

**A STRONGER ECONOMY
A STRONGER AUSTRALIA**



**THE HOWARD
GOVERNMENT
ELECTION 2004 POLICY**

21ST CENTURY BROADCASTING



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PART 1 IMPROVING COMMUNITY ACCESS

The Coalition Government is committed to ensuring that Australians have access to a wide range of quality media services regardless of where they live.

We have improved community access to ABC and SBS television and radio services, and commercial and remote television and radio services around Australia.

Building on this, to provide further access to ABC radio services, the Coalition will:

- Extend ABC NewsRadio services to all transmission areas with a population over 10,000 (subject to spectrum availability); and
- Improve ABC Local Radio coverage in Dubbo, Wagga Wagga and Geelong and their surrounding areas.

The Coalition Government has also committed to expanding the scope of the ABC Local Radio Self-Help Retransmission Subsidy Scheme to enable up to 50 communities without the full range of ABC terrestrial radio services to apply for assistance to establish an ABC radio self-help service, and to improve the coverage and quality of the ABC Local Radio service in nine locations in Western Australia and Queensland.

To date, the Coalition Government has assisted more than 64,000 households across Australia to gain new or improved access to television services through its \$35 million Television Black Spots Programme and \$13.3 million Alternative Technical Solutions Programme.

The Coalition Government has also provided \$5 million over three years to establish the Commercial Radio Black Spots Programme which is delivering new and improved commercial radio services to regional and remote communities. This programme has assisted 104 communities so far.

These programmes will continue to benefit Australians in rural and regional areas across all States and Territories.

PART 2 TRULY NATIONAL BROADCASTING

Australia's national public broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, are integral to our cultural landscape.

In recognition of their importance to our community and our nation, the Coalition Government has funded the significant expansion of ABC and SBS services, providing more Australians with access to the range of services the national broadcasters provide.

The Coalition will continue to respect and adhere to the statutory independence of the ABC and SBS.

In addition to the ABC's triennial funding, since 2001-02 the Coalition Government has committed \$125.6 million in funding to the ABC for its National Interest Initiatives programme, which is providing increased rural and regional television and radio services, innovative educational programming and new media content. This includes an additional \$54.4 million over three years, announced in the 2004-05 Budget, to continue the ABC's Regional and Local Programming (RLP) initiative.

As part of its commitment to the transition to digital television, the Coalition will continue its \$1 billion commitment to fully fund the ABC's and SBS's digital transmission and distribution costs.

The Coalition will also continue to encourage the ABC and SBS to be responsive to the needs and views of their audiences and will work with the national broadcasters to develop a more independent complaints handling process.

The Coalition acknowledges the importance of quality programming from the national broadcasters. In the 2004-05 Budget, the Coalition Government provided the ABC with an additional \$4.2 million per annum to help meet the costs of purchasing new domestic and overseas programmes.

PART 3 COMMERCIAL BROADCASTING

The Coalition will continue to support the smooth rollout of digital free-to-air television to enable the benefits of digital technology to be experienced by all Australians.

A series of reviews, required under the Broadcasting Services Act, are currently underway to assess the progress of the digital television regime. The Coalition will consider and respond to these reviews to ensure the continuing development of a vibrant digital television regime for the benefit of Australian viewers.

In conjunction with industry, the Coalition will work towards establishing a digital testing and conformance centre to test and enhance the performance of digital television technology and ensure that consumers get the most out of their equipment.

The Coalition will also continue to work with the radio industry on developing a framework for the introduction of digital radio in Australia.

The Coalition will also ask the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) to review requirements that commercial radio licensees in remote licence areas provide the same service across the entire remote licence area, with a view to improving the quality, diversity and local relevance of commercial radio programming in remote licence areas.

The Coalition will continue to monitor the anti-siphoning rules to ensure their continued relevance.

PART 4 COMMUNITY AND INDIGENOUS BROADCASTING

The Coalition recognises the important role played by community broadcasting. To support the continuing operation and growth of these services, the Coalition will:

- Continue to build on its already substantial funding to the community broadcasting sector by increasing funding to the sector by \$1.5 million per annum to assist with transmission access costs;
- Provide the sector with funding of \$2.2 million over four years to enable it to provide improved training;
- Continue to work with the community television and radio sectors on the development of an appropriate framework for the transition to digital broadcasting; and
- Review the viability of creating an Indigenous broadcasting service as part of the series of statutory reviews of the digital television regulatory framework which are required under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*.

