



**Submission by Mareeba Shire Council  
On  
Digital Conversion of Self-help  
Television Retransmission Sites**

## **Background**

Mareeba Shire Council operates two self-help retransmission facilities at Speewah and Chillagoe. The facility at Speewah is located in a regional television license area and was established in 2005 with funding from the Television Black Spot Program. The facility in Chillagoe was set up approximately ten years ago with funding from local residents. The original equipment at this site was replaced in 2005 with funding from the Television Black Spot Program.

The facility in Speewah receives off-air feeds from the analogue terrestrial transmitters of the local broadcasters which are located on Mt Bellenden Ker. This facility serves approximately 250 residents. The Chillagoe facility is satellite fed and retransmits the remote area broadcast service and serves approximately 350 residents.

## **Digital Transmitters versus Multiplexers**

Council believes that the most effective option for converting its existing analogue sites to digital is to use an individual digital transmitter and decoder for each television service required to be retransmitted.

This preference is based on a number of considerations including the fact that multiplexing equipment can be more susceptible than individual transmitters to variations in temperature and intrusions of dust. While we have built an air conditioned room at each site to house the retransmission equipment the harsh climate in the tropics means that variations in temperature are difficult to prevent and dust and other debris often end up in the room. This means that to minimise operational problems it is preferable to use the less susceptible type of equipment.

In addition to this, if a multiplexer is used and there is a breakdown then the community loses all of their television services. With individual transmitters however, there is some redundancy in the system in that if one transmitter fails then only one television service is lost not all of them. This can be an important consideration in remote communities where it may take several days or even longer to rectify a fault.

In relation to the costs involved in converting the analogue sites to digital, Council believes that the averages quoted in the discussion paper are realistic. However, if the deadline for the switch over to digital television is not until 2012 then improvements in technology may reduce this cost somewhat.

Given that the fact that the switch over to digital television is being mandated by the Federal Government Council believes that it is appropriate that financial assistance be provided to those communities who have self help facilities, to cover the the full cost of the conversion. Most self help facilities serve small communities which do not have the necessary resources to undertake the conversion themselves. Without financial assistance Council would not be able to afford the cost of converting its two retransmission sites.

### **The Direct-to-Home (DTH) Option**

Council does not support the DTH option for viewers living in remote areas where the population is less than 500. For example, in Chillagoe using the figures quoted in the discussion paper it is still more cost effective to convert the existing analogue facility than to install DTH equipment. The site serves 350 people and it would cost \$120 000 to convert it to digital, whereas it would cost around \$160 000 to install DTH equipment.

In addition to this it is much easier to manage and capture the benefits of technological change with one central site rather than having equipment scattered across the community.

### **Conclusion**

Council believes that the self-help retransmission facilities that it operates provide an important basic service for the community. The conversion of these sites to allow them to retransmit digital television services is important and we look forward to working with the Department to manage this complex process so as to obtain the best outcome for the community.