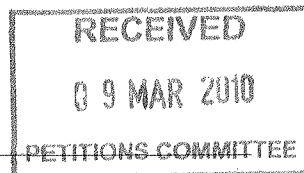




SENATOR THE HON STEPHEN CONROY
MINISTER FOR BROADBAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SENATE



24 FEB 2010

Mrs Julia Irwin MP
Chair
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms *Julia* Irwin

Petitions about digital television services in regional South Australia

Thank you for your letter dated 26 November 2009 in your capacity as Chair of the Standing Committee on Petitions about two petitions received by the Committee from the residents of Gumeracha and Yankalilla districts, South Australia, about the availability of digital television services in these areas. I apologise for the delay in replying.

In their petitions, the residents of Gumeracha and Yankalilla districts expressed concern that their existing television transmission facilities would not be upgraded from analog to digital, and that they would be left without television. They also asked the House to consider urgent funding to upgrade their transmission facilities, and sought a guarantee that their communities would be able to receive digital television.

The Government acknowledges the importance of free-to-air television to regional and rural Australians and is committed to introducing policy and legislative measures to maximise viewers' access to digital television services.

On 5 January 2009, I announced that the Government will implement a new satellite service to provide digital television to viewers in regional television blackspot areas. The new service will make available all commercial and national free-to-air digital television services, as well as local news services through a dedicated local news channel.

Under an agreement reached with all television broadcasters across Australia, broadcasters will upgrade more than 100 existing regional analog self-help transmission facilities to operate in digital. Viewers who currently rely on self-help sites that will be upgraded by broadcasters under this agreement will simply need to install a high definition set-top box to access the full suite of digital television channels.

Gumeracha and Yankalilla are both in the metropolitan Adelaide commercial television licence area (rather than a regional licence area). However, broadcasters have indicated that it is highly likely that analog self-help retransmission facilities serving communities located in metropolitan licence areas will also be converted to digital. The Government is currently consulting with broadcasters to identify the list of self-help sites to be upgraded to digital.

Any regional households not able to receive digital television from the upgraded self-help sites will be served by the new satellite. In order to access the satellite service, these households will need to install the necessary direct-to-home (DTH) household reception equipment, including a satellite dish and a set-top box.

The Government will provide a satellite conversion subsidy to eligible households currently served by self-help transmission sites which are not upgraded to digital by the broadcasters.

The Government will shortly be writing to licensees of self-help transmission facilities setting out the new measures, as well as providing further information to local communities. An announcement about the self-help sites to be converted from analog to digital is expected in the first half of this year.

Thank you for bringing these petitions to my attention

Yours sincerely

Stephen Conroy
Minister for Broadband,
Communications and the Digital Economy