PART 5 MEDIA OWNERSHIP, BROADCASTING STANDARDS AND AUSTRALIAN CONTENT

The Coalition remains committed to reforming Australia's outdated media ownership laws in the interests of development, flexibility and diversity.

The Coalition's reforms will give Australian media organisations commercial flexibility and the ability to access capital for infrastructure and content investment, while protecting the public interest in a diverse and vibrant media sector.

The Coalition is also committed to the current co-regulatory regime through which the ABA assists the television, radio and Internet industries to develop codes of practice relating to content and complaints-handling which reflect community standards and expectations.

We are committed to retaining the current Australian Content Standard, which plays an important role in promoting broadcasting that portrays and reflects a sense of Australian identity, character and diversity.

PART 1 IMPROVING COMMUNITY ACCESS

The Coalition is committed to ensuring that Australians have access to a wide range of quality media services regardless of where they live.

Since coming to office, the Coalition Government has improved community access to ABC and SBS television and radio services and to commercial and remote television and radio services around Australia.

The Coalition remains committed to fully funding the ABC's and SBS's digital transmission and distribution costs. Over the decade from 2001, the cost of ensuring that the ABC's and SBS's digital television coverage matches their current analogue services is estimated to be around \$1 billion.

Without this digital funding, many Australians in regional and rural areas would have no access to the digital national broadcasting services that audiences in cities and major regional centres now take for granted, and our national broadcasters would be unable to participate in what is one of the most important broadcasting developments in the history of television.

In addition, we have provided up to \$260 million towards the cost of converting commercial television broadcasting to digital technology in regional and remote Australia as part of the Regional Equalisation Plan.

(i) *National Broadcasters Extensions*

As part of its commitment to ensure that all Australians have access to the ABC's comprehensive services, the Coalition will fund at cost of up to \$14 million over four years:

- The extension of ABC NewsRadio to all transmission areas around Australia with populations over 10,000, subject to the availability of spectrum. This will benefit up to 62 areas around Australia, as currently ABC NewsRadio is only transmitted to our capital cities, Newcastle, Gosford and the Gold Coast; and
- The improvement of ABC Local Radio coverage at Dubbo, Wagga Wagga and Geelong to better serve up to 205,000 people in these major centres and their outlying areas.

The Coalition has also committed to extending the ABC Self-Help Local Radio Retransmission Subsidy Scheme. This scheme, which was originally confined to a defined “cyclone incident zone” in northern Australia, offers regional communities around Australia funding to establish ABC Local Radio self-help services.

The extension of the scheme will provide up to \$1.5 million to enable up to 50 smaller communities in regional and rural Australia which do not currently receive ABC radio services to establish their own self-help retransmission facility to access any of the ABC’s five radio services.

The Coalition Government has also committed to the scheme funding improved ABC Local Radio service coverage, reliability and sound quality at nine locations in Western Australia and Queensland at a cost of \$162,000. Areas which will be covered are Broome, Carnarvon, Derby, Exmouth, Geraldton, Karratha, Kununurra and Port Hedland in Western Australia, and Thursday Island (Torres Strait) in Queensland.

These services collectively reach an estimated 150,000 people, and, with the exception of Carnarvon and Geraldton, they are transmitted within the northern Australia “cyclone incident zone”. The ABC Local Radio service in these areas is particularly important, not only as a source of general news and information, but also as a vital emergency warning system.

The extension of this scheme is met from within existing resources.

To provide improved access to SBS television services, in line with the Coalition’s commitment at the last election the Coalition Government has funded the extension of SBS television services to population areas of 5,000 or more at a cost of \$5.7 million. This follows the extension of SBS television services to areas of 10,000 or more that was completed by the Coalition Government in 2001.

(ii) *Television Black Spots Programme*

The \$35 million Television Black Spots Programme reflects the Coalition’s ongoing commitment to ensuring better access to television services by all Australians.

To date, the highly successful first two rounds of the programme have helped 243 Australian communities, ensuring that an estimated 64,700 households around Australia, which were previously located in television “black spots” are, or will soon be, able to enjoy new or improved television reception. And further projects are underway.

