



Press Release

For Immediate Release: 5 May 2021

DRM – Regulator Unveils Licensing Framework for Digital Sound Broadcasting in South Africa

The DRM SA Group welcomes the final regulations for Digital Sound Broadcasting (DSB) Services issued by The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), published on April 23rd, in the Government Gazette [44469](#). The objective of the regulations is to set out a framework for the introduction of Digital Sound Broadcasting (DRM and DAB+) services; and to prescribe a procedure for applicants seeking to launch DSB services.

This major milestone comes after years of testing and demonstrating DSB in South Africa since 1999. The first successful DRM for AM (mediumwave) trial was conducted in 2014 by Radio Pulpit. This was followed by a DRM in FM trial done on Kofifi FM 97.2 kHz by WECODEC in Westbury/Johannesburg. Both these trials have now been adopted as ITU reports.

In July 2020 the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT) issued a policy direction for ICASA to develop regulations for the introduction of digital sound broadcasting (DSB) in South Africa. The policy direction also mandated DRM (in AM and VHF band II FM) and DAB+ as its preferred DSB standards. The regulator moved swiftly and issued the draft licensing framework in November 2020 for public comment. A total of 15 stakeholders (including the DRM Consortium, Radio Pulpit, WECODEC, Bluemon and Thembeke & Associates) made written submissions and participated in the public hearings in January 2021.

According to the Regulations, the introduction of DSB will be done in a phased manner with existing broadcasters allowed the option to dual illuminate their existing services for a 3-year period. New entrants will then only be allowed to launch services, first in the primary markets (Gauteng and the metropolitan areas of and around Cape Town and Durban) and then, to the rest of the Republic.

This phased approach and the waiting period for new entrants was fiercely debated at the public hearings with the DRM Consortium proposing the immediate introduction of new services, particularly for community stations, thus helping the underprivileged to gain access to news and entertainment. The reason ICASA upheld the waiting period for licensing new entrants was to give existing broadcasters and operators time to recoup their investments.

The regulator will issue an Invitation to Apply (ITA) for new players to apply for DSB service licenses and for ECNS licensees (signal distributors or self-providers) to apply for spectrum licenses.

The next stage for the industry is the practical implementation of Digital Sound Broadcasting. The South African DRM Group was relaunched in March 2021 by the DRM Consortium to promote the adoption of the DRM standard by broadcasters and operators in



the country. The DRM SA Group joins the ranks of other DRM national platforms (in Germany, India, Brazil, Russia or USA) engaged in promoting the rollout of the DRM standard globally.

The DRM Consortium together with the DRM SA Group have offered to serve and provide advice on the DSB technical advisory group, DTAG, to be established by ICASA for the smooth introduction of DSB in South Africa.

DRM SA Group interim Chairman, Aldred Dreyer, noted: "The DRM SA Group welcomes the great work ICASA has done to enable digital sound broadcasting in South Africa. The introduction of DSB, in particular DRM, provides a mechanism for universal access to information, entertainment and education for all citizens, including people living with disabilities. The introduction of new players into the market will encourage economic growth and stimulate job creation, especially amongst the youth. The hard work now begins with all stakeholders in the industry pulling together to implement".

For more information on DRM and how to get involved in the work of the DRM please go to: www.drm.org

You can contact us on: info@drmsa.org