



IRCA
Indigenous Remote Communication Association

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Digital Broadcasting
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Please find below **Impacts for BRACS (RIBS) sites from the Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Sector re the Digital Conversion of Self-Help Television Retransmission Sites-**

The only feasible, cost-effective way for digital television to reach remote communities at this time would seem to be via satellite delivery with a satellite dish and set-top box at each household. Last mile digital TV retransmission would be hugely expensive, both to establish and maintain. Even if digital retransmission were established, the BRACS (RIBS) broadcast of local content over on the incoming signal on the community licensed channel would not be able to be carried out without very complex and expensive technology. Effectively BRACS program insertion would become a thing of the past.

The most realistic and cost-effective solution, in order to still enable BRACS (RIBS) program insertion, is to maintain the current arrangement of digital signal to a central retransmission site, with a set-top box for each channel for broadcast to the community via analogue transmitters. This limits the number of TV services available to community members but ensures access for the majority of community members who are not able to afford a dedicated satellite dish, decoder/ set-top box and digital television set. It also ensures that locally produced and relevant Indigenous content is able to be played to the community. Where additional services are demanded by community members (eg-ABC2) a separate decoder and transmitter can be purchased, and combiner upgraded, as per the recent RIBS TV rollout.

In the instance that analogue televisions and transmitters are no longer available for purchase (quite some time away yet given that many countries will not be going digital for years), we would then have to address the situation as to how to best provide digital services to self-help retransmission sites. It is likely that fibre optic networks will reach into most remote communities by that time, providing an alternative method of providing digital television services to satellite delivery.

As part of this discussion, it is worth proposing that in order to prepare for the eventual abolition of BRACS local program insertion, that up to eight regional Indigenous television channels be made available as part of the digital spectrum. This would help to ensure the ongoing maintenance of Indigenous culture and

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languages through region-specific broadcasting, using the same coverage areas as the current Remote Indigenous Media Organisations and regional radio networks.

While digital television will provide more and higher quality television services to audiences across Australia, these are not necessarily the priorities for remote Indigenous community members if they are primarily targeted at mainstream audiences. Even the Indigenous audience is hugely varied, with remote and urban Indigenous audiences having very different taste. Recently there has already been significant debate over the introduction of National Indigenous television on the Aurora satellite channel 31, replacing the remote community produced Indigenous Community Television on that channel, which remote communities want returned.

This has reinforced the importance of television services that are more audience-specific, especially for remote Indigenous audiences that speak traditional languages and very little English. The introduction of digital television spectrum provides the opportunity for a broader diversity of services, including Indigenous and community programming, rather than more of the same.

Yours truly

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