The Coalition has also provided funding through the \$13.3 million Television Black Spots – Alternative Technical Solutions programme to provide alternative technical solutions for television black spot areas where an analogue retransmission solution is not available.

This is a clear demonstration of the Coalition Government's commitment to ensuring that Australians have access to quality broadcasting services regardless of where they live.

(iii) Commercial Radio Black Spots Programme

Radio services are often an important link for Australians living in regional and remote areas.

In recognition of this, the Coalition Government has provided \$5 million over three years to establish a Commercial Radio Black Spots Programme to deliver new and improved commercial radio services to regional and remote communities where it has not been viable for commercial licensees to provide coverage.

To date, the Coalition has funded 106 projects under the programme, giving 104 communities around Australia access to new or improved services. Further eligible projects are under consideration.

To build on this success, a re-elected Coalition Government will look to enhance the ability of radio licensees to provide Programmes that meet the individual preferences of communities in different areas across remote regions of Australia.

At present, a remote area licensee is required to provide broadly the same service across its licence area.

Following the ABA's investigation into Remote Commercial Radio Services, a re-elected Coalition Government will ask the ABA to investigate the feasibility of relaxing programming rules to enable a remote area licensee to provide different services to different parts of its licence area.

This would enable remote area licensees to better serve their listeners by providing more localised services to particular areas.

PART 2 TRULY NATIONAL BROADCASTING

(i) *The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)*

The ABC is one of Australia's primary cultural institutions. It has a significant and valued place in our national life.

For more than 70 years the ABC has helped define us as Australians, holding a mirror up to Australian life, and leading the way in developing and showcasing Australian acting and broadcasting talent.

The Coalition Government's vision is for an independent, successful ABC that delivers high quality programming to Australian audiences as efficiently as possible.

We want to ensure that all Australians have access to the ABC's comprehensive services - spanning television, radio and online - regardless of where they live.

To deliver on our vision, the Coalition Government is strongly committed to maintaining triennial funding for the ABC in real terms and to the current ABC Act prohibitions on advertising and sponsorship.

This year the Coalition Government will provide \$774 million for the ABC.

This includes \$18 million for ABC Asia-Pacific television, which the Coalition has re-established with a \$90 million commitment over five years; funding for digital interference management; and additional programming funding for the National Interest Initiatives programme.

From this year we are also providing a further \$4.2 million per annum (indexed) to help the ABC meet the increasing costs of purchasing quality new domestic and overseas television Programmes.

In 2001-02 the Coalition Government provided \$71.2 million over four years in additional programming funding to support the ABC's National Interest Initiatives programme. This programme has resulted in increased local regional radio services, the establishment of four new radio studios servicing regional areas, the employment of additional regional staff, the establishment of an Internet radio station "DiG", new regional and business television programming and innovative educational programming.

In recognition of the success of this programme, the Coalition Government has committed a further \$54.4 million for National Interest Initiatives over three years from 2005-06.

This commitment enables the ABC to plan with certainty, to continue to develop regional and local programming across all media, and to develop additional programming in areas such as business, finance, children's and educational programming.

The Coalition also remains committed to fully funding the ABC's digital transmission and distribution costs. Over the decade from 2001, the cost of ensuring the ABC's digital television coverage matches its current analogue services is estimated to be around \$600 million.

The Coalition will further enhance access to ABC radio services through the extension of ABC NewsRadio, improved coverage of ABC Local Radio services and the extension of the ABC Local Radio Self-Help Retransmission Subsidy Scheme.

To ensure that the ABC is using its funding to its greatest potential, the Coalition, in conjunction with the ABC, will undertake a review of the adequacy and efficiency of the ABC's use of its funding. Any additional resources identified as a result of this review will be available to the ABC to use towards meeting its Charter obligations.

(ii) *The Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)*

The Coalition remains committed to SBS as an independent, truly national broadcaster, devoted to providing multilingual and multicultural radio and television services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians, while reflecting Australia's multicultural society.

The Coalition Government has provided \$480 million in triennial funding for the SBS and will maintain this funding in real terms.

In line with the Coalition's commitment at the last election the Coalition Government has funded the extension of SBS television services to population areas of 5,000 or more at a cost of \$5.7 million.

