



Australian Government

Department of Transport and Regional Services

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Ms Trish Barons
General Manager
Digital Broadcasting
Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Ms Barons

Response to Discussion Paper – ‘Digital conversion of self-help television retransmission sites’

The Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS) administers the Indian Ocean Territories (IOT) of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and provides state-type services to the IOT communities.

Christmas Island is located approximately 2,600 kilometres northwest of Perth and 360 kilometres south of Java and has a population of approximately 1500. The Cocos (Keeling) Islands are located approximately 2,770 kilometres northwest of Perth and 900 kilometres southwest of Christmas Island and have a population of approximately 600.

DOTARS retransmits mainland television and radio to the IOT. Due to the isolation of these communities, the retransmission of television represents an important cultural link with the mainland. DOTARS has no obligation to provide this service to the IOT as either an Australian Government agency or a provider of state-type services, but it retransmits television in the absence of another party doing so.

In this context, DOTARS makes the following submissions:

1. DOTARS acknowledges and welcomes the opening statement of the discussion paper that ‘The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that all Australians, irrespective of where they live, will be able to enjoy the benefits of digital television’.
2. In the development of policies relating to digital television conversion, the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) should also consider that not all retransmission sites may be suitable for conversion. This issue was not addressed in the discussion paper. The retransmission of television for the IOT uses existing facilities, established for

aviation communications, and it is currently unknown whether these facilities are upgradeable. The discussion paper also implies that most remote area self-help retransmission sites are predominantly satellite-fed. This is not the case for the IOT.

3. In the development of policies relating to digital television conversion, DCITA should continue to consider the unique circumstances of the IOT, along with those of other remote Australian communities. The IOT communities have a unique ethnic composition: the majority of Cocos (Keeling) Islands residents are of a Malay background and the majority of Christmas Island residents are of a Chinese or Malay background. For many, English is their second language. Furthermore, due to the geographical location of the IOT, television and radio broadcasts from Indonesia and Malaysia are easily accessed. It is important in this context to ensure access to Australian mainland broadcasting services, including digital services when available. Mainland-based broadcasts provide the communities with both English-language media and a cultural link to the mainland.

DOTARS is currently investigating the impact that the introduction of digital television will have on its retransmission service, including the viability of upgrading the current service. We would be interested in meeting with you or your staff to better understand the issues involved before consulting with the IOT communities.

Karenn Singer, Assistant Director, Strategic Policy and Projects (02 6274 7829) will contact your office to discuss this further.

DOTARS looks forward to future announcements about digital television conversion. Any questions about our submission may be directed to Ms Singer.

Yours sincerely



Julian Yates
General Manager
Territories West

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