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Canberra, Darwin and Hobart next in line for DAB+ digital radio

Canberra, Darwin and Hobart will be the next in line for permanent DAB+ digital radio services, with commercial radio broadcasters today welcoming the ABC's announcement that it intends to extend services into the three capital cities.

Chief executive officer of industry body, Commercial Radio Australia, Joan Warner said commercial broadcasters were working closely with the ABC and SBS on the regional rollout plans.

"We've been aware for some time that local listeners in regional areas are extremely keen to have DAB+ services introduced and we are working closely with the public broadcasters to make this happen," she said.

Digital radio was launched in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth in 2009. The technology offers better sound than AM/FM analogue services and additional features such as extra stations, images and live text.

Commercial broadcasters Capital Radio and Canberra FM have been running trial digital radio services in Canberra for some years and Grant Broadcasters has also been on air in Darwin on a trial basis.

"DAB+ is greener and more spectrum efficient than analogue radio and is particularly well-suited to Australians living in regional areas because it allows broadcasters to use their allocated capacity dynamically," Ms Warner said. "This means, for example, broadcasters can launch pop-up stations to provide 24x7 emergency services bulletins in times of fire or flood."

Ms Warner said commercial broadcasters were working with public broadcasters on coordinating launch dates, with permanent digital radio services in Canberra and Darwin expected to start in 2017 and Hobart in 2018.

"The radio industry is committed to a digital broadcast future via DAB+ combined with and complemented by online. This is especially important in terms of spectrum efficiency and operational costs," Ms Warner said. "We will also continue to discuss financial support with the Federal Government for DAB+ rollout into regions as was provided to the television industry for its digital switchover. As the major electronic mediums, radio and television must receive equal treatment from the Government to ensure optimum services in regional Australia and more diversity and choice for regional Australians."

Figures released today show that 3.6 million Australians, or 27% of the population in the five capital cities, listen to digital radio via DAB+ devices each week.

There are 2.9 million DAB+ digital radio receivers in market at September 2016 including 758,000 DAB+ equipped new cars now on the road.

The commercial radio industry launched a new on-air marketing campaign to promote digital radio earlier today. The campaign, in partnership with audio brand QV, is aimed at driving sales of digital radios through the retailers Target, Bing Lee and Harvey Norman in the busy Christmas shopping period.

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