

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Silence Deafening over Digital Shortwave Radio**

*Short Wave Radio is gone: Digital Shortwave Radio could be the answer, so why is no one listening?*

Alice Springs, NT – 10 Feb. 2017 – The glaring omission in public discussions following shortwave broadcast termination in Central Australia is a viable alternative, like Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM). DRM is a maturing technology which allows FM-quality broadcasts over enormous areas, using much the same broadcasting infrastructure the old AM shortwave used. In fact, the shortwave transmitter in Tennant Creek is already DRM-ready. The ABC, Broadcast Australia and the federal government already know about this technology and its suitability for the Australian environment. Why has the ABC terminated shortwave broadcasts rather than rolling out a transition to DRM?

Many global broadcasters have already switched to DRM, including Radio New Zealand International which has been [transmitting a DRM signal for almost 11 years](#) to most of the Pacific Islands. India (population 1.3 billion) has just completed a DRM network which covers the whole country. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has had [an embargo on some of the appropriate frequencies for DRM since 2006](#) for the explicit purpose of facilitating the introduction of digital radio using the DRM standard.

As early as 2010 the ABC has admitted in government submissions that their preferred digital radio standard (DAB) is unsuitable for full coverage of regional and remote areas and the connecting roads of Australia. SBS and Broadcast Australia have made similar admissions in their submissions. All of these organisations and others suggest in their submissions that DRM30 (DRM broadcast in the bands under 30 MHz for long-range transmission) is the best technology for Australia's vast landmass. The resultant federal report, "Review of technologies for digital radio in regional Australia" (7 October, 2011) also concludes that DAB is not suitable for all regional areas, and that DRM is the preferred technology to supplement DAB+ in regional areas.

DRM30 is shaping up to be the future of wide-area radio broadcasts. It provides FM-quality audio without the fading issues of FM. The broadcast can be paused and rewound. A single transmitter located in the geographical centre of Australia could provide a reliable signal from coast to coast (excluding Tasmania, which could be serviced with a much smaller transmitter in its geographical centre). Day/night frequency switching, familiar to shortwave radio listeners, can be done automatically with DRM30. Truck drivers, grey nomads, tourists and other travellers would not experience drop-outs or have to change stations on long road trips. Changing stations between DAB+, DRM, and old AM and FM stations can be seamless and invisible to the end user on a multi-platform radio receiver.

The ABC imagines that you can use a VAST satellite receiver or SkyMuster satellite broadband whilst driving or boating or on horseback. This requires a \$25,000 servo system to keep the satellite dish pointed at the satellite as you move along. They also suggest the use of satellite phones which require a clear sky and someone to make the call to each satellite phone in the event of an emergency.

With DRM reliable emergency broadcasts are possible, even to the most remote parts of Australia, some Australian waters, and people on the move. DRM30 includes an Emergency Warning System which can wake the receiver and automatically tune it to the appropriate channel. It is also possible to transmit weather maps and scrolling text which appear on a display on the radio receiver. As yet there has been no move by broadcasters to roll out DRM30. The ABC in particular should be leading the way, as it is the most cost-effective and reliable method of fulfilling its Charter.

All this is done using less than half of the electricity needed for the old AM shortwave radio.

Benjamin Quilliam, the new Frontier Services “Patrol Padre” for Central Australia, is shocked that DRM30 is not being discussed in the wake of the ABC shortwave radio shutdown.

“I was working at a shortwave transmission station back in 2003-2004, and even back then we were talking about DRM and the possibility of switching our transmitters over to a digital broadcast. It’s a no-brainer, considering all the advantages of DRM with no long-term drawbacks. I feel concerned for the many people who come under my care in the isolated areas of Central Australia. They have been abandoned by broadcasters who care more about listener numbers than equitable access. But in reality, DRM30 will be good for all Australians. We, the public, need to educate ourselves on DRM30 and push for its prompt implementation.”

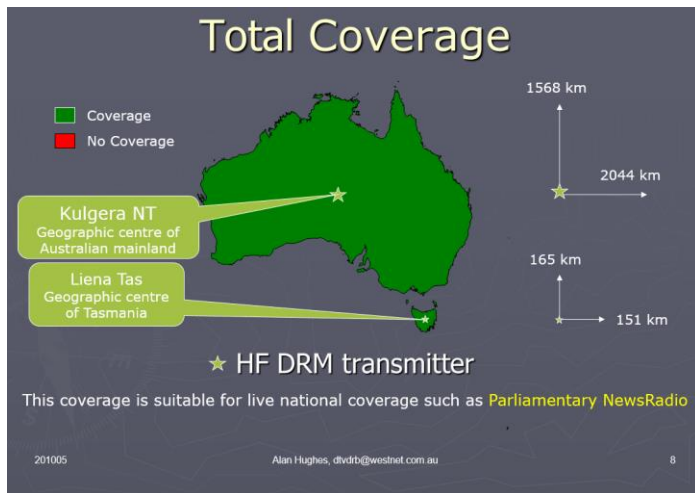
Australia prides itself in its innovation. It was the first nation to commence 24 hour digital radio broadcasts using the DAB standard back in 2009. We are sadly lagging behind with digital radio for the 40% of our population outside the five mainland state capitals because of the failure to roll out DRM.

Please find links below to two of the reports mentioned in this release:

[“Australian Broadcasting Corporation submission to The Australian Government: Technologies for digital radio services in regional Australia Discussion Paper.” \(December 2010\), pages 4-5, 6-7](#)

[“Review of technologies for digital radio in regional Australia: Final Report.” \(7 October 2011\), pages 11, 15-17, 22](#)

Alan Hughes is the author of a 5-part technical series on digital radio in Silicon Chip magazine, as well as having taught the technical and operational side of broadcasting for both Radio and TV for over 15 years:



For more information please contact:

Benjamin Quilliam

Remote Area Ministry Pastor, Frontier Services

52 Todd St, Alice Springs

PO Box 6, Alice Springs, NT 0871

Tel: 0400 562 127

Email: [benjamin.quilliam@ns.uca.org.au](mailto:benjamin.quilliam@ns.uca.org.au)

###