
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Community Television: Options For Digital Broadcasting

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

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Foreword

The last decade has seen spectacular growth in the community television sector. If this growth is repeated in the next decade then enormous diversity will be added to Australia's media. Led by Channel 31 in Melbourne which has over 3 million viewers, many channels are demonstrating the potential for significant audience share. TVS in Sydney, Access 31 in Perth, BRIZ 31 in Brisbane, C31 in Adelaide and stations in regional capitals like Lismore and Mt Gambier also demonstrate the phenomenon of increasingly diverse media. This diversity is akin to that found online through sites such as *You Tube*, which presents a wide variety of site content from the community (*You Tube*, founded in February 2005, sold for US \$1.65 billion in October 2006).

There is deep community interest in providing content to broadcasters, and new technology will increase the number of people who convert their interest into content. The wealth of talent that contributes daily to the production of community television is now the incubator of new programming for the commercial sector. The community television sector is fast replacing the National broadcasters as the training ground for new talent in all areas of production and content.

Community television currently only broadcasts in analogue and so cannot be seen by those 20% of Australians who have purchased digital receivers. The logical conclusion of this scenario is that by the time 90% of Australians have bought digital receivers, and analogue is switched off, no-one will be watching community television.

Without the opportunity to simulcast, the sector will have to start its growth again sometime after 2012, when analogue channel 31 - the only spectrum left - switches to digital.

The committee viewed it as important to release early this report on the community broadcasting inquiry, as the Australian Government intends to sell remaining spectrum soon, with no provision for community television. The report makes five recommendations to the Australian Government which encapsulate

the only way community television will survive the transition to digital without having to grow from scratch after analogue switch off.

Community television should be able to participate in the exciting future of digital broadcasting and continue to develop the richness, diversity and experimentation which have characterised its growth to this point. Any delay in ensuring digital broadcasting would be irresponsible and fly in the face of all Australian Government undertakings to date.

This report addresses only one aspect of the Committee's broader inquiry into community broadcasting. A detailed report covering the full range of issues for the entire sector will be released later this year.

I thank those who prepared submissions for the inquiry and who spoke to us during public hearings and inspections. I also extend my thanks to the members of the Committee for their commitment and interest in this inquiry. I also thank the Committee secretariat for their hard work and dedication during the inquiry.

The Hon Jackie Kelly MP
Chair



Membership of the Committee

Chair Hon Jackie Kelly MP

Deputy Chair Ms Julie Owens MP

Members Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP

Mr Peter Garrett AM MP

Mr Alan Griffin MP (until 25/5/06)

Mr Michael Johnson MP

Mr Michael Keenan MP

Mr Andrew Laming MP

Mr Chris Hayes MP

Mr Ken Ticehurst MP

Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP

(from 25/5/06)

Committee Secretariat

Secretary	Dr Anna Dacre
Inquiry Secretary	Mr Anthony Overs
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Terms of reference

The Committee will investigate 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.



List of abbreviations

ABA	Australian Broadcasting Authority
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACMA	Australian Communications and Media Authority
BSA	<i>Broadcasting Services Act 1992</i>
CBAA	Community Broadcasting Association of Australia
CTV	Community television
DCITA	Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
DTTB	Digital Terrestrial Television Broadcasting
ETC TV	Education Training Community Television
ICTV	Indigenous Community Television
NITV	National Indigenous Television
NITVC	National Indigenous Television Committee
RMITV	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Television
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
SLICE TV	Sydney Local Information Community Education Television
TVS	Television Sydney



List of recommendations

Options for digital broadcasting

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government sell the unreserved channel known as Licence A, with an obligation to be placed on the new licensee to carry community television during the simulcast period.

Additionally, the Committee recommends that:

- carriage would be at no cost to the community television sector, during the simulcast period;
- the terms of sale for Licence A will include the condition to simulcast community television by 1 January 2008, otherwise penalties on the new licensee will apply; and
- such penalties must be sufficient to ensure that community television is carried by 1 January 2008.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that, if Licence A does not sell before the end of 2007 with a 'must carry' community television obligation, the Australian Government:

- temporarily allocate sufficient spectrum from Licence A to a national broadcaster in order for it to carry community television during the simulcast period; and
- allocate sufficient funding for that national broadcaster to cover the costs of digital community television transmission during the simulcast period.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, at analogue switch-off:

- convert the spectrum band known as Channel 31 to digital; and
- permanently allocate it to current and future community broadcasters.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide funding of \$6 million to the community television sector for the conversion of broadcast equipment to digital, and recommends that this funding be made available immediately after a simulcast arrangement has been made.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide funding of \$1.7 million per year to the community television sector for each year of simulcast.