

# The Digital Conversion Of Self-Help Television Retransmission Sites

## Comment of the Shire of Coorow

The Shire of Coorow is a Council of 4,137 sq km located 285 kilometres north of Perth in Western Australia. Within the Shire of Coorow Leeman and Green Head are coastal communities beginning to experience the Seachange growth phenomena with the small community of Coorow, 120 km to the east, servicing a prosperous wheatbelt agricultural district.

Due to the geological formations in the Shire of Coorow, the normal broadcast signals of most radio and television services are not receivable in the Shire.

The Shire of Coorow rebroadcasts the following television and radio services:

- Coorow: ABC, WIN, GWN, SBS television and RedFM Radio;
- Leeman: WIN, GWN, SBS television and RedFM and StarFM Radio;  
and
- Green Head: ABC, WIN, GWN, SBS television and JJJ, ABC Classic FM  
and RedFM Radio

This equipment was installed by the residents of the towns within the Shire of Coorow in conjunction with Television Black Spots Program (TVBSP) and the SBS Self-help Retransmission Scheme. Residents who receive this service continue to pay an annual \$25 service charge that covers the maintenance expenses and minor capital upgrades necessary to provide the service.

Council receives no other financial assistance in providing this service. Even the Western Australian Local Government Grants Commission does not consider the provision of rebroadcast Self-Help Television Retransmission Facilities an expense worthy of increased financial assistance under their format for allocation of Federal Local Government Financial Assistance Grants..

The vast majority of rural properties within the Shire utilise a Direct To Home (DTH) reception of satellite television and radio.

### **1. Conversion of Analogue Self-Help Television Retransmission Facilities to Digital**

Comment is sought on the following issues:

Whether the use of individual digital transmitters for each service or the use of multiplexers, would be the most effective option for converting existing analogue self-help retransmission sites to digital in relation to:

1. technical viability;
2. costs of conversion, operation and maintenance; and
3. any other options for the digital conversion of self-help television retransmission sites.

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### **Council Comment:**

The Shire of Coorow does have the technical viability to operate individual digital transmitters with a long record of the successful in the operation of similar analogue equipment in three sites.

The increased technical requirements for multiplexing equipment, located outside easy reach of technical assistance may be beyond the capabilities of Council. The increased technical requirements could also be expected to significantly increase the cost of operation/maintenance of such equipment.

### **2. Direct To Home Reception of Satellite Television**

Comment is sought on the following issue:

Whether the DTH option for viewers residing in remote areas of Australia where the population is less than 500 should be adopted, rather than converting existing self-help retransmission sites from analogue to digital.

### **Council Comment:**

Council would strongly favour the implementation of digital retransmission equipment into communities of at least 100 people.

Significant other non technical or financial issues need to be considered, including:

- the amenity provided by a retransmission system that allows viewing/listening of multiple radio and television services concurrently in a single household. DTH allows reception of only one signal, radio or television, at one time;
- the amenity of large satellite dishes located at every house in a town site;
- the expectation of growth of smaller communities over the longer term may see communities exceed the 500 population limit. At that time residents will have both DTH apparatus and new rebroadcast aerials. Council would favour a minimum population of 50 to 100 residents; and
- the costs to transient/non permanent residents. Whilst the cost of installation of DTH is acceptable for residents wishing to invest in their permanent family home, non permanent residents and tourists visiting the coastal towns of Leeman and Green Head will have to purchase the special equipment for their caravan and holiday homes which they will use irregularly. This would impact the coastal town of Green Head within the Shire of Coorow has only 249 residents but has over 300 residences.

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### 3. Timing of Implementation

Comment is sought on the following issue:

Any views regarding the timing of digital conversion of self-help retransmission sites.

#### **Council Comment:**

Council would urge a prompt resolution of satellite transmission arrangements to allow for a transfer to satellite digital television service at a time similar to mainstream analogue services.

Should this move to digital satellite television signal be delayed, residents utilising the service will still need to access analogue equipment. However once the mainstream analogue television service ends, analogue product will cease to be readily available and/or a higher cost to obtain suitable equipment could be expected. This will be a further expense for residents of the Shire of Coorow.

### 4. Other Comment

The Discussion Paper makes no mention of the provision of radio services. The Federal government needs to address the provision of these rebroadcasted services in the digital age to allow our communities to continue to receive these services.