We are also meeting our commitment to fully fund SBS's digital transmission and distribution costs, estimated to be around \$500 million over the decade from 2001. This will enable SBS's digital television services to match the coverage of its analogue services.

(iii) *Public Broadcasters – Public Accountability*

The ABC and SBS are statutory bodies that are independent in programming and editorial policy from the Government of the day.

However, as national broadcasters funded by Australian taxpayers, the ABC and SBS must ensure their operations are consistent with their legislative and Charter obligations, which reflect community expectations.

The Coalition Government is committed to working with the ABC and SBS to ensure they continue to deliver effective, high quality services to the Australian community in accordance with those obligations.

A key to responding to community expectations is a rigorous and independent complaints handling system. A re-elected Coalition Government will continue to look at options for developing a strengthened independent complaints handling process.

The Coalition will also work with the ABC and SBS to enhance their ability to take into account audience views and expectations in relation to content and programming. This will include looking at ways to enhance community consultation in metropolitan, regional and rural areas on all aspects of the ABC and SBS's operations, including avenues for public input on programming decisions.

PART 3 COMMERCIAL BROADCASTING

Australia has a world class commercial broadcasting sector, which complements our national public broadcasters.

The Coalition is committed to ensuring Australians continue to have access to a wide array of commercial television and radio broadcasting services through both free-to-air broadcasting and the subscription television industry.

We want to ensure all Australians are able to benefit from the latest technology and the continuing roll-out of digital broadcasting.

To date, an estimated 80 per cent of the population have access to the full range of digital terrestrial services from all television broadcasters in their licence area. And an estimated 90 per cent have access to at least one digital terrestrial service.

Through the \$35 million Television Black Spots Programme, and the \$13.3 million Television Black Spots - Alternative Technical Solutions Programme, the Coalition Government has assisted more than 64,000 households across Australia to gain new or improved access to television services.

Through the \$5 million Commercial Radio Black Spots Programme, the Coalition Government has assisted 104 communities to date in gaining new or improved access to commercial radio services.

(i) *Free-To-Air Television*

The Coalition believes that its policies are helping to deliver high quality, diverse and accessible commercial television services to Australians.

Current arrangements with the three existing commercial television licences in major markets appear to be working well in delivering quality free-to-air television to Australians.

The issuing of commercial television licences has historically been a matter for the government of the day. A re-elected Coalition Government will amend the current legislative arrangements to ensure the power to allocate new commercial television licences after 2006 is vested in the government of the day.

(a) Digital Television

The Coalition Government has shown national leadership by taking responsibility for establishing a legislative framework to support the smooth introduction of digital television to Australia.

The former Labor Government had 13 years in office. Yet they failed to recognise the significance of the new technology and took no steps to prepare for the introduction of digital television.

In contrast, the Coalition Government is committed to giving Australians access to the enhanced television viewing experience provided by digital broadcast technology.

To give Australian consumers time to adapt to the new digital environment, we have required broadcasters to simulcast on both analogue and digital for at least eight years from the start of digital transmission.

We have also provided up to \$260 million towards the cost of converting television broadcasting to digital technology in regional and remote Australia as part of the Regional Equalisation Plan. And we have commenced a series of statutory reviews required under the Broadcasting Services Act.

These reviews provide an opportunity to examine a range of issues including: additional programming provided by free-to-air broadcasters and multichannelling; matters relating to the end of the moratorium on

the issue of new commercial television licences on 31 December 2006; datacasting services and arrangements for the possible conversion of datacasting transmitter licences to other uses; allocation of spectrum for digital television; the arrangements which apply to commercial television broadcasting licences in “under served” areas; High Definition Television (HDTV) requirements and the duration of the simulcast period.

The reviews will help evaluate progress in implementing digital television and whether any changes need to be made to the current regulatory framework.

A re-elected Coalition Government will consider and respond to these reviews once complete and will build on these initiatives to encourage the further take-up of digital television services by:

- Working in partnership with industry to develop a Digital Action Plan to further promote and encourage take up of digital television; and
- Working in conjunction with industry to establish a Testing and Conformance Centre, to test and enhance the performance of digital television technology available to the Australian people.

(ii) *Commercial Radio and Narrowcast Radio*

Australia has a world class commercial radio sector.

