

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications**  
**Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice**  
**Budget Estimates Hearings May 2015**  
**Communications Portfolio**  
**Department of Communications**

**Question No: 8**

**Program No. 1.1**

**Hansard Ref: Page 22-23, 28/5/2015**

**Topic: Community broadcasters**

**Senator Ludlam, Scott asked:**

**Ms O'Loughlin:** In terms of the spectrum—this is the discussion we have been having with the ACMA—you are correct, it is UHF. Of course various spectrums are used by different transmitters across certain areas. For example, for a trial in Sydney to be undertaken you would have to allocate spectrum across a broad range of different areas in VHF. The concern is that the spectrum occupied by the community broadcasters currently would interfere with that other spectrum.

**Senator LUDLAM:** When you say 'concerns expressed' or whatever language you put to us, that, to me, feels kind of vague. Could you provide us any evidence that that is actually a material concern?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** I might ask Dr Pelling.

**Senator LUDLAM:** As you wish.

**Ms O'Loughlin:** Certainly, not being an engineer, I would be happy to provide the detail that we have been provided by the ACMA on notice to you.

**Answer:**

In September 2014, the Minister for Communications announced that broadcasting spectrum at each transmission site known as the sixth channel would be made available in the short to medium term for trials of new broadcasting standards and technologies. The sixth channel represents the last unallocated television channel nationwide.

Community television services are currently transmitted on UHF channels from the following sites in the metropolitan licence areas: the main site in each of the Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney licence areas; and the South Yarra translator in the Melbourne licence area.

VHF channel 10 represents the sixth channel at all of these sites, with the exception of the South Yarra translator site where UHF channel 42 represents the sixth channel.

The South Yarra community television service is transmitted on the sixth channel for that site, which means no trials can be conducted involving this site while the community television service continues to be broadcast.

In addition, all the community television services are transmitted on channels that represent the sixth channel at one or more translator sites in the same metropolitan licence area and/or sites in adjacent regional licence areas. This affects a total of 17 metropolitan translator sites (other than South Yarra) and 11 regional sites and means that due to interference concerns trials cannot involve these sites while the nearby community television service continues to be broadcast.

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For example, in the Sydney metropolitan licence area a trial could not be conducted involving four of the translator sites (including Kings Cross and Manly/Mossman) while the local community television service is transmitted on UHF channel 29 which coincides with the sixth channel at those four sites.

In their responses to the *Consultation Paper: Digital Television Regulation* circulated by the Department of Communications early this year, both commercial and national broadcasters expressed an interest in moving to the DVB-T2 transmission standard in combination with the HEVC encoding or compression standard. Terrestrial television services in Australia are currently delivered using the DVB-T transmission standard and MPEG-2 compression standard. The HEVC compression standard is significantly more efficient than the currently used MPEG-2 standard.

As commercial and national broadcasters can only use their existing spectrum allocations to transmit television services in either DVB-T or DVB-T2, any future trials of DVB-T2 will need to be conducted using the sixth channel at the relevant sites.

One of the things broadcasters are expected to investigate with future DVB-T2 trials is the ability of translator sites to relay television services from main sites. If such a trial were conducted in the Sydney licence area, it is possible that it would involve one or more of the Kings Cross and Manly/Mossman translators.

In addition, to the extent that any trial wished to extend to trialling user reception issues both UHF and VHF may need to be tested to ensure that different reception environments are considered.

It is standard practice to clear spectrum ahead of it being used for alternative purposes.