

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates May 2017

Communications Portfolio

The Australian Communications and Media Authority

Question No: 175

The Australian Communications and Media Authority

Hansard Ref: Written, 07/06/2017

Topic: Wide area radio services

Senator Urquhart, Anne asked:

1. Are radio frequencies available for the provision of a new High Frequency (HF) shortwave service with coverage across northern Australia?
2. What, if any, technical, policy or regulatory impediments may be involved in the provision a new HF radio service covering northern Australia?
3. In general terms, what process would be undertaken to assess whether a new HF radio service with coverage across northern Australia could be provided, what regulatory approvals or coordination work may be required, and what timeframe/s may be involved?
4. How much time would the ACMA require to provide an estimate of the population unable to receive terrestrial radio coverage in Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory based on a set of reasonable assumptions and methodology as determined by the ACMA?

Answer:

1. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) anticipates spectrum would be available for a High Frequency (HF) domestic broadcasting service for coverage within northern Australia should the ACMA receive an application for such a service.
2. An HF service requires appropriate transmission infrastructure. The ACMA would need to determine the suitability of the frequency applied for. Also, the ACMA would be required to notify the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Radiocommunications Bureau (the Bureau) of the proposed frequency assignment. The issue of an apparatus licence authorising the operation of an HF domestic service station, including conditions attached to the licence, may be dependent on the Bureau's findings in relation to the proposed assignment.
3. To apply for an HF domestic broadcasting service, an applicant can either contact an accredited person to undertake the co-ordination work or submit an RO57 and RO77 form to the ACMA at info@acma.gov.au. Applications to the ACMA are processed on a first in time basis and processing timeframes will depend on the volume of applications already received, awaiting processing.
4. Questions 4 and 5 have been answered under question 4 below.

It would take the ACMA a considerable amount of time, likely to be several months, to prepare a reasonably reliable estimate of the population unable to receive terrestrial radio coverage in Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory. Precisely how long this would take is difficult to estimate in advance due to the complexity of the task and the large number of

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services currently in operation in those areas - there are approximately 1,700 AM and FM radio licences in these states and territory. The ACMA has access to a certain level of information about the size and distribution of the population in remote areas, notably through Census data. It is also able to source or generate estimates of geographical coverage of individual radio services, as long as those services are licensed. Initially, a series of assumptions would need to be made and a methodology developed to efficiently undertake coverage estimates for services that, at their largest, can extend over hundreds of thousands of square kilometres. (For example a single high power ABC AM transmitter can in some circumstances provide day-time coverage to an area of over 400 km radius, which is a coverage area of just over half a million square kilometres (500,000 km²). Each of the coverage calculation results would need to be combined to avoid double-counting of the population in coverage overlaps. The population within this combined coverage area could then be subtracted from the relevant state population to yield an estimate of the population that is outside of the coverage area of any radio service.