



31 December 2003 is the simulcast start date for commercial digital television services in the New South Wales licence areas of Broken Hill and Griffith/Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) and the South Australian licence areas of Mount Gambier, Riverland and Spencer Gulf.

Simulcast start dates for regional digital services

The ABA has determined a simulcast start date of 31 December 2003 for commercial digital television services in the New South Wales licence areas of Broken Hill and Griffith/Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) and the South Australian licence areas of Mount Gambier, Riverland and Spencer Gulf.

'Since the start of digital television in metropolitan areas, the ABA has received numerous calls from viewers in regional areas who are inquisitive about what digital television services can offer them,' said Lyn Maddock, Acting ABA Chair.

'In many cases, access to digital television services will provide regional viewers with improved viewing quality; and provide a similar range of television services as are available in metropolitan areas. The determination of the regional simulcast start dates will encourage regional commercial broadcasters to continue the progressive roll-out of digital television services in regional Australia.'

In regional licence areas, digital transmission must start be-

fore 1 January 2004. However, regional broadcasters may apply to the ABA to start on an earlier date. A number of measures have been undertaken to facilitate early start-ups in regional areas. Regional broadcasters can claim licence fee rebates if they start regular transmissions before the simulcast dates under the Regional Equalisation Plan.

Commercial Television Conversion Scheme

The *Commercial Television Conversion Scheme 1999* (as amended) (CTC Scheme) sets out the legal framework under which commercial television broadcasters will be able to achieve conversion of their television transmissions from analog mode to digital mode.

The CTC Scheme has legislative status and empowers the ABA to develop digital channel plans for the allotment of the additional channels broadcasters will need to achieve the conversion process. All broadcasters must broadcast in both analog and digital mode for at least eight years, during what is

known as the simulcast period.

Schedule 4 of the Broadcasting Services Act requires that the ABA determine a simulcast date for regional licence areas. Regional licence areas are those that are not metropolitan or remote licence areas.

Determination of simulcast date

The CTC Scheme states that the start of the simulcast period for regional commercial licence areas must be during the period beginning on 1 January 2001 and ending immediately before 1 January 2004.

The ABA does not determine simulcast dates for the ABC and SBS. The simulcast period for the coverage areas of each national television services commences on the dates indicated in each broadcaster's relevant implementation plan.

Regional equalisation plan

In recognition of the costs associated with rolling out digital television in regional areas, the government has developed a program to assist commercial

broadcasters with delivery of regional digital television services.

The Regional Equalisation Plan provides a financial assistance package to assist regional broadcasters to facilitate digital television services as quickly as possible. The Regional Equalisation Plan also recognises that the start of the simulcast period triggers obligations and costs on the part of regional licensees in relation to the roll-out of their digital television services.



Further information about digital broadcasting can be obtained at the ABA web site, www.aba.gov.au and the Digital Broadcasting Australia web site www.dba.org.au.

The ABA maintains a public register of implementation plans, which is available either in hard copy or on the ABA website at www.aba.gov.au/tv/digitaltv/legislation/impregister.htm.