

RACING RADIO STATIONS, RECEPTION UPGRADE

760. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Racing and Gaming:

Given that Totalisator Agency Board's racing radio stations FM886's and AM1404's reception in the Geraldton area is substandard and affecting the TAB turnover and the possibility of greater interest in racing, will the minister agree to an essential upgrade of radio reception in all areas?

Hon NICK GRIFFITHS replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question. Licences to operate racing radio transmitters are granted by the Australian Broadcasting Authority - the ABA. It is not a matter for the Government or the Totalisator Agency Board to act unilaterally. The ABA released its radio licence area plan for Geraldton in November 1996. The plan provided for a number of narrow-cast licences, and commercial licence AM1008. The TAB was successful in December 1997 in obtaining licences FM87.6 and FM88.6, as well as the licence for AM1008, for \$4 000. At the time, some 50 new licences were created. In order to meet the demands of a number of rural areas, the TAB made the decision not to proceed with AM1008 on the basis of the cost of some \$250 000 for transmission equipment and an ongoing cost of \$40 000 per annum. Its advice at that time suggested that FM87.6 and FM88.6 would adequately serve the Geraldton township. The TAB's request in July 1999 to the ABA to increase the transmission power of FM88.6 was rejected by the ABA in September of 1999. A further request in November 1999 was rejected by the ABA in March 2000, when it stated that transmissions above one watt could be achieved only by the acquisition of a commercial licence, which would incur the costs previously mentioned.

The TAB could again take up the matter with the ABA, but a change in the outcome is not anticipated. Despite the issues with radio reception in the Geraldton area, I am advised by the TAB that it has achieved a steady growth in activity in Geraldton over the past six years of 39 per cent - that is an annualised growth of 6.5 per cent, which equates to the overall growth in TAB activity. Radio AM1004, which can occasionally be received in Geraldton, has its transmitter located in Dunsborough. A number of areas in the State, unfortunately, have not benefited from ABA cooperation in allowing the TAB to implement its wishes for the racing public of Western Australia.