



**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATIONS,  
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO THE  
BROADCASTING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (DIGITAL RADIO) BILL 2007 AND  
THE RADIO LICENCE FEES AMENDMENT BILL 2007**

**SPECIAL BROADCASTING SERVICE CORPORATION  
13 April 2007**

## Summary

- The *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Digital Radio) Bill 2007* provides an appropriate framework to enable the managed introduction of digital radio services in Australia. The proposed legislation enables a smooth transition to digital broadcasting. In the case of the national broadcasters, this transition will also require adequate funding for both digital radio infrastructure and content.
- SBS considers multiplex transmission **capacity** within the multiplex reserved for the national broadcasters should be allocated **equally** between the ABC and SBS. An equitable allocation would enable SBS to provide a range of services it has been unable to provide in the analogue radio environment.
- SBS's Charter requires it to provide multicultural and multilingual broadcasting services covering a wide range of content areas and audiences and to provide a balance of programs both of wide appeal and of specialised interest.
- SBS has been considerably **disadvantaged** in both the extent of its coverage and the range of services it has been able to provide in the analogue radio environment.
- Whilst the ABC has achieved national coverage SBS lags behind the ABC in its ability to provide satisfactory coverage to all Australians.
- Due to frequency limitations and spectrum constraints SBS has been unable to provide all the services necessary to fulfil its Charter obligations.
- SBS has significant **need** for new services from communities and language groups that currently do not receive coverage on SBS Radio or those who currently have some coverage but do not receive enough broadcast hours. This includes a need for services for newly arrived migrant and refugee communities who are most at need for new services to assist with integration into the Australian community.
- SBS has substantial **demand** for new services including English language teaching programs, information programs on community services (such as health and education), music programs, live talk back radio and current affairs. SBS also has a significant amount of content that it is currently unable to put to air due to spectrum constraints but would be suitable for the digital radio environment.
- The *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Digital Radio) Bill 2007* provides for the reservation of spectrum for the national broadcasters to share one multiplex ensemble. The Bill does not specify how transmission capacity within the national broadcaster multiplex be allocated between the national broadcasters.
- Given the number of new services and expansion to existing services planned by SBS to ensure it delivers appropriate services to those communities identified in its Charter and to address the current imbalance between the ABC and SBS in terms of both service provision and coverage it would be appropriate for the national broadcasters to share the national broadcaster multiplex on an **equal** basis.

## **Introduction**

SBS welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee inquiry into the *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Digital Radio) Bill 2007 and the Radio Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2007*.

The Special Broadcasting Service Corporation is established under the *Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991*, with a Charter to provide multilingual and multicultural radio and television services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians, and, in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society.

SBS Radio provides services in 68 different languages. SBS Radio broadcasts on two frequencies in Sydney, Melbourne, Wollongong and Canberra and on one frequency to the other state and territory capital cities and some regional centres. SBS also provides radio services to a number of locations under the 'Self Help' retransmission subsidy scheme. SBS also provides radio services through its online portal at [www.sbs.com.au](http://www.sbs.com.au).

## **Digital Radio**

Australia has a mix of public, commercial and community broadcasting in the analogue radio environment. The *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Digital Radio) Bill 2007* provides an appropriate framework to enable the managed introduction of digital radio services in Australia.

The proposed legislation enables a smooth transition from analogue to digital broadcasting. In the case of the national broadcasters, this transition will also require adequate funding for both digital radio infrastructure and content.

## **SBS Radio Analogue Services**

SBS's current analogue radio services have developed over time to become an important part of the broadcast industry. It provides valuable services to a broad range of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. However, SBS's analogue radio service has been restricted both in terms of the extent of its coverage and in the number of services it can provide. SBS's analogue radio services are geographically limited both within the major capital cities and in regional and remote areas. Only Sydney, Melbourne, Wollongong and Canberra receive the full range of SBS Radio programs through transmission on two separate frequencies (either AM or FM). All other capital cities and a few regional centres only receive half the number of programs received in Sydney, Melbourne, Wollongong and Canberra as they only have access to one frequency.

This has restricted SBS to only providing two analogue services (limited to Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Wollongong) compared to the ABC's five national services. In other areas, SBS's services have been severely limited by the unavailability of additional frequencies and insufficient funding to provide additional transmitters. In these areas SBS cannot provide its full range of services, severely limiting access to those CALD communities who are in most need. In many areas, SBS services are not available at all.

SBS considers its services should have broader coverage than currently available and should be at least equal in coverage to that of the ABC. The *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Digital Radio) Bill 2007* addresses this imbalance through the

reservation of digital radio spectrum for the national broadcasters. It will enable SBS to provide coverage to the same extent as the ABC.

