

CONVERGENCE
and
ELECTRONIC MASS COMMUNICATION
POLICY
in
AUSTRALIA

Dissertation

by

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Abstract

The historical assumptions that underpin broadcasting regulation in Australia have included scarcity of spectrum for broadcasting, concerns about the power of the media to influence, an expectation that a service that uses spectrum belonging to the public should be used for the public good, and a desire on the part of Governments to offer economic protection from competition in return for the provision of public goods by broadcasters.

Despite the substantial reforms to broadcasting regulation implemented by the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, the whole broadcasting system that now exists has grown incrementally on the foundations of these unchallenged assumptions.

Service innovations made possible by convergence of communications and computing technologies, however, challenge many of these assumptions. Convergence also provides for many forms of physical media that are currently exempt from restrictive regulation, to migrate into the electronic domain, inviting questions about if, and how, they should be covered by the type of regulation currently applied to broadcast media. If they are not to be subject to restrictive regulation, will they be able to be sufficiently differentiated from broadcasting to allow industry specific regulation of broadcasting to be unaffected by their presence?

The approach to the study of mass communication policy and law in Australia, until very recently, was steeped in a public trust paradigm. The recent emergence of a market paradigm, coupled with challenges to the assumptions underlying the regulation following from the convergence of services and technology opens new issues to academic inquiry.

This dissertation sketches out some of the challenges for broadcasting policy that lie in this new conceptual territory.

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IDH

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for
Jordan Hayne

Commonly Used Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| ABA | <i>Australian Broadcasting Authority</i> - broadcasting industry regulator established by the <i>Broadcasting Services Act 1992</i> . |
| ABC | <i>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</i> - publicly funded national broadcaster. |
| ABCB | <i>Australian Broadcasting Control Board</i> - broadcasting industry regulator from 1949 to 1976. |
| ABT | <i>Australian Broadcasting Tribunal</i> - broadcasting industry regulator from 1976 to 1992. |
| ADSL | <i>asymmetric digital subscriber line</i> - technique for optimising data capacity on twisted-pair copper telephone lines. |
| AM | <i>amplitude modulation</i> - a scheme for coding information on electromagnetic radiation so that the information varies the amplitude of a constant frequency signal. |
| ATVI | <i>Australian Television International</i> - a satellite delivered service to South-east Asia packaged by the ABC, transmitted over Indonesian Palapa satellites. |
| AWA | <i>Amalgamated Wireless Australasia</i> - operator of the sealed set scheme in the early 1920s. Now a major industrial company. |
| BEN | <i>Broadcast Engineering News</i> - broadcasting industry trade journal. |
| B-ISDN | <i>broadband integrated services digital network</i> - optical fibre cable digital telecommunications system with very high transmission capacity. |
| B-MAC | <i>multiplexed analogue components - type B</i> . A time division multiplex method of transmitting video information. This system used by RCTS broadcasters and the ABC for satellite transmission of television and radio services to remote areas. |
| BSA | <i>Broadcasting Services Act 1992</i> - The principal regulatory instrument of electronic mass communication regulation in Australia. |
| BTCE | <i>Bureau of Transport and Communications Economics</i> - sub-program within DOTAC. |
| CD | <i>compact disc</i> - optical storage medium for data, or more popularly for digitally recorded music. |

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| DAB | <i>digital audio broadcasting</i> - digital transmission technique for radio services. |
| DAT | <i>digital audio tape</i> - digital coding techniques of music on compact cassette tapes. |
| DOTAC | <i>Department of Transport and Communications</i> - Australian Department of state with responsibility for communication issues. |
| IDD | <i>international direct dialling</i> - international telephone service. |
| ISDN | <i>integrated services digital network</i> - digital telecommunication system. |
| LAN | <i>local area network</i> - computer networking within a small area, such as a building. |
| FACTS | <i>Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations</i> - commercial television industry peak body. |
| FARB | <i>Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters</i> - commercial radio industry peak body. |
| FCC | <i>Federal Communications Commission</i> - US communication industry regulator. |
| FIRB | <i>Foreign Investment Review Board</i> - reviews foreign investment proposals and makes recommendations to the Government. |
| FM | <i>frequency modulation</i> - a scheme for coding information on electromagnetic radiation so that the information varies the frequency relative to a stable reference. |
| GHz | <i>gigahertz</i> - measure of the frequency of electromagnetic radiation. 10^9 cycles per second. |
| HORSCOTCI | <i>House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport Communications and Infrastructure</i> . |
| MDS | <i>multipoint distribution systems</i> - microwave band services to multiple users. |
| MHz | <i>megahertz</i> - measure of the frequency of electromagnetic radiation. 10^6 cycles per second. |
| OFLC | <i>Office of Film and Literature Classification</i> - Commonwealth body which classifies material. |
| OLE | <i>object linking and embedding</i> - technique used by Microsoft to integrate software packages operating in the Windows environment. |
| PIN | <i>personal identification number</i> . |

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| PMT | <i>Packer/Murdoch/Telecom</i> - syndicate formed in 1993 to pursue pay TV opportunities in Australia. |
| PSTN | <i>public switched telephone network</i> . |
| RCTS | <i>Remote Commercial Television Services</i> - commercial television for remote areas delivered by satellite. |
| SBS | <i>Special Broadcasting Service</i> - publicly funded national broadcaster. |
| SMA | <i>Spectrum Management Agency</i> - organisation within the Transport and Communications portfolio established to administer the radiofrequency spectrum. |
| STD | <i>subscriber trunk dialling</i> - long distance telephone service. |
| TPC | <i>Trade Practices Commission</i> - trade practices and competition policy regulator. |
| UHF | <i>ultra high frequency</i> - band of the radiofrequency spectrum between 300 MHz and 3 GHz . |
| VHF | <i>very high frequency</i> - band of the radiofrequency spectrum between 30 MHz and 300 MHz. |
| US | <i>United States</i> - United States of America. |
| VAEIS | <i>video and audio entertainment and information services</i> - broadcasting like services to non-domestic premises, authorised by the Government in 1986. |
| WAN | <i>wide area network</i> - computer networking over a large geographic area. |

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