

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Additional Estimates Spill-over hearing March 2017

Communications Portfolio

Australian Communications and Media Authority

Question No: 286

Australian Communications and Media Authority

Hansard Ref: Written, 03/04/2017

Topic: Digital TV reception in Berrigan Shire

Senator Urquhart, Anne asked:

1. Please describe the ACMA's understanding of the digital television reception problem being experienced in Berrigan Shire, and surrounds, as communicated to the ACMA by Susie Escott, Administration Officer, Berrigan Shire Council?
2. Please advise how many complaints the ACMA has received about television reception issues from residents of the townships of Berrigan, Finley, Tocumwal and Barooga:
 - (a) in the 2016-17 reporting year to date?
 - (b) in the 2015-16 reporting year?
 - (c) in the 2014-15 reporting year?
3. Please provide an estimate of how many people/homes are currently experiencing difficulties with digital television reception in Berrigan Shire and neighbouring towns?
4. Please advise what steps the ACMA has taken and plans to undertake to investigate and resolve digital television reception problems being experienced in Berrigan Shire and surrounds, with an indication of timeframe.

Answer:

1. The Australian Communications and Media Authorities (ACMA's) understanding is that atmospheric or signal ducting (ducting) is affecting reception of Goulburn Valley television services in the Berrigan Shire. Ducting is associated with the weather, most common in summer, and tends to affect reception in the late afternoon and early evening. It can cause distant TV signals, in this case from the Ballarat (Lookout Hill) transmission site, to travel much further than they normally would, resulting in interference to the reception of local Goulburn Valley TV services operating on the same frequencies.

Viewers in the Berrigan Shire area should otherwise enjoy reliable access to Goulburn Valley television services, assuming that they have an optimised antenna/receive system. While some of the viewers in the Berrigan Shire may experience unavoidable interference due to ducting, experience shows that concerns about reception often result from viewers' antenna/receive system not being optimised for the best possible reception in that area.

2. For the specified townships, the ACMA received:
 - (a) nine complaints in the 2016-17 reporting year to date
 - (b) nine complaints in the 2015-16 reporting year
 - (c) six complaints in the 2014-15 reporting year.

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3. It is very difficult to estimate the number of affected households in Berrigan Shire as ducting is a localised phenomenon and is influenced by the level of television coverage and viewer antenna/receive system setup at individual households.

Information provided by the Berrigan Shire Council suggests that somewhere between 20 and 100 households in the area could be affected. Households in variable coverage areas in relation to the Goulburn Valley transmission site or with old, broken or inadequate antenna setups are more likely to be affected.

4. The ACMA has been actively working with the local broadcasters on confirming the cause and identifying the options to improve TV reception in the area.

The broadcasters have conducted television signal monitoring over time in the township of Finley to confirm the cause and develop options for infrastructure upgrades in the area to provide more reliable television coverage. Installation of a local retransmission facility in the area could provide community-wide solution to the reception problems but establishing and running such a facility would require substantial funds and a responsible body which could take on the role of owning, operating and maintaining the local broadcast site.

The ACMA does not have a role in mandating or allocating funding for these types of services. It would have a role in assessing any proposal for a new broadcasting site from the channel planning and licensing perspective.

The ACMA has helped set up appropriate lines of contact between the broadcasters and the Office of the Hon Sussan Ley MP, Federal Member for Farrer, to discuss options for funding any broadcasting infrastructure upgrades in the area. The timeframe for the implementation of such a solution is difficult to estimate, but even with an agreed funding arrangement, it may take several months before the solution could be implemented.

The ACMA has also been focusing on informing viewers and Berrigan Shire Council of the importance of having an optimised antenna system for reliable TV reception. Viewers have access to up-to-date resources on television reception from the ACMA's website **www.acma.gov.au/tvreception** and also the mySwitch website **myswitch.digitalready.gov.au**

Households unable to receive reliable terrestrial digital TV services from any TV tower are able to apply for the VAST service, which provides an alternative reception option to current terrestrial TV services. Over 200,000 households across Australia get their TV from the VAST service. To receive the VAST service, households need equipment similar to that needed to receive satellite pay TV - a satellite dish installed along with a VAST set-top box - but without the monthly subscription.