The Coalition is committed to ensuring Australians continue to have access to a wide array of high quality radio services. In particular we have focused on ensuring these services are available to all Australians, regardless of where they live.

That is why we have committed \$5 million through the Commercial Radio Black Spots Programme, to assist 104 communities to date in gaining new or improved access to commercial radio services.

A re-elected Coalition Government will continue to promote access to diverse, high-quality commercial radio broadcasting service across Australia.

We will maintain our commitment to enable High Powered Open Narrowcasting licensees to roll over their licences on the basis of paying a fee that equates to the value of the spectrum they are using.

The Coalition will also maintain the anti-hoarding regime for Low Powered Open Narrowcasting licensees.

A re-elected Coalition Government will look to enhance the ability of remote area radio licensees to provide Programmes that meet the individual preferences of communities in different areas across remote regions of Australia. This would enable remote area licensees to better serve their listeners by providing more localised services to particular areas.

At present, a remote area licensee is required to provide broadly the same service across its licence area.

(a) *Digital Radio*

The Coalition Government has long recognised that the introduction of digital radio broadcasting technology has the potential to enhance radio services for the Australian people.

We have already delivered on our 2001 election commitment to make spectrum available free of charge to conduct digital radio trials in Sydney and Melbourne.

We also established a Digital Radio Study Group to report on the status of digital radio technologies internationally. The Digital Radio Study Group Report will form the basis for further consultation with the commercial radio industry and other stakeholders on the parameters for the introduction of digital radio services in Australia.

The Coalition will release the Digital Radio Study Group Report and a discussion paper that will invite submissions on a range of issues that need to be addressed in order to take the digital radio process forward.

The Coalition recognises the importance of the participation of incumbent commercial broadcasters in the implementation of digital radio services in Australia and the substantial investment industry has made to date to provide quality free-to-air radio services. We recognise the contribution incumbent commercial broadcasters will make in the future with the introduction of digital radio.

The Coalition will introduce a moratorium on the issue of new licence area planned commercial digital radio licences for an initial period of five years. Commencement of the moratorium will be determined once technology and spectrum issues are resolved and a timetable for roll-out of digital services can be determined. The moratorium will be reviewed in advance of its expiry date, with any extension to be an issue for the government of the day.

The Coalition is committed to a transparent and accountable process for developing a policy framework and an implementation strategy for digital radio that meets both industry and community needs and expectations.

A re-elected Coalition Government will continue to work in partnership with industry and stakeholders to develop an appropriate framework for the introduction of digital radio technology so that all Australians have access to the best radio services possible, regardless of where they live.

(iii) *Subscription Television*

The Coalition is committed to ensuring the development of a viable and competitive subscription television industry that contributes to the range of quality broadcasting services available to consumers.

The Coalition will continue to monitor access arrangements for both the digital and analogue subscription television platforms to ensure that third-party access is available on reasonable commercial terms and that the opportunity exists for a competitive market to continue to develop.

(a) *Anti-Siphoning and Anti-Hoarding Provisions*

The anti-siphoning rules are designed to ensure that, with the introduction of subscription television services in Australia, major sporting events of national significance, which have traditionally been shown on free-to-air television and which viewers have come to expect to see on free-to-air television, continue to be shown free-to-air.

The Coalition Government has committed to streamlining the operation of the anti-siphoning regime to enable the automatic de-listing of those events the free-to-air television networks do not intend to broadcast 12 weeks before the event's commencement, rather than the current six weeks. This will benefit sporting bodies and viewers by allowing pay television operators a reasonable opportunity to acquire rights not taken up by the free-to-air television broadcasters, arrange coverage and promote the Programmes to viewers. It has also introduced anti-hoarding provisions that require free-to-air television networks with the rights to televise listed events, but which do not propose to do so in full, to offer the unused portion to the ABC and SBS for a nominal charge.

The Coalition is committed to the anti-siphoning regime as it currently operates. Unlike Labor, the Coalition's position is that any significant changes to the way this complex regime works need to be undertaken in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

The Coalition will continue to monitor the free-to-air television coverage of events on the anti-siphoning list to gauge whether the coverage they receive is consistent with their national significance and place on the list, taking into account the interests of Australia's major sporting organisations and the subscription television industry.

