

# Broadcast planning priorities: June 2023 update

In 2020, we published our strategic broadcast planning priorities in our [The future delivery of radio](#) report. These priorities allowed us to better target our resources to improve the diversity and service quality offered in a radio licence area.

The following activities will continue to be the focus of our broadcast planning:

- > transitioning commercial, community and national radio services in regional areas from AM to FM, where spectrum is readily available
- > supporting the rollout of digital radio where feasible
- > improving coverage for national, commercial and community broadcasting where spectrum is available
- > supporting trials of new types of broadcasting technology.

In light of developments since the release of our Future Delivery of Radio report, in 2023 are providing an update to industry and audiences on how we intend to deliver these priorities.

## Progressing AM to FM conversions in regional areas

We have expanded the AM to FM conversion program for commercial radio broadcasting services in regional areas to include competitive markets, so we can deliver the benefits of FM to more regional listeners and broadcasters.

FM conversion of AM services in regional areas has the potential to improve listener experience by delivering improved audio quality and reduced signal interference, and support industry with lower costs for broadcasters.

In September 2022, we released our [Principles for planning AM to FM conversions in regional licence areas](#) to guide the expansion of the AM to FM conversion program. The principles help to identify eligibility for inclusion in the conversion program for industry and to assist our prioritisation of conversion requests.

We have been working with commercial AM licensees in competitive regional radio markets that previously expressed interest in AM to FM conversion to advise them how to progress their applications.

We are working on requests for conversions in competitive markets, and progressing conversions in single licensee markets, in accordance with the conversion planning principles.

We are including information in our [five-year spectrum outlook](#) (FYSO) about the conversion work in the coming year's work program. This includes early-stage planning requests, and flagging the licence areas that we are awaiting feedback from, or resolution by, industry. We will consult with licensees to prioritise this work.

To help progress the conversion program, we appreciate licensees aligning their conversion requests with the planning principles and responding quickly to our requests for information.

## Continuing the digital radio rollout

As well as providing better audio quality for listeners, digital delivery of services allows greater channel choice, as broadcasters can provide multiple digital services per licence.

We will prepare Digital Radio Channel Plans (DRCP) for licence areas where agreement has been achieved with the radio industry on the technical specifications for digital radio, and if a relevant commercial broadcasting licensee or a national broadcaster has committed to commence the service within 2 years from the date of a request.

We encourage broadcasters and licensees considering digital rollout to discuss their plans with us.

We encourage broadcasters and licensees in neighbouring licence areas to make submissions to any DRCP consultation process we conduct to let us know their plans, even if they may be well into the future.

The digital radio legislative framework provides the only pathway for eligible incumbent commercial, national and community broadcasting services to access a digital radio multiplex transmitter. We will not support digital radio trials to sidestep the regulatory requirements for permanent licensing or to facilitate broadcasting services that are not eligible to access a digital radio multiplex transmitter under the legislative framework.

## **Improving coverage of existing broadcasting services**

Improving coverage of existing services is a principal way in which diversity of broadcasting services can be promoted. Information about how we assess planning requests is in the document [ACMA approach to broadcast planning and varying LAPs](#).

We will prioritise requests to extend the reach of services to places not already served within a licence area, or throughout Australia for the national broadcasters.

Coverage improvement is differentiated from broadcasters seeking to extend their licence area. We will generally not progress these types of requests.

We will not progress requests that would result in transmission outside a licensee's licence area, unless the transmission is incidental to what is technically necessary to provide an adequate signal within the licence area.

## **Supporting trials of new broadcasting technology**

Scientific licensing for trials fosters and encourages the development and testing of new radiocommunications technologies, services and devices, which plays a key role in facilitating innovation. We prioritise planning to enable trials of new broadcasting technology to assist industry to make informed decisions about choices of delivery platforms for broadcasting services.

Scientific licences for trials of DAB+ were issued ahead of digital radio rollout in each of the capital cities in 2009. As these trials were part of the introduction of digital radio in Australia, the trials were seen as being of strategic significance for the government, the radio industry and the ACMA. For this reason, the scientific licences issued as part of these early digital radio trials authorised the transmission of broadcast content.

We are receiving requests from all sectors of the radio industry to conduct digital radio trials in regional areas and in some established metro markets. Subject to spectrum availability, we are generally supportive of such trials, as they facilitate acquiring information relevant to industry business decisions about new broadcasting technologies for digital radio rollout in regional areas.

Given the length of time since DAB+ was introduced, we generally will not permit broadcasting services to be transmitted as part of digital radio trials. Our view is that the technical aspects of the trial are generally able to be tested and assessed by the transmission of a test signal or looped audio content.

This approach to scientific licensing follows the ACMA's long-term position of not authorising marketing trials or pre-commercial rollout exercises to test the market for new services.

Broadcast trials should not be seen as an alternative to, or first stop, on the route towards permanent licensing under the digital radio multiplex framework.

## Industry requests and feedback

Requests that support our broadcast planning priorities will be included in an annual broadcast spectrum planning work program. We will consult on that program each year through our FYSO.

Priority requests that cannot be accommodated in any one year may be included in the next year's program.

Requests for non-priority activities are considered when resources permit. Our process is set out in the document [ACMA approach to broadcast planning and varying LAPs](#).

Industry engagement helps inform our decision-making process. We welcome feedback on the draft work plan that we will follow for the next 12 months when we consult on the draft FYSO annually.