

INDUSTRY'S FM VICTORY

Australia sets its own standards

By MEGAN STOYLES

AMALGAMATED Wireless (Australasia) Ltd has won a major political victory with yesterday's Government announcement introducing frequency modulation broadcasting in Australia.

The Government has accepted a report from the Australian Broadcasting Control Board which recommended FM broadcasting on an ultra high frequency band — a completely different system from FM systems used in all other countries.

This system was strongly urged by AWA, who based all its evidence on the supposition that an Australian service would operate in the UHF bands rather than in the very high frequency bands.

This all electronics equipment available or already in use in Australia which has FM facilities will be useless unless converted for the new Australian system.

The decision to introduce FM broadcasting will generally please Australian manufacturers of electronic equipment.

They told the inquiry that "the depressed state of the electronics industry would be relieved by a decision in favour of FM broadcasting."

Witnesses expressed their confidence that Australian manufacturing firms were equipped with the technical knowledge and facilities to produce the required transmitting equipment, and also sufficient broadcasting receivers to meet the likely public demand for FM receivers, the control board report stated.

AWA also said that transmitters and receivers would be available from Australian manufacturers within two or three years following technical standard announcements.

Australian manufacturers could have a captive market, as it is unlikely that overseas

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manufacturers would produce for such a small market.

The report recognised this. The board said that it had based its recommendations on the need for a large number of FM stations because of the need to develop the "widest possible market for receivers." These would have to be entirely developed and manufactured in Australia.

The Government has accepted the board's recommendation to establish four types of FM stations.

They are:

- A second regional station of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, "planned as far as possible to cover the entire population;"

- An ABC capital city station, to transmit "fine music;"
- Commercial FM stations throughout the country; and

- Non-profit "public broadcast stations" to cater for educational, professional, musical, religious and similar interests.

Several interests are catered for in this group — country areas seeking a spread of adequate services and any minority group which feels the ABC does not cater for its particular interest.

The only major group opposing the introduction of FM stations during the control board's inquiry was the Fed-

eration of Australian Commercial Broadcasters.

Their case was based largely on the possible economic effects which the introduction of FM could have on existing AM stations in provincial areas.

However, the board felt that FM was justified even if only to allow a nationwide second regional network.

FM often is the only satisfactory method of providing a full transmission schedule for an improved service to the regions, including better local content.

It also felt that other stations should be established to allow FM to be spread as wide as possible in reasonable time.

The Postmaster General's Department has estimated that the capital cost of establishing a complete ABC regional network will be about \$7 million, spread over three years, plus about \$3 million dollars for the PMG to provide relay facilities.

The ABC has estimated that the total capital cost of establishing a complete ABC regional FM network would be \$10 million spread over three years, and approximately \$1 million a year in running costs.

AWA has estimated some costs for FM receivers which put the prices of dual FM/MF units at approximately \$20 to \$40 more than existing AM receivers, depending on type of receiver.

Sir Alan Hulme said yesterday that the technical work necessary to establish FM would begin immediately and should take three years.

The Government expected to

invite applications for commercial and public station licences in 1976, and work on the ABC stations would begin immediately the conversion to colour television had finished.

A statement by the managing director of AWA, Mr J. A. L. Hooke, said his company welcomed the Government announcement, which his company has been advocating for many years.

Mr Ronald Tremlett, bureau manager of trade relations to Philips Industries and chairman of the technical committee of the Australian Electronics Consumer Industry Association said: "This was the only way the Australian system could be expanded. We just don't have enough frequencies."

A spokesman for Plessey Communication Systems Pty Ltd said: "This is a great step forward. It opens a great deal of our continent to good radio reception."

"At this moment nobody would be able to give any realistic figures about the extra costs involved because there is an awful lot of work involved and Government body decision to be taken yet."

Industry's FM victory