

Review of Program Standards and Captioning Requirements on Digital Multi-Channels

The Manager
Digital TV Policy
Digital Switchover Taskforce
Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
GPO Box 2154
Canberra ACT 2601

By email to: multichannels@dbcde.gov.au

2 February 2010

Dear Sir/Madam,

Review of Program Standards and Captioning Requirements on Digital Multi-Channels

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) appreciates the opportunity of making a late submission to the Review of Program Standards and Captioning Requirements on Digital Multi-channels.

Media Access Australia and Deafness Forum of Australia have provided comprehensive submissions to the Review and ACCAN supports their position.

Captioning is a vital service for many older people and people with disabilities and should be integrated into the planning and programming of all digital channels. As most programs on digital channels are already captioned on analogue channels, there is no reason for those digital TV programs not to be captioned.

In other words, current captioning requirements should be in place and be complied with as switchover to digital occurs in various regions of Australia.

Captioning (together with audio description) will be a powerful incentive for many older people and people with disabilities to switch over to digital in the knowledge that they can adequately access their programs of choice. These are important equity issues and should be accommodated in the first instance.

Commercial television stations need to take into account a number of compliance measures when creating a new channel and captioning should be just another of these measures.

Over time, captioning should increase to 100% of all programming hours. A useful guide to phasing in increased captioning is provided by Ofcom's Code on Television Access Services. However, ACCAN wishes to emphasise that the current captioning requirements do not need a phasing-in period.

About ACCAN

ACCAN is the peak body that represents all consumers on communications issues including telecommunications, broadband and emerging new services. ACCAN provides a strong unified voice to industry and government as consumers work towards availability, accessibility and affordability of communications services for all Australians. Consumers need ACCAN to promote better consumer protection outcomes ensuring speedy responses to complaints and issues. ACCAN aims to empower consumers so that they are well informed and can make good choices about products and services. As a peak body, ACCAN will activate its broad and diverse membership base to campaign to get a better deal for all communications consumers.

ACCAN will be pleased to discuss captioning requirements with you. I can be contacted on (07) 3310 8768 or gunela.astbrink@accan.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

Gunela Astbrink
Manager, Disability Policy and Research