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Response to digital conversion of self-help television retransmission sites discussion paper:

Digital conversion of the self-help sites:

We have already started rolling out digital transmissions using the D1 service for ABC and SBS. We have a number of old, and some not so old (ex Black-Spots) analogue services where they failed and were not worth repairing. It seems crazy to roll out new analogue transmitters when government policy and the industry are moving to digital. In all cases the Council/Community welcomed the additional services offered under digital, for example, ABC & ABC2, dig radio and dig jazz.

The Aurora platform needs to be sorted ASAP otherwise the bush will be left behind with a second-grade service compared to town.

Multiplexing equipment at transmitter site:

We would not support this, especially when this can be done at the satellite uplink site. I see no reason why you would want to put this level of complexity into the regional or remote areas. Why not multiplex ABC & SBS on one stream, and the other for commercials? This would reduce your transmitter requirements down to two or three transmitters, instead of the normal 4 or 5 analogue at present in regional and remote areas.

Individual digital transmitters:

This may be the solution for the initial roll, one for each service boutique (ABC1, ABC2, dig radio, dig jazz). This could change when we move to IMAG4, and more services can be fitted into the one data stream. I think it's important that the stream includes the high definition (HD), so that the remote and regional areas are not left out.

Issue to be considered concerning parts that can be re-used from the old analogue services:

- Satellite dish, depending on which satellite the digital services are on, and if radio services are also on this.
- Combiners, until we run some tests with different makes of combiners I do not wish to comment on the re-use of the old analogue combiners.
- Transmitter antennas and feeders, again until these are looked at on case by case, I reserve my comment. I would suggest 50% of the antennas/feeders would be ok, with the remaining needing to be replaced.
- Same for some of the mast/buildings.
- Replacement racks may be needed.
- Upgrade of mains filtering, earthing and lightning surge protection. This is a very neglected area, but affects the overall reliability of the system.

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Before we drop a lot of expensive transmitters around the country, we need to take a close look at suitability of sites, i.e. value for money re coverage. This issue is important as this roll out is for the next 20 years, and we need to protect Commonwealth money, and get the best value for the community. I have rolled out over 60 self-help systems over the last 2-3 years. In roughly 75-80% of the cases the available site is very much a compromise: mast too low, poorly located, and buildings far from ideal. In addition there are poor earths, no mains filtering for surge protection, and poor air conditioning. With the privatisation of Telstra a lot of sites are now not readily available as Telstra is looking for a commercial return on any site access. They have all the hilltops tied up around Australia, along with BA. Although BA has a subsidy arrangement for self-help, the final cost is often in excess of the allocated funding due to the combiner and antenna upgrade required. This issue not only affects the digital TV roll out, but also ABC & Commercial radio, along with community site access for community radio.

DIRTECT TO HOME (DTH):

I suggest a lower cut off point of ≤ 30 house-holds, roughly ≤ 100 population as the change over point from DTH to a terrestrial service.

The numbers of DTH has increased recently but this is more due to frustration with poor, or failed analogue services in the area. This applies especially to Indigenous communities, but also includes such places as King Island, TAS, and Crookwell, N.S.W. When you discuss this with local people re DTH most complain about the lack of local content, and in most cases the necessity of paid TV subscription. Most are not aware that you can get DTH without going down the paid subscription route.

My recent discussions with Indigenous Councils, especially those servicing outstations, is that they use the ≤ 30 households as the change over point between a DTH and terrestrial service. This maybe appropriately addressed through a one off grant. We recently quoted \$850.00 per household, including UEC decoder, smart card, 90 cm dish, travel and installation in a remote area of NT. We managed to keep the price low as there were 30 installs in the one area. This price would be a lot higher if the numbers are less, as the travel cost is spread across fewer installs.

It would be good if we could remove the necessity of the smart card, as this is a major cost item and an added area of potential failure. The legal issue of news coverage of court cases (which holds little weight with modern web access to news) and copyright needs to be looked at as this issue is often worked around by travellers, such as caravan owners on the road moving around Australia holding multiple smart cards.

Another reason to eliminate the smart card is the necessity to keep the satellite decoder power on to keep up with the key changes, thus wasting power when its not being used. Power consumption does not change whether domestic decoders are on or off (average 10 watts) 24/7. This wasted power is the same as leaving a low energy light on day and night.

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Timing:

By the time a digital conversion is put in place, at the earliest next year, all new TV sets are going to have inbuilt digital tuners. My suggestion is that you do not simulcast, but on the allotted day change from analogue to digital. This will allow the use of the same transmitter antenna, and in some cases, antenna combiner. Otherwise the cost to government to support simulcast will be very high for the few viewers who have not got a set-top box or newer TV set. As set top boxes cost less than \$50.00, I do not feel this is an unfair demand on the viewing public. This digital change over needs to be well managed with a good publicity program and information packs.

Further notes:

I have commented on the costing in some closed documents, but feel the amount allowed for in general being adequate. I am looking at options to include a new mast and small building, including mains filtering. I hope we can avoid just dropping boxes by supplying a well-engineered solution.