

Media release

Hon David Cunliffe
Minister for Communications and Information Technology
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Further steps towards "All digital" television

Communications and Information Technology Minister David Cunliffe today announced further progress towards an all-digital television environment for New Zealand.

“The government has agreed to revised policies for analogue and digital television licences which will allow licence holders to plan their transition to digital technology with greater certainty,” Mr Cunliffe said. “These policies complement the existing free-to-air digital television licences, which are already providing services in main urban areas

The revised policies confirm the ability of licensees to convert their analogue broadcasting to digital at any time, but require broadcasters to accept any frequency and technical changes necessary to consolidate television use within the band after analogue services are switched off. The policies also offer licensees longer term certainty of use of their licences beyond the present expiry date of 2020.

Digital television services use the radio frequency spectrum more efficiently than analogue services, and this allows part of the television band to be considered for re-allocation after analogue broadcasts stop. This surplus spectrum is commonly referred to as the “digital dividend”.

The Ministry of Economic Development has been asked to re-plan and consolidate the existing UHF television bands to enable the early identification and allocation of digital dividend spectrum.

“A number of countries are already planning or allocating digital dividend spectrum for new services and, following analogue switch-off, New Zealand will also be able to implement new services,” Mr Cunliffe said. “The benefits for consumers lie particularly in the potential for new mobile, broadband and broadcast services.”

More information

Full details of the revised policies will be published on the Ministry of Economic Development [website](#).

Questions & Answers

What does conversion from analogue to digital technology entail?

Broadcasters will need to roll out new transmission networks, but otherwise there will be few changes — studio and outside broadcast equipment is predominantly digital and has been for some years.

Consumers will need to replace their existing analogue equipment with a digital receiver or — the cheaper alternative — a set-top-box. The majority of New Zealand households already have a Sky decoder or a Freeview receiver and their number is growing rapidly. As analogue television sets reach the end of their useful life over the next decade they will undoubtedly be replaced by fully digital receivers.

When will analogue transmissions cease?

A target analogue switch-off date will be set once digital television reaches 60% of New Zealand households. A firm date will be set when digital television take-up has reached 75% of households or in 2012 — whichever is earlier.

Does ‘consolidation’ mean that broadcasters and consumers will need to change frequencies?

In some cases, yes, but the digital technology simplifies any change. A receiver can be “instructed” which frequency to use if one of the frequencies used is changed, or the consumer can simply automatically re-scan all available channels.

What are the advantages of digital, as opposed to analogue, television?

In short, the viewer gets a better picture and audio quality and more programmes. The technology also enables broadcasters to transmit channels in standard, wide-screen or high definition formats.

The spectrum can also be used more efficiently. One analogue programme can be replaced with up to ten standard digital programmes, or up to three high definition digital programmes. This allows for a greater number of programmes and more variety for the viewer but also releases spectrum for other uses — the digital dividend.

What uses are planned for the digital dividend?

These are still to be determined. The spectrum in the UHF-TV band is technically very attractive for radiocommunications services as it has a relatively high carrying capacity, good range and excellent building penetration. It is therefore of interest to broadcasters, mobile radio operators, broadband service providers, telecoms companies and many others. The Ministry of Economic Development, in consultation with industry, will consider options for the optimum allocation of this spectrum over the coming year.