

- a review of the decision to expand SBS television on UHF only; and
- expansion of SBS television on the basis of at least equivalent coverage to that of the ABC and commercial television stations in a particular area.

NEWS

THE FDU AM/FM CONVERSION REPORT

The Minister of Communications, Michael Duffy, has now released the Forward Development Unit's ("FDU") report Future Directions for Commercial Radio ... Interim Report: AM/FM Conversion.

In this report the FDU identified three options. The first is to allow all commercial stations to convert.

The second is to allow regional commercial stations in competition with an FM station to convert.

The third is to allow no conversion. In relation to this the FDU noted that radio in Australia was already enjoying the benefits of deregulation.

The FDU said that conversion was not as simple as it might first appear. The question of "commercial viability" was one which lay at the root of proposals for conversion. They said that it was not possible to demonstrate the truth or falsity of the proposition that FM was a clearly superior mode. Nor was it possible to conclude that AM broadcasters would be made unprofitable, let alone unviable, if they were denied conversion. They said that given over 230 AM main stations were involved it was not necessary to take sides in the conversion issue to conclude that wholesale conversion of existing stations was essentially a long term option.

The FDU stated that the debate about conversion was in fact a debate about a closed versus an open system of broadcasting, regulation versus deregulation. For that reason it was important for the Government to determine its priorities. It also noted that freedom to change program formats at will could be under question as a corollary of conversion.

The Report again noted the Government's stretched resources. It stated

that virtually all of the Department of Communications' resources would be devoted in the short term to planning for the equalisation of television services. This was the first priority. Secondly, resources would be allocated to planning the ABC's second regional radio network and the re-transmission of remote commercial television services. This would seem to indicate that the Department has not the desire or the ability to handle this issue at the present time.

It now appears that the FDU's report of its study on future directions for commercial radio in Australia has been postponed indefinitely.

**REPRINT OF B & T ACT
AND BROADCASTING ACT**

The Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters has arranged with the relevant authorities to print an updated, but unauthorised, edition of the Broadcasting Act and Broadcasting and Television Act, as it still applies. The cost of the Broadcasting Act is \$19.00 and the cost of the Broadcasting and Television Act is \$18.00. If anyone is interested in obtaining copies they should write to:

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or ring Yoland or Janice on (02) 929-4866.
