

# Submission By Shire of Yarra Ranges

Page No. 61

Parliamentary Inquiry: Digital Television – who's buying it?  
Closing 6<sup>th</sup> May 2005

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/cita/digitaltv/media/media01.pdf>

**Why many of this Shire's residents won't be taking up digital TV.**

**Digital TV Issues for this Shire and other Self Help TV operators.**

**It is considered that digital conversion of Self Help TV sites should be Federally funded, as were the TV Black Spot Programs for new services and replacement of obsolete equipment.**

## **LOCALITY**

The Shire of Yarra Ranges on Melbourne's eastern fringe takes in the breathtaking natural beauty of the Dandenong Ranges, Yarra Valley and Warburton Ranges. With over 40 townships and urban centres the Shire is sustained by a thriving local economy, rich social fabric and strong environmental values. Attracting well over 3 million visitors annually, the Shire is only 50 minutes from central Melbourne.

## **BACKGROUND OF TV BLACK SPOTS PROGRAMS IN THE SHIRE OF YARRA RANGES**

The Shire in 2000/2001 submitted 5 Expressions of Interest for TV services to DCITA for Federal Government funds to improve poor reception, mainly due to mountainous and heavily vegetated terrain. Under Round 1, four Black Spots were confirmed by DCITA at Healesville, Monbulk and Kalorama North and South. Under Round 2 a Black Spot was also confirmed at Tecoma/Belgrave. These TV Black Spots existed even though the main Melbourne TV transmitters at Mt Dandenong and three TV translators were within the Shire. Following protracted processes, new analogue transmission facilities were established at Mt St Leonard for Healesville and at Monbulk, commencing operation in December 2003. As analogue solutions were not available for the other areas due to spectrum limitations, they were considered for the TV Black Spots Alternate Technical Solutions (ATS) Program. Tecoma/Belgrave was field tested by the ABA in May 2004, who concluded the new digital TV coverage from the existing translator sites was adequate. Kalorama North (and South) is still being considered under the ATS program.

## **DIGITAL SOLUTIONS FOR TV BLACK SPOTS**

The Shire Of Yarra Ranges has for a long time pursued Digital TV as the appropriate solution to its TV reception problems, yet has been restricted by Guidelines of the TV Black Spots Program, which only funded analogue solutions. Digital TV transmission from Mt Dandenong commenced on 1 January 2001, six months after Round 1 EOI's were called for old technology analogue solutions and before Round 2 EOI's were called. In March 2001 the Shire (with equipment supplier support) first demonstrated its commitment to digital TV by field testing the new services in all its Black Spots (limited in Tecoma/Belgrave) to avoid, if at all possible, the cost and difficulty of establishing new transmitter sites. Unfortunately the terrain difficulties were too great, even for the superior technical characteristics of digital, with the best results in Kalorama South relying solely on reflected signals. This practical approach by the Shire to use new digital services to solve analogue Black Spots was followed by the DCITA and ABA, who later field tested in Bacchus Marsh and determined it as the preferred solution there, and formalised it in the subsequent TV Black Spots Alternative Technical Solutions (ATS) Program.

## **CONCERNS RAISED ABOUT ANALOGUE SOLUTIONS TO TV BLACK SPOTS**

The Shire has previously corresponded with DCITA and Local Members in 2003 advising of the Shire's preference for digital transmitters over analogue.

## **ISSUES**

Subsequent discussions with DCITA were for the Shire to accept the grants for analogue facilities or receive nothing. Choosing to put the grant toward a long term digital facility along with funding from other sources was not provided as an option. The Shire then raises the following concerns:

1. At the end of analogue in 2008 our residents will be pursuing digital facilities so as to have access to the same benefits as the majority of the Australian population;
2. Recent improvements in digital receiver technology may make digital more effective in poor reception areas, but there may be a limited choice of models at higher cost and less features eg no High Definition viewing or surround sound;
3. The Shire indicated strongly in 2003 it does not have the capacity to fund digital conversion of its two facilities;
4. It is considered that a Federal Government funding program will be required for the digital conversion of existing Self Help transmitters that have been installed throughout Australia;

5. Digital conversion will cost less if some of the existing equipment can be reused, as will be the case with the Shire's two facilities if a simulcast period is not required;
6. It is understood equipment prices for stand alone digital transmitters have come down to \$150,000 - \$200,000 for 5 services;
7. Single Frequency Network (SFN) digital transmitter sites are understood to cost \$300,000 - \$500,000 for 5 services. They are less desirable for Self Help operators due to their complexity and licensing issues when sharing spectrum;
8. Should digital conversion of a Self Help transmitter require a site to be on an SFN, operating costs of up to \$50,000 per year would also need to be funded. The Shire does not have the capacity to fund this additional ongoing cost, and would therefore seek Federal assistance.
9. Most Self Help facilities will require funding for new digital off-air receivers, even if grants are not available for digital conversion. After the 2008 end of analogue transmission, many analogue input signals will no longer be available. This will not be an issue for the Shire as the DCITA permitted the Shire use digital input for its two facilities, and therefore their analogue output can continue long term, but resident pressure to convert will be expected;
10. An analogue/digital simulcast period for Self Help TV facilities in general has not been considered in any known legislation, unlike requirements for the metropolitan and regional network licensees. Simulcast is not possible at the Shire's Healesville site due to equipment room space limitations;
11. Simulcast analogue and digital transmissions from many Self Help TV sites would require significant spectrum planning by the ABA to confirm availability of duplicate channel sets that do not cause interference with other nearby sites. Simulcasts are unlikely to be achievable except at remote sites or when spectrum is freed up at the 2008 end of analogue transmissions or through the use of more complex SFN's;
12. Simulcast analogue and digital transmissions are not financially possible for many Self Help TV operators as their ongoing costs could double, without any increase in income as no income is generated for the transmissions;
13. The only practical and cost effective way for many Self Help TV facilities to be converted to digital is to advise residents 6-12 months in advance that analogue transmission will cease, and that they must obtain a digital receiver for use after that date. Equipment changeover at the Shire's sites could require these facilities to be off air for about a day.

Thankyou for this opportunity to be able to provide input to future options for digital TV. Should you have any further queries you are welcome to contact Theo Knol, Senior Developments Engineer on 03 9294 6749