



The ABA has determined eight commercial television licence areas to be remote licence areas for the purposes of conversion to digital broadcasting.

ABA determines remote licence areas for digital television

The ABA has determined eight commercial television licence areas to be remote licence areas for the purposes of conversion to digital broadcasting.

These are the licence areas of ITQ Mt Isa, IMP and QQQ Remote Central and Eastern Australia, WOW Regional and Remote Western Australia, WAW Remote Western Australia, VEW Kalgoorlie, GTW Geraldton and SSW South West and Great Southern Western Australia.

The Broadcasting Services Act deems all non-metropolitan licence areas to be regional unless the ABA determines them to be remote.

New provisions

A new provision of the Act (section 38B) allows existing commercial television broadcasters in two-station markets to apply for one additional licence in their market (unless a remote licence area overlaps their licence area). The broadcasters can compete for the licence or apply jointly.

These new third services can only be provided using digital transmissions.

All the two-station regional markets (Tasmania, Darwin and Mildura), have overlaps with a remote licence area (Remote Central and Eastern Australia). The ABA is proposing to vary the television licence area plans for Remote Central and Eastern Australia to remove the overlap between the Remote Central and Eastern Australia television licence areas and the Tasmanian commercial television licence areas. This will enable the Tasmanian licensees to notify the ABA of their intention to apply for an additional licence.

Digital conversion

Digital conversion is governed by the Commercial and National Television Conversion Schemes developed by the ABA. These schemes set out the policies, methods and procedures for conversion of commercial and national television transmissions from analog to digital.

Broadcasters in regional licence areas are bound under Part A of the schemes. The legislation is prescriptive about the contents of Part A, including the requirement to start up digital transmissions no later

than 1 January 2004.

Part B of the schemes caters for the special circumstances of remote areas (remote coverage areas in relation to national services are deemed to be the same as remote licence areas).

Issues such as whether remote broadcasters will be required to match their existing analog coverage and provide specified minimum amounts of high definition television are left to the ABA's discretion. The ABA is yet to develop these policies.

Nevertheless, the ABA has determined which licence areas are 'remote' for the purposes of Part B because the timing provisions of section 38B of the Act apply differently to affected licensees, depending on whether they are licensed to serve remote or regional licence areas.

Section 38: remote areas

Section 38B commenced on 1 January 2001. Licensees in regional licence areas must act within 90 days of this date if they wish to seek the additional licence unless their licence areas are overlapped by a remote

licence area, in which case the timing is tied to that of the remote licence area. Licensees in remote licence areas will have 90 days from a date to be determined by the ABA.

The licensing mechanism allows eligible licensees to notify their intention to pursue one of three options to secure the additional licence. They can form a joint venture licensee company, one or the other may apply alone or both may apply separately, in which case they must compete at auction for the licence.

By formally determining the remote licence areas now, the ABA prevents inappropriate treatment of remote area broadcasters under section 38B. If the ABA had not determined these areas to be 'remote', the 90-day period would have started on 1 January 2001 in all markets.

The determination will also provide certainty to industry as to which commercial television licensees and national broadcasting services are bound by Part B of the schemes.

To view the determination:
www.aba.gov.au/what/digital/policy/remote.htm