



Senator the Hon Helen Coonan

Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate

Media Release

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\$10.5 million for community and national digital radio broadcasting

Millions of radio listeners around the country will be able to enjoy improved radio services thanks to Federal Budget funding of \$10.5 million, the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Helen Coonan said today.

The funding will help community broadcasters establish digital radio infrastructure. The national broadcasters ABC and SBS will also receive funding which will be determined by a competitive tender process.

Senator Coonan said the funding will significantly improve the quality of radio services and enable the delivery of a range of new and innovative services.

“It will enable recording and playback as well as streamed text and will also provide news and weather updates, sound broadcasts, play list information and even still pictures.”

Senator Coonan said national broadcasters play a vital role in driving consumer take-up of digital technology across both television and radio, through access to new digital-only services.

“This funding will allow our national and community radio stations to broadcast innovative new content in digital mode. Through digital radio, broadcasters will be able to offer listeners a superior service.

“The funding will enable the ABC and SBS to provide the full range of their existing analogue radio services. But there will also be new digital services, such as ABC DIG radio and DIG jazz and some of SBS’ existing digital radio services which are currently only provided online will also become available,” Senator Coonan said.

“Radio is the only mainstream broadcast service that is analogue only and faces increasing competition from new digital platforms such as the Internet and mobile phones.

“Examples of digital radio implementation overseas indicate that the technology works most effectively as a supplement to existing radio services, rather than a replacement technology.

“The new Australian Government framework allows the ABC and SBS, together with community broadcasters to initiate digital radio services. This funding for national and community broadcasters will ensure that they are able to participate with commercial broadcasters in the commencement of digital radio services in the state capital cities on 1 January 2009,” Senator Coonan said.

Supporting information

National and community broadcaster digital radio

Why is this important?

- Providing the funding to make digital radio available through the national and community broadcasters will help to ensure the successful introduction of the new platform.
- In the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe, national broadcasters have played a vital role in driving consumer take-up of digital radio, in particular by adding new digital-only services.
- Funding will ensure that national and community radio are available in digital mode, in addition to commercial radio, and ensure that the diversity of analogue radio is reflected in digital radio mode.
- In 2004, the Howard Government committed to include the community broadcasting sector in the framework for the introduction of digital radio in Australia.
- Funding for the community sector will enable it to participate in the planning and management of the shared broadcasting infrastructure (known as a 'multiplex') required for the operation of digital radio, in conjunction with commercial radio operators.

Who will benefit?

- Digital radio provides listeners with a rich and more diverse radio offering than possible in analogue mode, enabling listeners to easily record and rewind radio broadcasts, to access streaming text—providing news and weather updates—and to access play list information and still pictures.
- This proposal involves:
 - (a) new funding to be distributed via the Community Broadcasting Foundation to facilitate wide-coverage community broadcasting stations in Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney to commence digital radio broadcasting by 1 January 2009; and
 - (b) new funding to enable the commencement of digital radio services by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) in the six state capitals by 1 January 2009, followed by the establishment of up to 57 "in-fill" translators across these cities.

What funding is the Government committing to the initiative?

- The funding for the rollout for the national broadcasters will be determined by a competitive tender process.

What have we done in the past?

- In 2004, the Government initiated a transparent and accountable process to develop a policy framework and implementation strategy for digital radio in Australia.
- After an extensive program of industry consultation, research and policy development, the Government released a policy framework in October 2005 to guide the introduction of digital radio services.
- This policy framework is now being implemented through legislation introduced in the Parliament on 28 March 2007 that will see the commencement of digital radio services in the state capital cities by 1 January 2009.
- This funding initiative will enable the ABC and SBS and the community broadcasting sector to participate in the first phase of digital radio introduction and to continue to provide full-time, free-to-air digital radio broadcasts in these markets into the future.

When will the initiative conclude?

- Funding for community broadcasters will be reviewed in 2010 to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the program.
- Funding for national broadcasters is ongoing (transmission contracts entered into will be for 15 years).