

**Submission to the Standing Committee on Communications,
Information Technology & the Arts.**

Enquiry into the Uptake of Digital Television in Australia.

This submission is made by Stephen Wayne Crisdale, on my behalf as a Digital Video Broadcast consumer and High Definition Digital Video proponent, and on behalf of those individuals who have requested guidance from myself on the most appropriate and cost effective means to become DVB consumers.

My submission though largely based upon personal experience, will attempt to redress the perception that the take-up rate of DTV in Australia has been slow, and to further show that the likelihood of any future reticence by consumers who have not converted their current viewing experience to DVB may be hampered by the reticence of others to deliver on the promises that DVB espoused.

Preamble

I became involved in DVB approximately three years ago. After some thorough research into the hardware available at the time, and the Governments' National guidelines for DVB delivery, I purchased my first HD capable TV (Panasonic 76cm WS 100Hz) and a Dgtec 2000a HD STB. These purchases were made from the Bing Lee electronics store, Penrith (NSW), where I learnt from first hand experience how poor the knowledge of sales-staff within many large retail chains can be when dealing with those interested in purchasing appropriate DVB equipment. If it was not for my prior research into the DVB experience, I would have been pressured into purchasing sub-standard equipment. The sales-person's comment at the time was "you know more about this than me, so why don't you set the system up..."

This experience was enough to convince me to avoid any future purchases from any of the major electronics retail supplier's outlets. All subsequent purchases of DVB or HD capable equipment I have made have been from specialized electronics suppliers, who have supplied goods of superior quality at far more competitive prices and with superior after sales service and support.

My current DVB and HD equipment includes:

Sharp Aquos 83cm LCD HDTV

Homecast HD DVB-t STB

VisionPlus (HD capable) DVB-t PCI card

JVC HD10u NTSC HDV camcorder

Sony HDR FX-1e PAL HDV camcorder

Samsung 17" WS LCD monitor

I'll assume you can discern that my initial experience with DVB and HD in particular were of a quality that was seductive enough to expand not only the viewing of digital material, but also convinced me of the viability of creating my own High Definition Digital video material.

Other paths to DVB

HD capable DVB-t and DVB-s PCI cards have allowed savvy individuals to become involved in DVB without recourse to major retailers, while maximizing investments they've already made on computer equipment. In many cases the computer is used to not only view DVB material, but to also record and archive to DVD. While such a hardware path may not include a larger than 21" WS display device, the quality of image to be seen on a standard 19"-21" CRT display is exceptional.

I myself have advised a large number of friends, colleagues and acquaintances to follow this path into the DVB experience, as it allows the latitude to up-date their current analog TVs to a large WS Digital HDTV when they can afford to do so.

While the major electronics retailers may initially suffer from the increasingly larger numbers of Australians exercising their option to follow the 'pseudo-HTPC' path into the DVB experience, it should be noted that technology is changing rapidly enough to allow those who may have shown reticence over the benefits of DVB to date, to become DVB consumers now for relatively little cost, whilst remaining virtually invisible statistically.

The Quality Factor

Unfortunately, the current quality of DVB signal in Australia (with the possible exception of Channel 9 HD and at a stretch 7 ED) cannot be lauded as a positive determinant in any consumer's decision to purchase DVB equipment. The constant up-scaling of lower resolution source material leads to serious image artifacts when viewed on any reasonable display device. Coupled with low bit-rates for supposed HD services, the Australian DVB viewing experience is heading backwards, towards the quality of analog viewing that DVB was meant to supplant. I have personally noticed a degeneration of quality on a number of networks.

Under the current circumstances of 'Extended Definition' (or worse) material being purveyed as 'High Definition' programming, I can no longer recommend to people who ask me for advice on DVB purchases that an expensive (relatively) LCD, plasma or CRT are worthy of purchase. So, if persons such as myself are responsible for the seemingly slow uptake of DVB in our country; I'll happily take credit for helping those who ask me for advice to avoid an expensive DVB purchase they would eventually regret, certainly given the current degrading of DVB quality.

I would humbly submit that the current level of quality in DVB signal does a disservice to the propagation of DVB in Australia, and any further degeneration of the already strained current services, threatens to make a travesty of something that held such promise for early adopters of DVB in Australia.

I further submit, that the 'reticence' of a seemingly large proportion of Australian consumers to embrace DVB, can be ascribed to the poor commitment by the majority of broadcasters to embrace the Government's guidelines for delivery of DVB services beyond what they (the broadcasters) have considered legally

supportable, and that consumer's cannot be held to account for any failure to 'buy into' something that demonstrably fails to deliver in it's current permutation.

I would conclude that any sane person, when faced with the options offered in the large electronic retail outlets, would prefer the cheaper analog choice, when the only visible advantage with the current broadcast signal available to most DVB display devices (despite the disproportionate extra cost) is larger size.

While I may not be a fully trained DVB technician; nor am I armed with volumes of statistical data, my desire to see the intent of the original DVB guidelines, which had at their core the maintenance of quality DVB services to Australian consumers being upheld, is none the less sincere.

It is my belief that all Australians should have access to a locally provided World class broadcast system, even if World leading is implausible; and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee for providing this valuable opportunity to take part in such a laudable process that is aimed at achieving such a goal.