PART 4 COMMUNITY AND INDIGENOUS BROADCASTING

The community broadcasting sector is unique in the broadcasting industry for its diversity, independence and commitment to providing the community with a platform for expressing views and ideas.

The Coalition is committed to a healthy and vibrant community broadcasting sector and recognises the important role it plays in communities around Australia, particularly Indigenous communities.

We also recognise the volunteer nature of the sector and the important role the sector plays in providing basic training in broadcasting skills.

A re-elected Coalition Government will build on our record levels of investment in community and Indigenous broadcasting to enable the sectors to enhance the services they provide to local communities across Australia.

(i) *Community Broadcasting*

The Coalition Government has increased funding for community broadcasting by more than 50 per cent over 1995-96 levels. In 2004-05, we are providing almost \$5.5 million in funding to the community broadcasting sector. In addition, we are providing the sector with access to spectrum – a valuable public resource – free of charge.

Building on this and other significant measures we have already undertaken, a re-elected Coalition will:

- Increase funding for the community broadcasting sector by \$1.5 million per annum to assist community radio stations with the costs associated with access to transmission infrastructure; and
- Increase the sector's funding for broadcasting training development by \$2.2 million over the next four years to enable it to establish a national training fund to provide for training, particularly in regional, rural and remote Australia.

This funding will be provided to the Community Broadcasting Foundation. The transmission infrastructure funding will increase the amount of money available for distribution to community radio stations by way of transmission access costs subsidies. The training funding will enable the sector to provide improved training, which will help to raise the skill level of the sector and enhance the quality of the programming delivered to regional communities.

The Coalition remains committed to the inclusion of community broadcasters in the digital environment.

We will continue to work with the community radio sector in the context of the development of a framework for the introduction of digital radio in Australia. We will also continue to work with the community television sector to develop an appropriate framework for the transition to digital services. This framework will be considered in the context of broader issues relating to digital television, including the process for switching off analogue services.

(ii) *Indigenous Broadcasting*

The Coalition recognises the important role the Indigenous broadcasting sector plays in providing programming that is particularly relevant to Indigenous Australians.

The Coalition Government is conducting a review under the Broadcasting Services Act of the viability of creating an Indigenous television broadcasting service and the regulatory arrangements that should apply to the digital transmission of such a service.

A re-elected Coalition will consider the outcomes of the review, which will provide a solid platform for re-examining avenues for developing and strengthening the Indigenous broadcasting sector.

PART 5 MEDIA OWNERSHIP, BROADCASTING STANDARDS AND AUSTRALIAN CONTENT

(i) *Australian Communications and Media Authority*

In the converging telecommunications and broadcasting environment, the maintenance of two separate regulators, both dealing with similar or overlapping issues but focussing on different sectors of the communications industry, is neither practical nor effective.

The Coalition is committed to ensuring that the merger of the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) and the Australian Communications Authority (ACA) to form the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is completed efficiently and does not disrupt the ongoing performance of the key regulatory functions of the existing regulators.

The new arrangement will see the key regulatory, licensing and engineering roles of the ABA and ACA remain after the merger. There will be no immediate savings from this initiative.

Therefore Labor's claims to be generating savings from this move must be based on job cuts or reductions in services.

A re-elected Coalition Government will legislate to give the ACMA power to consider complaints alleging serious and specific cases of bias, lack of balance, inaccuracy or unfair treatment in respect of ABC and SBS broadcasts or publications. At present, the ABA is only able to consider complaints which relate to the ABC and SBS Codes of Practice. This amendment will provide a more complete, streamlined and responsive complaints-handling process in respect of both national broadcasters.

(ii) *Reform of Australia's Media Ownership Regime*

The Coalition remains committed to reforming Australia's outdated media ownership laws.

Labor supports an outdated approach to media ownership laws which would restrict investment and expansion of the Australian media sector and favour foreign investment over diversified investment by Australian investors.

The Coalition's reform package addresses the dual objectives of the need for reform in the area of media ownership while protecting the public interest in a diverse and vibrant media sector.

The Coalition Government's reforms will give Australian media organisations commercial flexibility and access to capital for infrastructure and content investment. They will enhance the ability of Australian media organisations to succeed and grow in the new international market and ensure that Australians have access to high quality media products.

While achieving these important outcomes, the reforms also contain significant measures to protect diversity.

