



AUSTRALIA

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## Regional TV needs long-term support, not shuffling of the deckchairs

The closure of Mildura Digital Television signals that regional television in Australia is at a critical point.

Free TV today called for a comprehensive four step plan to place regional television broadcasting on a sustainable long-term footing. Regional Australians are starting to lose access to television services and the ongoing availability of local trusted news, local advertising opportunities for regional businesses and Australian content in regional areas is at stake.

“The *Regional Broadcasting Continuity Bill* introduced today contains two short-term legislative tweaks in response to the imminent closure of Mildura Digital Television (MDT) on 30 June, but long-term structural measures are now urgently needed to ensure the future viability of regional commercial television services in Australia,” said Free TV CEO, Bridget Fair.

“From 1 July almost 70,000 people in Mildura will no longer be able to access broadcasts from Mildura Digital Television, which delivers Network 10 programming to the region. That means no broadcast access to the Matildas or Socceroos or shows like MasterChef, Australian Survivor or 10 News.

“This legislation merely allows Mildura viewers the option of installing a satellite dish at their own expense to receive the remote area VAST service to replace their Network 10 services. While this gives Mildura residents an option to replace their lost services, it is not a fair or reasonable solution, new satellite installation can cost upwards of \$800. In a cost-of-living crisis this is simply not realistic for many Australians just to access the television services that are available for free to everyone else.

“Without urgent substantive action by Government more licence areas are likely to follow.

“Regional broadcasting has been the subject of numerous detailed Government reviews conducted by the likes of Korda Mentha and Boston Consulting Group over the past five years. Yet we still have no plan from Government to ensure the long-term sustainability of this critical media sector.

Regional commercial broadcasters spend millions on local content every year and comply with significant local news content quotas that do not apply to any other platform. In FY23, they spent \$35 million on local news bulletins, \$5 million more than they did the year before. The only place you will find local television news bulletins in regional Australia is on commercial television.

All commercial television broadcasters also comply with additional regulatory requirements such as 55% Australian content obligation and accessibility requirements. Yet despite the public interest benefits they deliver; Australian commercial television broadcasters pay the highest spectrum taxes in the world which is a significant impost on their ability to fund content and infrastructure costs.

“With content spend going up, and revenue going down, the costs of providing regional TV services across the wide Australian land mass are a serious concern—particularly when you consider the excessive spectrum tax they pay every year. The tax was introduced as a temporary measure in 2017 and should have been abandoned years ago.”

“The solutions to keeping the lights on for regional TV are squarely in the hands and control of the Albanese Government, Ms Fair said.

Free TV is calling on the Government to:

1. Abolish the outdated and unjustified spectrum tax.
2. Amend the Prominence and Anti-Siphoning Bill to ensure that all Australians can watch their live and free sport no matter how they get their free TV, and can find their local TV services on their current TV sets without needing to buy a new one.
3. Review regulatory imposts on commercial TV stations that don't apply to digital competitors who sell advertising against them—such as licence area restrictions and rules that limit ownership arrangements.
4. Implement direct funding support for markets where services are not commercially viable. The Government already spends billions of dollars on telecommunications blackspots and should do the same for regional broadcasting.

“Regional broadcasters know their audiences love local news, community stories and sport, and that local businesses need regional TV to reach local customers. But without the Government's long-term support more services are at risk, and these social and economic benefits for regional Australia will be lost”.

**ENDS**

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**ABOUT FREE TV AUSTRALIA**

Free TV Australia is a leading media industry organisation. It represents all of Australia's commercial free-to-air television licensees through advocacy, innovation and strategic advice. The members of Free TV Australia are Seven West Media, Nine Entertainment Co, Network 10, Southern Cross Austereo, WIN Network and Imparja Television.