

Submission on conversion of Community Self Help television re-transmission sites from analogue to digital transmission.
From the Port Campbell Victoria community

In the early nineties the Port Campbell re-transmission system was set up with the aid of the Federal Government Television Black Spot Funding Initiative. This enabled the whole community and visiting tourists to receive all 5 television channels from Ballarat. Signal quality varied considerably according to the weather at the time.

In 2004 more funding was obtained from the government to maintain and replace some equipment further improving the signal to near metropolitan quality. Attempts were made to pick up the digital transmissions from Ballarat, then convert them, using digital set top boxes, to analogue and transmitting the signal down into the town. Because of the extremely weak and variable digital signal coming into the system, results varied from useless in the summer, to good quality in winter, when there was no ducting interference from Tasmania.

The system has been operating under the auspices of the Corangamite Shire council. In 2006 a local committee was formed to fundraise locally and to encourage the Shire to maintain its interest and participation. As a committee we feel any new development should remain under the auspices of the local government body as their influence and facilities have proved to be most beneficial to continued operations.

Over the past ten years the community has become used to good quality television signals and, as in most communities, television has become one of the “normal” staples of everyday life. Residents are now beginning to purchase LCD and Plasma sets and have begun to look for digital and High Definition programming, as is happening in nearby larger towns and in metropolitan areas. The huge numbers of visitors to the town (because of its locality near the 12 Apostles) also expect the same quality television that they receive in their homes.

We need support to change to Digital reception and re-transmission. Because of the weak digital signal levels coming into our receiving antenna we may need to begin the whole process of investigation again. We will need to investigate from whence the best signals come – from Ballarat or from Tower Hill in Warrnambool. Where the best site for a receiving antenna is and to ensure that the chosen site has good transmission into the town. Negotiate to lease some land for the site and supply power to the site. Either shift the building housing equipment to that site or arrange to transmit the signal to existing facilities. One of the major factors to continued operation of these systems that has emerged is the training of people who are capable of maintaining equipment. This expense should be built into any funding program.

Committee submissions on details requested in Discussion paper.

1. DTH rather than conversion.

The committee feels that conversion from analogue to digital is far more preferable to DTH transmission. The limited viewing available through DTH would mean a great diminution of service to local homes and to the tourist population.

2. Individual digital transmitters rather than multiplexing.

We would prefer multiplexing of the signals rather than individual transmitters. Even though multiplexing demands more tuning there will be less equipment to maintain in our harsh coastal environment. Concerns have been raised over the technical viability of multiplexing. The costs of the conversion and the operation of the equipment were also discussed but there is no information in the discussion paper on which to base any recommendations. Other options for getting the digital signal to the local system were explored-- is cable to the site from a distant transmitter an option? (Optical telephone cabling may bring clearer transmission to our site) Is the establishment

of satellite transmission of **all** free to air channels an option, with one satellite dish at our local site, and re-transmission occurring from there?

3. Our digital signal reception is very weak and further degrades in summer. If a policy change re the number and manner of transmission and booster re-transmission sites operated by the TV companies was made, frequency congestion on the airways would diminish. Perhaps TV companies could multiplex their signals into fewer frequencies thus allowing more booster sites without the current signal interference. The changing from analogue to digital signal would seem to be an appropriate time to do this.
4. Timing issues. We feel there should be a wait before introducing the change till all the companies have switched to digital transmission and worked all the bugs out of their systems. Unless digital signals are much stronger in the country areas, than they are currently, there will be a huge outcry at the poor TV reception caused by the change. Problems to digital signals caused by ducting, dry ground and weather and other booster stations transmitting on similar or the same frequencies have already been mentioned
5. The committee feels very strongly the local government should be used as the oversight agencies as they have been done on the past. Our experience has shown that our Shire's involvement and participation has resolved most of the problems that have occurred. We further feel that the costs involved should not be passed on to local government as their finances are already heavily committed. TV is a Federal Government issue, is regulated federally, and decisions are made federally. This initiative should also be funded federally at a level sufficient to install all sites, maintain them and to train the necessary support people in an ongoing capacity.
6. The committee also wishes to stress that all citizens are entitled to good TV reception in this day and age. The ones living in the many poor reception areas need to keep up with the same news, and have entertainment as their neighbours only a few miles away.

Ray McCraw

For the Port Campbell Community Television re-transmission Group.