform occurs. Because the legislation makes no mention of the existence of narrowcasting, the fear is that such a service will not be recognised in any future HD and SDI services provision on the new digital platform.

Description of Westlink

Westlink is principally a satellite talkback television network operating on a narrowcast licence, providing education, training and information services to regional and remote area residents throughout Western Australia and has done so for more than 16 years.

Westlink delivers a wide variety of special interest programming as well as an avenue for talkback participation by regional residents in capital city programs.

By virtue of an Australia-wide footprint (also covering Christmas Island), Westlink supplies services through its full-time channel to state and national clients including the Rural Health Education Foundation (RHEF), wishing to reach a national audience. It could be said that Westlink, is Australia's only national full-time narrowcaster.

The Western Australian Government has a substantial ongoing investment in this satellite network encompassing Community Resource Centres (formerly known as Telecentres), Government and Private Schools, TAFE Colleges, Hospitals and Health Centres.

Every community, no matter how remote, can currently receive Westlink whether or not they have access to adequate internet, broadband or local telecommunications infrastructure. Westlink uses the same satellite platform as the remote area broadcasting services (RABS) provided by the ABC, SBS and commercial radio and television licensees. This means that it can be received anywhere in Australia using a standard RABS satellite dish and decoder, valued at approximately \$500, connected to a standard TV set. There are approximately 16,000 privately owned satellite receivers in WA, on farming and pastoral properties, remote Aboriginal communities and mine sites. There are 60,000 + receivers Australia-wide able to receive Westlink services.

In addition, the State Government has allocated Westlink reception equipment to 200 communities to provide shared public access to Westlink programs for people without their own satellite equipment. This equipment is typically housed in a Community Resource Centre or public library. The Education Department of WA has also installed satellite receivers in over 380 country schools, and the WA Centre for Rural and Remote Medicine has provided receivers to 52 hospitals and medical centres. All metropolitan and regional prisons have installed reception equipment so that inmates can receive training courses through Westlink.

However, with the closing of the Aurora service by 2013 and a separation of the Westlink service from existing national broadcasting services, the present service would no longer be available. Westlink and its program providers such as the RHEF, the Queensland Health Service, National Indigenous Television and the numerous Western Australian entities will lose a major means of distributing its programming.

Narrowcasting groups like RHEF and Westlink need to deliver programming to their clients in places of business and also private homes as is the case at present on the existing Aurora platform.

If the legislation is promulgated in its present form:

- Narrowcasting channels like Westlink and RHEF will be placed in jeopardy.
- Communications among large sections of peer to peer groups in rural communities will be diminished.
- Viewers will be forced to purchase additional duplicate equipment to access services previously received on one decoder and through one satellite dish.

There must be universal conditional access for viewers through set-top-box decoders to enable the Westlink narrowcasting service to be available nationally.

Provision for services such as Westlink, NITV and RHEF must be included in proposed legislation and funding for the transition of these services must be made available from the Commonwealth.

In Summary

The Western Australian Government, Department of Regional Development and Lands seeks the Commonwealth's support for the maintenance of these important satellite services by:

- Including reference to narrowcast services in the proposed legislation.
- Assuring that all television broadcast and narrowcast services are available on a single platform.
- Being consulted and have involvement in future planning of conditional access on the new satellite platform to ensure continuity of its current services.
- Providing funding to assure the smooth transition and reception of these services.

14 April 2010