

Introduction

- 1.1 In 2005, the Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts conducted an inquiry into the uptake of digital television in Australia. The inquiry report was tabled in February 2006.
- 1.2 During this inquiry, the committee became aware of the community television sector's plight to gain access to digital spectrum, as promised to the community broadcasting sector by the Australian Government.
- 1.3 In January 2006 the Committee resolved to conduct a wide-ranging inquiry into community broadcasting which would encompass the community television issues.
- 1.4 Recent announcements by the Australian Government concerning the proposed use of previously unused digital channels has concerned the community television sector about future options for access to digital spectrum.
- 1.5 The Committee has decided to table this report that deals with the issue of access to digital spectrum for the community television sector, ahead of a broader report which will be tabled later in 2007.
- 1.6 It is envisaged that this report's recommendations will be considered by the Australian Government in early 2007 in its deliberations and decision making regarding the proposed uses and sale of the digital channels previously reserved for datacasting.

Background to the inquiry

- 1.7 The Committee agreed on 19 January 2006 to conduct an inquiry into community broadcasting in Australia. The inquiry was referred by Senator the Hon Helen Coonan, Australian Government Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.
- 1.8 The terms of reference for the inquiry called for the Committee to inquire into and report on:
- The scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across radio, television, the internet and other broadcasting technologies;
 - Content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity;
 - Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks; and
 - Opportunities and threats to achieving a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters.
- 1.9 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* on 28 and 31 January 2006 and the *Australian Financial Review* on 31 January 2006.
- 1.10 The Committee sought submissions from relevant Australian Government Ministers and from state and territory governments. In addition, the Committee sought submissions from community broadcasting sector representative bodies, the many broadcasters in the sector, academics, media organisations, and commercial and national broadcasters.
- 1.11 The Committee received 130 submissions and 15 supplementary submissions. These submissions are listed in Appendix A.
- 1.12 Submissions were received from many community radio and television stations, community broadcasting representative bodies, and content producers. In addition, a great number of individuals recorded their personal views and experiences in relation to community broadcasting.
- 1.13 The Committee received 10 exhibits to the inquiry, which were provided in addition to written submissions, received during public hearings or sent to the Committee by other parties. These are listed in Appendix B.

- 1.14 The Committee held 12 public hearings across Australia in Canberra, Melbourne and Alice Springs. The Committee called 18 witnesses. These witnesses are listed in Appendix C.
- 1.15 The Committee carried out a number of inspections of community broadcasters in Melbourne and Alice Springs. A list of the inspections undertaken by the Committee is found in Appendix C.

