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Sydney switches on digital radio

Commercial radio stations in Sydney 2GB, 2CH, 2UE, 2DAY, TRIPLE M, 2KY, WS-FM, MIX 106.5, 2SM, NOVA, VEGA Radar, Pink Radio, Koffee and NovaNation began broadcasting DAB+ digital radio services today, joining stations in Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane completing the five state metropolitan switch on and taking the total number of digital radio services on air in Australia to 44.

Joan Warner, chief executive officer of Commercial Radio Australia, the industry body that has driven the move to digital radio on behalf of the commercial and public broadcasters, said the switch on of permanent DAB+ services in Sydney illustrates how a highly competitive industry has come together to create one of the most spectrum efficient and sophisticated digital radio networks in the world.

Chairman of Commercial Radio Australia, Mr Michael Anderson said he was privileged to chair the industry organisation during such an exciting phase. "Australia has a vibrant and resilient radio industry that is the envy of many countries around the world and digital radio will enable the industry to continue to innovate," said Mr Anderson.

In the first few weeks of the DAB+ digital radio broadcasts in Sydney stations will be broadcasting at lower power while technical aspects of the broadcasts are finalised; then broadcasts will go into variable power mode while any interference is identified, assessed and remediated, as required by the Australian Media and Communication Authority.

Ms Warner explained that because of the poor weather conditions over the past month, lower power in the first couple of weeks is required to finalise some aspects of the infrastructure build. In addition, as Sydney is densely populated with many high rise buildings the variable power stage of the Interference Management Scheme (IMS) may continue a little longer than in other states so that any issues can be addressed.

"In the first few weeks in the other switch on cities we broadcast in interference test mode – lower power at night and higher during the day - without any major issues. Following this phase we added high power over the weekends and then, in Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane and Melbourne have moved onto full power at all times. However, Sydney's unique topography will mean we will remain in interference at low power for a little longer than in other states so any interruption to service is not a cause for alarm – but simply part of the technical aspects of the switch-on," said Ms Warner.

The commercial radio industry and the ABC and SBS will celebrate the metropolitan digital radio switch on with a five state capital simultaneous outside broadcast on 6 August 2009. All stations in each city will broadcast live from a central city location at the same time and invite listeners to attend. More details will be released on the event in the coming weeks.

"In Sydney the outside broadcast will be in Martin Place and you'll have for the first time, competing broadcasters from all stations coming together on one morning to tell listeners more about digital radio," said Ms Warner.

The five state metropolitan switch on completes the first step in bringing free to air digital radio to all Australians. The radio industry is now calling on the Federal Government to allocate VHF Band III spectrum to regional broadcasters so all listeners throughout Australia can receive digital services.

"Nearly 60 percent of Australia's population will now be able to access digital radio services but Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth represent just five out of the 105 commercial radio Licence Area Plans (LAPs). The industry is committed to ensuring all Australians are able to access the enhanced form of free to air radio and we've commenced talks with Australian Media and Communications Authority (ACMA) and the Federal Government to plan the rollout of digital radio throughout the rest of Australia," said Ms Warner.

Digital radio is free – all you need is a new digital receiver – no subscription fees or signing up, just tune in. Listeners can go to the website www.digitalradioplus.com.au and type in their postcode to see if they live in an area where they can receive digital radio or where they will be able to buy a digital radio. Alternatively, simply SMS your postcode to the mobile phone number 0409DRPLUS (0409 377 587) to find out if you can receive digital radio in your area.

DAB+ digital radios are available in all shapes and sizes including MP3 style devices, hi fi, portable players, clock radios, car adaptors and PC radios. Prices vary depending on their features. Entry level radios start from around A\$150 and a radio with all the digital capabilities start at around A\$299.

Manufacturers producing DAB+ digital radios include; Pure, Roberts, Bush, Revo, Grundig, iRiver, Sangean, Yamaha and Teac with other manufactures expected to introduce further products throughout 2009.

Digital radios are available to purchase at leading retailers including; Harvey Norman, Dick Smith, The Good Guys, Clive Peeters, Retravision, Myer, David Jones, and specialist retailers.

For further information on digital radio visit: www.digitalradioplus.com.au
Media contact Melissa Fleming, CRA PR Manager Digital on – 0417 499 529.