### **Access to Digital Radio Services**

Digital radio provides an opportunity for a large number of consumers who currently either do not receive SBS services or only receive a limited range of services to receive SBS through digital radio transmission. SBS considers it essential that its services are available to all Australians and seeks to ensure that Australians, particularly those from non English speaking backgrounds, newly arrived migrants and refugees can reasonably expect to be able to access SBS digital radio services (at least on equivalent terms to the ABC).

The level of demand for SBS services in regional areas can be expected to increase as a result of government policy to promote settlement of newly arrived migrants and refugees in regional areas. The eventual provision of digital radio in regional areas will enable SBS to provide much needed services to this group to assist with integration into regional communities.

High demand for SBS services can also be gauged by the increasing number of applications for assistance under the self-help retransmission subsidy scheme.

SBS considers minority communities should not be disadvantaged in the digital radio environment. In fact, these communities most often need additional services not provided by other broadcasters. To provide these services SBS will need to fully occupy its own share of the national broadcaster multiplex on an equal basis with the ABC.

### **New Digital Radio Services**

For SBS, limited frequency availability and coverage has been a significant constraint on:

- the development of new services;
- delivery of existing services;
- expansion of services to new areas; and
- expansion of the number of broadcast hours of existing programs.

SBS Radio is an essential service for a significant number of CALD communities. Their broadcasting needs and, in particular, needs that are appropriate to their cultural requirements, are increasing. Digital radio will provide an opportunity for SBS to provide the **additional services** that are highly demanded by CALD communities.

There is a need from CALD communities for SBS Radio to provide additional language services. SBS radio analogue services are already at capacity, providing services to 68 language groups. It is unable to meet demand for existing services and those anticipated in future. Indeed SBS has a waiting list of language groups eager to be accommodated in the SBS schedule.

Currently, SBS's largest language groups are confined to only 14 hours of programming per week at best, whilst our medium sized language communities only receive between 2-4 hours of air time per week. Smaller communities only receive one hour per week or, in some instances, only one hour per fortnight. In some coverage areas, some language programs are not available at all.

On the introduction of digital radio, SBS plans to provide a range of new and exciting digital services including increased language services through expansion of our existing schedule, more world music and new talk back and current affairs programming. This includes to:

- increase the number of language services it provides (to accommodate existing language groups with no representation on the SBS schedule, particularly newly arrived migrant and refugee groups);
- increase the number of hours of existing language services;
- provide English language teaching services;
- extend the number of broadcast hours of English language services from overseas;
- enable time shift broadcasts of existing services;
- increase sports coverage; and
- provide a more extensive range of youth services targeted to second and third generation migrants who have links to their family's diverse cultural heritages but whose main language is English.

Additional programming is also required to meet the needs of young, second and third generation Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds who are alienated and disenfranchised from existing media. In the aftermath of the Cronulla riots there has been a well recognised need to bring communities closer together and promote tolerance and cultural acceptance. SBS is well placed to provide additional services that promote social cohesion, community harmony and assist with integration and acceptance into the broader community. English language programming with distinctive multicultural content has the capacity to provide a much needed bridge between communities and assist in promoting social cohesion, integration and community harmony.

SBS seeks to expand news and current affairs reporting in a digital radio environment. Additional air time for programs will enable a greater diversity of views to strengthen our commitment to balance and objectivity in covering national and international events. There is significant demand within current programming for additional air time for information programs on Australian life across all language groups.

SBS also seeks to improve the quality the quality of broadcast transmission. New digital compression technology will enable SBS to broadcast new services, particularly music, at a much improved quality compared to current analogue transmission.

However, to enable the provision of these new digital services SBS Radio will need an equal share of the multiplex transmission capacity available in the national broadcaster multiplex.

### **Access to national broadcaster multiplex capacity**

The *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Digital Radio) Bill 2007* provides for spectrum, equivalent to one digital radio multiplex, to be reserved for national broadcasters. This has the potential to restore an imbalance in the coverage and service levels provided by SBS in its analogue service and to meet the demand for new SBS services.

SBS considers that the legislation provides an appropriate structure for SBS and the ABC to share a multiplex through the reservation of spectrum and for both the ABC

and SBS to jointly manage the multiplex licence. However, the legislation remains silent on the allocation of national broadcaster multiplex capacity between the ABC and SBS. The legislation should provide specifically for national broadcaster multiplex capacity within the national broadcaster multiplex to be **shared equally** between the ABC and SBS.

SBS considers that the allocation of digital radio multiplex transmission capacity for national broadcasters should be forward looking and based on both the demand and need for new services rather than on the number of existing analogue services in operation by the ABC and SBS. SBS considers that an equal allocation of multiplex capacity between the ABC and SBS (and taking into account the additional capacity from AAC+ technologies) is possible and desirable. To this end, there should be an equal allocation of multiplex transmission capacity for national broadcasters. This will enable SBS to provide a range of new digital radio services to more fully meet its Charter obligations and remove some of the disadvantages it has experienced in its analogue transmission.

**Special Broadcasting Service Corporation**

**13 April 2007**