



## Public hearing in Canberra – 22 June

# Digital television – who's buying it?

The **Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association** (ASTRA), the **Australian Broadcasting Corporation** (ABC), and the **Special Broadcasting Service Corporation** (SBS) will continue the debate on multi-channelling and digital television content at a public hearing in Canberra on Wednesday 22 June. The hearing is the fourth for the inquiry into the uptake of digital television by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications Information Technology and the Arts.

The rollout of digital television in Australia began in the major metropolitan areas in 2001. Although the scheduled rollout has passed the half way mark, it is anticipated that digital television it will be taken up by less than 50 per cent of Australian households by 2008.

**ASTRA** represents the interests of subscription television platforms and channels. It argues that digital television take-up will continue to be driven by subscription television, under the existing competition regulatory framework. ASTRA also advocates a moratorium against multichanneling by the existing commercial television broadcasters until 2008.

**ABC** has suggested that current restrictions do not give the industry the flexibility develop a range of content for digital television. The ABC's ability to offer services is constrained by the genre restrictions applying to the content of national broadcaster multichannels under the Broadcasting Services Act.

**SBS** advocates a number of regulatory changes to assist with the development of new content and services to increase uptake of free-to-air digital television. Broadcasters should have the flexibility to program in innovative ways to lift the appeal of digital television for their audiences.

Both ABC and SBS propose that multichanneling genre restrictions on the national broadcasters should be immediately lifted or substantially relaxed in order to provide the Australian public with greater access to the full range of publicly funded programs.

Committee Chair Jackie Kelly said digital television can deliver high quality transmission and a greater range of programming to Australian viewers.

"Currently, Australians are either unaware of the technology, or reluctant to purchase digital televisions or set-top boxes," Mrs Kelly said. "Given that analogue services will be phased out from 2008 onwards – we need to ensure that the Australian public is ready to switch on to digital."

The Federal Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Helen Coonan, has requested the Committee to inquire into progress on the rollout process for digital television and options to encourage greater consumer interest in the uptake of digital television.

### Public Hearing Program - Wednesday 22 June

**Venue:** Committee Room 2R2, Parliament House, Canberra, (HMS 98.7)  
**9:05 am** ASTRA (Submission 50)  
**9:40 am** ABC (Submission 45)  
**10:20 am** SBS (Submission 62)

Further details on the inquiry, including the terms of reference, membership of the Committee and advice on making submissions can be obtained at [www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/cita](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/cita) or by contacting the committee secretariat on (02) 6277 4601 or emailing [cita.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:cita.reps@aph.gov.au).

**For media comment**, please contact Emily Tinson (Jackie Kelly's media officer) on (02) 6277 2369 or (02) 4732 2844  
**For background information**, please contact the Committee Secretary, on (02) 6277 4601