In the event that a re-elected Coalition is unable to achieve its media ownership reforms, it will review the restrictions on the broadcasting sector in relation to foreign managed funds as a matter of priority.

(iii) *Broadcasting Standards*

The Coalition is committed to a classification system which balances the need to protect people from material they find offensive, harmful or disturbing and the premise that adults should be able to read, hear and see what they wish.

The current classification system is intended to provide sufficient information to enable people, and especially parents, to make informed decisions about the types of Programmes that are suitable for them and their children to watch.

In relation to broadcasting standards, the Coalition is committed to retaining the current co-regulatory regime through which the Australian Broadcasting Authority assists the television, radio and internet industries to develop codes of practice relating to content and complaints-handling and investigates complaints about inappropriate conduct on broadcasting services and the internet.

This includes the Coalition's commitment to ensuring appropriate standards are applied to subscription broadcasting channels and that the multi-channelling nature of subscription television is reflected in the codes of practice for this sector.

The ABA will only register a code of practice if it is satisfied that it provides appropriate community safeguards, that it is endorsed by the majority of broadcasters and that members of the public have had an adequate opportunity to comment.

The Coalition Government has delivered on its 2001 election commitment to request the ABA to oversee a review of the commercial free-to-air television Code of Practice. That review has been completed and included opening up the draft Code of Practice for public comment. The ABA has approved the revised Code of Practice, which ensures that community standards continue to be reflected in commercial television programming.

A re-elected Coalition will ensure that the ABA (or ACMA) oversees a review of the Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association Code of Practice by July 2006.

(iv) Australian Content

The Coalition strongly believes the Australian Content Standard plays an important role in promoting broadcasting which portrays and reflects a sense of Australian identity, character and diversity.

In the Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement, the Coalition Government successfully negotiated a reservation which preserves the right of the Australian Government to regulate for Australian content standards now and into the future.

The Coalition will continue to monitor the requirements imposed on broadcasters under the Australian Content Standard to ensure that it is fulfilling its aim.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ACHIEVEMENTS

(i) Improved Community Access

The Coalition Government has funded the extension and improvement of ABC and SBS television and radio services.

In 2001, the Coalition Government completed an extension of SBS television to all transmission areas with populations of 10,000 or more, resulting in 1.2 million extra Australians having access to SBS television. This was followed by an extension of SBS television coverage to all areas with a population of between 5,000 and 10,000 at a cost of \$5.7 million.

The Coalition remains committed to fully funding the ABC's and SBS's digital transmission and distribution costs, at a cost of over \$1 billion. This is a substantial investment which will enable the ABC's and SBS's digital television service coverage to match the coverage of their current analogue services all over Australia.

Through the \$35 million Television Black Spots Programme, the Coalition Government has helped address 243 television reception black spots around Australia.

It is also assisting eligible applicant communities that cannot be assisted under the Television Black Spots Programme, due to a lack of spectrum or a viable analogue solution, through the \$13.3 million Television Black Spots – Alternative Technical Solutions Programme. There are presently 23 projects under this programme.

The \$5 million Commercial Radio Blackspots programme is providing new or improved radio services in towns and communities in regional and remote Australia where it is not viable for licensees to do so. To date, 104 communities have benefited from the three year programme.

And a further \$5 million is being spent to ensure that the transmission costs of self-help groups continue to be subsidised following the sale of the National Transmission Network to Broadcast Australia.

(ii) National Broadcasting

The ABC's triennial funding has been maintained in real terms, as promised.

In the 2004-05 Budget, the Coalition Government announced an addition of \$4.2 million (indexed) to the ABC's funding, to assist the ABC in meeting the increasing costs of television programme purchasing.

In the 2001-02 Budget, the Coalition Government provided the ABC with an additional \$71.2 million in programme funding over four years for the ABC's National Interest Initiatives programme.

The Coalition Government has built on this commitment by allocating a further \$54.4 million from 2005-06 to enable this programme to continue.

In accordance with its commitment in 2001, the Coalition Government is also spending \$90 million over five years to re-establish the ABC's international television service, ABC Asia-Pacific.

Under the Coalition Government, the ABC has increased its State and regionally based programming, purchased capital equipment that will enhance the ABC's ability to provide quality reliable regional programming, and has expanded the services of the ABC Local Radio stations, including the establishment of new stations and the refurbishment of existing studios.

