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## Industry welcomes passing of Digital Radio Bill

Australians will be able to enjoy one of the best digital radio services in the world following the passing of legislation in Federal Parliament today allowing for digital radio to be rolled out in the state capitals by 1 January 2009.

“Digital radio ushers in a new era for radio and for the 95 percent of Australians who listen to radio every week,” said Joan Warner, chief executive officer of peak industry body Commercial Radio Australia, which represents 98 percent of commercial radio stations.

“The passing of the legislation means consumers will get vastly superior radio services sooner rather than later and it gives industry the certainty it needs to move ahead on the massive investment in broadcasting infrastructure that will be required.”

Ms Warner said while the legislation covered the licensing, planning and regulation for digital radio initially in the six cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart, regional and rural Australia would not miss out.

“There are around 220 commercial radio stations who play a very important role in the lives of listeners in regional and rural Australia, and it’s important that they share in the benefits that digital technology will bring,” she said.

“The industry has already started reviewing the needs of some regional licence areas. The metropolitan roll out will allow us to realistically cost the regional rollout and we will be approaching the government for assistance to help regional commercial broadcasters with the costs of digital infrastructure.”

Digital radio will provide listeners with more choice, crystal clear sound and many new features free to air. Because digital technology is so much more spectrum efficient than analogue, radio stations will be able to broadcast extra digital-only channels as well as data and images such as CD covers, weather and traffic maps and news images.

Ms Warner said the Act reflected the industry’s key policy requests and the vital role commercial broadcasters would play in the roll out and success of digital radio. “The industry appreciates the level of consultation we had with the Prime Minister and the Minister on this important area as well as the support of many Government MPs in helping to negotiate a workable set of policy settings.”

However, she said the industry was still seeking clarification on a number of aspects of the Act. These include a statutory review of the six-year moratorium period for new entrants depending on take-up levels after five years, restrictions on the allocation of new analogue commercial radio licences and broadening of allowable digital program content from “still visual images” to moving visual images such as dynamic text, animations and short burst video, which would encourage take-up. “We understood from the Minister’s policy announcement that there would be no restrictions placed on broadcasters’ use of spectrum,” Ms Warner said. “We will continue to work with the Government as the Act is implemented to ensure that the policy settings agreed between the industry and the Government come to fruition.”

Contrary to the government’s position, she said the industry considered digital radio a replacement technology for analogue broadcasting over time and not a supplementary technology.

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Note: A fact sheet on digital radio is attached.