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Australia launches world's first DAB+ digital radio test broadcasts

Australian radio broadcasters today switched on the first test transmissions of digital radio using the new DAB+ technology in Sydney.

"This is the first fully compliant high power broadcast of digital radio using DAB+ technology anywhere in the world, so it's quite an important milestone," said Joan Warner, chief executive officer of peak industry body Commercial Radio Australia.

The digital radio test will broadcast a mixture of talk and music including pop and jazz to allow the industry to test the sound quality of a variety of content at various bitrates.

"This is a technical field test that will ascertain coverage area and system performance and how well DAB+ can be used to broadcast multiple channels of audio and data, in preparation for commercial rollout," Ms Warner said. "The test will send a very strong signal to the major radio receiver manufacturers that Australia is committed to launching digital radio using DAB+ and we will need a broad range of DAB+ digital radios in the market in time for our launch."

A demonstration DAB+ receiver has been developed for the test as DAB+ receivers are not yet commercially available. A number of manufacturers have indicated they will have DAB+ products ready for overseas retail sale before Christmas 2007. In Australia, digital radio services will officially launch in January 2009 in the six capital cities.

The DAB+ test is being coordinated by Commercial Radio Australia on behalf of commercial radio stations and public broadcasters, the ABC and SBS. The test will use upgraded multiplexers from world leading suppliers Factum and Radioscape (the MAP250 and fusion, version 6 respectively).

Ms Warner said there were some very exciting receiver developments in the pipeline, including the development of a plug-in which would allow listeners to tune into digital radio through an iPod, and new products that would allow listeners to download and purchase songs from their digital radio as they are listening to them.

"The technology is advancing very rapidly and there is likely to be a wide range of digital radios developed over the next 12 months that will be very exciting. We'll be working with manufacturers of radio receivers, mobile phones and mp3 devices as well as car manufacturers to make sure digital radio is available on as many different platforms as possible for Australians," Ms Warner said.

Australia has also joined a new DAB+ task force set up by the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, an association with 170 members in 53 countries. Ms Warner has been appointed chair of the new task force, which will focus on encouraging the adoption of DAB+ within the region and the development of a wide range of low cost DAB+ receivers. Other countries currently represented on the task force include Brunei, Singapore and New Zealand. The task force will undertake a survey of broadcasters to ascertain their plans for digital radio and encourage countries such as Russia, Kuwait, India and China to adopt DAB+.

For more information about digital radio, visit www.digitalradioaustralia.com.au.

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