

Submission 25

Chairperson, honorary members.

I am a citizen who cheered when the Australian government initially proposed, in the late 90s, a world-leading rollout of High Definition Digital TV.

Even though the current scenario falls far short of that promise, I still look expectantly forward to a country where high quality television viewing does not come tied to a costly monthly bill.

Here are my comments for each term of reference:

* the rollout process for DTV, progress to date, future plans

1) Living in a major city, I am quite happy with the rollout. The delay of the the analogue cutoff from its initial 2005 to the currently proposed 2008 was a disappointment, however. I do not think this should be delayed further - each time the cutoff moves there is less incentive for purchasers to buy a TV capable of receiving digital signals.

* options for further encouraging consumer interest

2) If the TVs in supermarkets and retail showrooms had labelling indicating the 2008 cutoff (e.g. "Useless after 2008!" stickers), consumers might actually learn about, and take up, the technology.

3) Extra channels, and high definition material, do sell digital television technology. With the recent reintroduction of a second ABC channel, retailers can again actually demonstrate a benefit. High definition programming is a little harder to show off. Ideally, there should be a 24 hour test pattern transmitted by ABC or D44 for this purpose.

4) When Foxtel recently introduced their digital cable service, the built-in programming guide, and the ability to record programs based on that, were the major selling points. Our free-to-air networks need to embrace similar usage models; consumers want it, and it will result in them watching more TV.

* technological issues relevant to uptake

5) Lack on an Electronic Programme Guide

I believe consumers want the convenience of easily viewing or searching a channel's planned programme timetable. See 4) above.

The majority of other countries worldwide that transmit digital television also transmit an electronic program guide. The majority of

DTV Set Top Boxes sold in Australia support this feature. Why have the networks been allowed to not transmit such information?

The networks currently waste effort and bandwidth with an animated "guide" channel that is hard to read and wastes the viewer's time waiting for the information they want, and then the government re-enforces this with a similar guide on the D44 channel.

6) Poor implementation of High Definition

High Definition should look better than Standard Definition. Consumers will not buy HD TV equipment if there is no improvement. Half of the networks implement the minimal 576p standard for HD, which results in an image that shows no improvement. In fact, there have been recent examples where the HD channel has looked worse than the same network's SD channel.

While I am loathe to suggest further legislation, the current level of High Definition compliance is poor, and offers no incentive for consumers to adopt. Thus I propose the following extra legislative requirements:

a) Upconverted source material should not ever be counted as HD for the purposes of a network's HD quota. Ideally, the network would change the watermark they transmit over the material to indicate to the consumer that what they are watching is not real HD material

b) Either

- i) disallow 576p for anything except fast-moving source material (e.g. sports), or
- ii) change the definition of HD to take both resolution and refresh rate into account. (e.g. Standard Definition is 720x576pixels by 25 frames/sec,
or about 10 million pixels per second.
Require HD source material of 15 million pixels per second)

* future options

7) Special allowances must be made for members of the community who may not be able to upgrade their equipment. Organisations like nursing homes should be able to install devices that re-transmit digital signals within their buildings as analogue.

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Nigel Pearson