



# **SUBMISSION**

## **Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Dividend and Other Measures) Bill 2011**

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### **North West Smaller Population Centres Require Access to Television**

Reported at last week's MITEZ meeting held at Richmond were concerns from both the McKinlay and Richmond Shires about how residents and businesses would be affected with the shutting down of analogue television across the region later this year.

This situation comes about with the introduction of digital TV later this year which alters the current way television reception will be received by some communities in the North West.

McKinlay Shire Mayor, Cr Paul Woodhouse said communities such as Mount Isa, Cloncurry and Hughenden will not have the issues of Richmond and Julia Creek due to their larger populations. He said in any smaller centres it won't be possible to get any free to air digital re broadcast reception unless the councils spend up to an estimated \$250,000 each to purchase the necessary equipment and provide the digital re-broadcast service to their communities, as is currently the case with the analogue TV signal being received now.

Alternatively, the councils can register their communities to be eligible for the Satellite Subsidy Scheme (SSS) This provides \$400 of subsidy from the Commonwealth but still leaves each individual household to pay between \$200 and \$350 for the necessary equipment to receive Free to Air Digital TV direct from the satellite.

"Currently, the situation which has been virtually imposed on us is that if councils don't invest this amount, and residents decline to opt into the SSS, then residents, businesses and tourists simply will

not have any TV reception available to them in these communities, as is the case under the existing arrangement, when the analogue TV signal is eventually switched off” said Cr Woodhouse.

Cr John Wharton, Mayor of the Richmond Shire agreed that “this was a matter of discrimination by the Commonwealth Government department responsible for the roll-out of the new digital TV on the grounds that communities like Richmond and Julia Creek don’t have a large enough population to be eligible for the service they provide elsewhere”.

“To make matters worse the new system will require every household to have a special box for every television set in that building and in the case of motels a separate box for each room, which will be fairly costly” said Cr Wharton.

An obvious concern was the effect this would have on tourists passing through these communities as you wouldn’t expect caravan parks to provide multiple sets of satellite dishes and reception equipment to provide TV to guests staying in the towns. There is a concern tourists may travel on to locations which have a signal more easily received by local re broadcast into their TV sets in their caravan or motorhomes.

The councils have concerns regarding the haste in which they are being forced to make these decisions by the Federal Department of Broadband, Communication and the Digital Economy (DBCDE), potentially involving hundreds of thousands of dollars, while there are potentially cheaper re broadcast options, and while the technology and equipment necessary to transmit a digital satellite signal to more than one TV in each house has not been properly thought through.

MITEZ members supported both McKinlay and Richmond Shires in their call for the Commonwealth to better support the transition to Digital TV in small communities, and to at least provide councils with more time to assess other and possibly cheaper options to re broadcast than those currently being directed by the Commonwealth Government.