

23 August 2013

Canberra & Darwin digital radio trials extended

Commercial Radio Australia (CRA) today welcomed the decision by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to extend the DAB+ digital radio trial licences in Canberra and Darwin for a further 12 months.

The scientific licences have been extended to allow ongoing bench and field testing and continued coverage modelling to be used by the industry and the ACMA in achieving a cost effective DAB+ rollout to other regional areas.

Commercial Radio Australia chief executive officer Joan Warner said: "Australia is a unique market for the rollout of digital radio and careful planning is needed to get it right. Much has been learnt throughout the year of trial activity about receiver sensitivity which could influence transmission planning and the number of services offered, which also affects the rollout costs. Despite the research to date, more work is needed to ensure regional audiences enjoy great quality and reception and that the broadcasters can deliver that at a reasonable cost."

"Not only has the trial licence allowed us to test the transmission side, it's given broadcasters an opportunity to try innovative digital programming such as the DAB+ pop up station, Canberra 100 dedicated to celebrating the capital's 100th birthday year," said Ms Warner.

Commercial Radio Australia is the trial licensee and on behalf of the ABC, SBS and all commercial broadcasters, requested extensions to the Canberra and Darwin trial scientific licences to allow the industry to continue its commitment to the roll out of digital radio to regional areas.

"The Canberra trial is a useful and active collaboration of commercial and public broadcasters and government agencies. It is a good test of a single shared multiplex model which is being considered for regional areas and some important technical as well as operational knowledge has been gained," said Ms Warner.

Commercial radio stations 2CA, 2CC, Mix 106.3, 104.7, My Canberra, Hot Country, Canberra 100 and Buddha, plus multicultural and multilingual stations SBS Radio 1 and SBS Radio 2, SBS Pop Asia and SBS Chill continue to broadcast on the low power DAB+ trial. ABC stations – 666 ABC Canberra, ABC Jazz, Radio National, triple j Unearthed and ABC Grandstand joined the trial in 2011 and these are all adding to the choice of services available to Canberra audiences.

Hot 100 and Mix 104.9 and digital only services, Top Country Digital, Classic Rock and Radio TAB will continue DAB+ trial services in Darwin. Canberra and Darwin DAB+ trials have been the first outside the metropolitan capitals of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide.

The DAB+ trial signal in both cities is at low power but tests have indicated coverage at low power has been able to extend to a large part of the Canberra and Darwin areas. A boost was required to retransmit the trial signal into Parliament House. This has provided additional testing opportunities for "in building" coverage in a challenging structure. The trial services continue to be subject to occasional interruptions and changes in power for ongoing technical testing.

Total number of digital radios sold since the 2009 launch four years ago has risen to 1,318,596, according to figures released by Commercial Radio Australia from the Q2 2013, GfK Marketscope report.

In addition, listening figures show that 1.6 million people or more than 12% of radio listening each week in the five state capitals, is via a DAB+ device. Time Spent Listening (TSL) to radio via a DAB+ digital radio device is more than double that of TSL to radio via the internet.

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