



14 April 2010

Our Ref: 05-059-03-003/JAL

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

To Whom It May Concern:

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
Inquiry into the provision of the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Television)
Bill 2010**

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is the united voice of Local Government in Western Australia. The Association is an independent, member-based group representing and supporting the interests and work of this State's diversified 139 Local Governments.

The Association provides an essential voice for almost 1,300 elected members and over 12,000 employees of the 139 Local Governments in Western Australia and Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Island Councils. The Association also provides professional advice and offers services that provide financial benefits to the Local Governments and the communities they serve.

In addition to the transmission facilities operated by broadcasters, there are a number of analogue television self-help retransmission facilities operated by local government authorities, or Indigenous or community groups. These are designed to obtain, or to improve, analogue television reception in areas unable to obtain adequate reception from existing broadcaster-operated transmission facilities. It is noted that 'self-help' television retransmission facilities are not covered by the conversion schemes, and so the obligations and policy objectives of these schemes do not apply to 'self-help' retransmission facilities.

Approximately 180 regional and WA remote areas and 4 Perth areas utilise 'self-help' analogue retransmission facilities, out of over 700 around Australia. WALGA believes that approximately 30 of the regional sites are operated by local governments. WALGA is supportive of the Australian Government's announcement that broadcasters will upgrade more than 100 existing regional analogue 'self-help' transmission facilities to operate in digital, plus the commitment to fully fund and build a new digital satellite broadcasting service for regional viewers who are

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unable to receive digital television from those facilities. However, this leaves approximately 600 unconverted sites, forcing viewers to install potentially expensive satellite dishes to utilise the satellite service, though we appreciate the Australian Government subsidising this conversion. Clarification is needed around the criteria for self-help analogue retransmission facilities, to ensure appropriate and equitable access for the community.

While we are pleased to note that any regional households not able to receive digital television from the upgraded 'self-help' sites will be served by the new satellite, some WA local governments have raised concerns with the amenity of large satellite dishes being located at every house in a regional town site. Further information is sought if this is likely to affect remote areas, or includes regional townships with populations of fewer than 500 people.

WALGA's primary interest is in ensuring WA's local governments are well prepared for the switchover to digital television in Australia and are heard in the discussions leading up to the switchover dates. WALGA supports the changes proposed by the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Television) Bill 2010 and the continuing assurances that local governments and their communities are not adversely affected. As such, WALGA would request responses to the following questions:

- 1. Which of the 100 existing regional analogue 'self-help' retransmission facilities in WA will be upgraded?**
- 2. Which of the 'self-help' retransmission sites in WA are owned or operated by local governments?**
- 3. What are the criteria for selecting which sites will be upgraded by broadcasters?**
- 4. Has consideration been given to cost comparisons of upgrading current 'self-help' retransmission sites, versus the cost burden on communities of over 200 households of installing satellite dishes?**

Thank you for providing us with an opportunity for providing feedback to the Inquiry; we will make further submissions as necessary, once we receive a response to our questions.

For enquiries, please contact Allison Hailes, Executive Manager – Planning & Community Development,

Yours sincerely

Wayne Scheggia
Deputy Chief Executive Officer