



promoting universal access

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) is established to regulate the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors in the public interest, in accordance with national policy goals and imperatives.

1. PROMOTING UNIVERSAL ACCESS

One of ICASA's most critical areas of service delivery is the promotion of universal access to services in the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors – colloquially known as bridging the information divide between the urban and rural, the rich and poor.

In the telecommunications sector, universal access to services translates to promoting community access to basic telephony. Recently, this right has come to include access to information and communication technologies, and services such as Internet access and electronic government services such as e-health.

Telecommunications

The amended Telecommunications Act, of 1996, provides for a new category of telecommunications licence called under-served area licence (USAL). This licence category seeks to enhance access to telecommunications services and create job opportunities in areas with a lesser telephone penetration in both rural and urban areas.

Following the enactment of the Amendment Act, the Minister of Communications declared 27 areas as under-served in December 2001. USAL licences provide for telecommunications services, including voice over Internet protocol (VOIP), fixed mobile services, public pay telephones and long distance calls to be transported through trunk networks of any operator licensed to carry international traffic.

The following seven companies were awarded licences in the first licensing phase:

1. Bokone Telecomms (Pty) Limited, Capricorn district, Limpopo
2. Kingdom Communications (Pty) Limited, Zululand district, KwaZulu-Natal
3. Thinta Thinta Telecommunications (Pty) Limited, Ugu district, KwaZulu-Natal
4. Ilizwi Telecommunications (Pty) Limited, OR Tambo district, Eastern Cape
5. Karabotel (Pty) Limited, Central district, North West
6. Bokamoso Consortium (Pty) Limited, Lejweleputswa district, Free State
7. Amatole Telecommunications (Pty) Limited, Amatole district, Eastern Cape.

A second invitation to apply for the USAL licences was published in the period under review, covering 14 under-served areas in Limpopo, North West, Gauteng and Mpumalanga. The closing date for this second phase of licensing was in April 2005.



Handover of USAL licences

Broadcasting

One of ICASA's objectives in promoting universal service and access to broadcasting services can be measured by people's access to a wide range of content, provided in various genres and languages. Access also relates to ownership of broadcasting services by communities and previously disadvantaged groups and individuals.

In pursuit of universal access to services in the broadcasting sector, ICASA issued and published a number of broadcasting licences and policies:

In March 2002, the SABC submitted its amendment applications in terms of the Broadcasting Act of 1999 as amended by the Broadcasting Amendment Act of 2002. The Act requires the SABC to apply to ICASA for such amendments to its existing licences as are necessary in order to reflect the reorganisation of the Corporation into public service and commercial service divisions and to comply with its related obligations in terms of the Broadcasting Act and the Independent Broadcasting Act.

In accordance with the notice to license the SABC in terms of the 1999 and 2002 Acts, ICASA received 11 representations as well as the SABC's response to the representations in July 2004. Public hearings were held in September and October 2004. One of the objectives of this exercise was to bring the SABC in line with all other broadcasters with respect to conditions that address the mandate of all the SABC stations, be they public or commercial. In December 2003, ICASA received an application from the South African Broadcasting Corporation for two Regional Television Services namely SABC 4 and SABC 5. In its application, the SABC

proposed that SABC 4 would broadcast in the Limpopo, North West, Gauteng, Free State and Northern Cape provinces in Setswana, Sesotho, Sepedi, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Afrikaans and English.

For SABC 5, the SABC proposed that it would broadcast in Mpumalanga, the eastern border of Limpopo, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and the Western Cape in isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, isiSwati, Afrikaans and English. The SABC's licence application was gazetted for public comment in January 2004. ICASA received written representations from Sentech and e-tv, both requesting an opportunity to make oral presentations. Sentech subsequently withdrew its request, and ICASA then conducted public hearings in respect of the two applications in Polokwane and Cape Town in October 2004.



SABC licence amendment process