The Coalition Government has also maintained SBS's triennial funding. In the 2003-04 Budget the Government removed the efficiency dividend on SBS, increasing SBS's funding by \$5.1 million over the 2003-05 triennium.

Over the same period, SBS is also receiving additional funding of \$3.6 million per annum to help it to meet the rising costs of overseas programme acquisition through SBS Independent.

(iii) *Commercial Broadcasting and Datacasting*

The Coalition Government's digital television regime, introduced in 2000, is proceeding smoothly.

It provides for a progressive transition of existing analogue terrestrial broadcasting services to digital mode. And it ensures that consumers will have time to adapt to the new digital environment by requiring that broadcasters simulcast in analogue and digital for at least eight years.

Consumer take-up of digital television is progressing as anticipated and in line with the take-up rates of other new technologies.

Digital television is now available in all capital cities and has also commenced in all regional areas. Approximately 80 per cent of Australians now have access to digital terrestrial television services, with an estimated further 10 per cent having access to at least one digital service.

Broadcasters are exceeding their obligations under the legislative framework to broadcast in both High Definition and Standard Definition.

The Coalition Government has committed \$260 million to regional commercial broadcasters under the Regional Equalisation Plan to assist them with the digital conversion process.

We have commenced a series of reviews under the Broadcasting Services Act to assess the progress of the digital television regime.

The Coalition Government has also made spectrum available for digital radio trials, which have commenced in Sydney and Melbourne.

Datacasting trials have commenced in Sydney and there is a further trial to commence in Perth later in 2004. Datacasting is a digital television service which differs from broadcasting in that it can deliver programme content which is information and education based.

The Coalition Government has continued to protect the access of Australian viewers to important sporting events on free-to-air television through the anti-siphoning regime and we have made necessary amendments to ensure the regime's continued relevance.

(iv) *Community and Indigenous Broadcasting*

The Coalition Government has increased funding levels for community broadcasters by more than 50 per cent since 1995-96.

Since 1996, the number of community broadcasting radio licences has increased from 148 to 342, including 80 Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) community radio licences.

The process of allocating permanent licences to community television broadcasters is under way. Permanent licences in Sydney, Perth, Brisbane and Melbourne have been announced. And applications are open for a licence in Lismore, with Adelaide to follow soon. Allocation of these permanent licences will establish the community television broadcasting industry.

(v) *Broadcast Standards and Australian Content*

The Coalition Government has retained the Australian Content Standard, which plays a crucial role in portraying and reflecting Australia's unique cultural identity.

The Coalition Government has also continued to ensure that television and radio industry codes of practice reflect community standards regarding appropriate broadcast content, particularly with regard to the portrayal of violence.

LABOR'S ALTERNATIVE

Labor continually reduced ABC funding over its 13 years in government and failed to provide additional ABC funding for local and regional programming.

Labor in government neglected television and radio reception problems in outer-suburban, rural and remote areas of Australia.

Labor refused to support the \$120 million Television Fund, which has provided SBS Television to all population areas with 10,000 or more people, is fixing television reception in 200 to 250 black spots around Australia, and is extending self-help broadcasting facilities in remote areas.

Labor denied Australians living in regional and remote areas access to increased radio services by allowing Licence Area Planning processes to grind to a halt.

And Labor failed to ensure that Programmes on commercial free-to-air television and radio met appropriate community standards.

Labor talks about the broadcasting industry undergoing major changes due to developments in technology, but it doesn't have a single policy relating to those technological changes.

Labor took no action to prepare for the introduction of either digital television or radio in Australia. Three years after the commencement of digital TV, Labor still does not have a digital TV policy and its digital radio policy is vague, uncosted and fails to address technical and planning issues.

Through Labor's neglect, Australia was one of the last countries in the world to get pay television.

Labor continues to refuse to support the Government's cross-media reforms despite telling media proprietors before the last Federal election that it would consider removing the cross-media rules itself if it won the election.

Labor's outdated and "mogul specific" approach to cross-media and foreign ownership laws would restrict investment and expansion of the Australian media sector and favour foreign investment over diversified investment by Australian investors.

Labor failed to provide certainty for community radio broadcasters and did not provide additional infrastructure funding for the sector.