

Digital Dzonga launched

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The Department of Communications officially launched its Digital Dzonga, an advisory body for South Africa's broadcast digital migration, yesterday, 21 July 2009.

The body was appointed by government in 2008, to oversee South Africa's migration process towards digital terrestrial broadcasting, a process that has been underway since 2007.

The council, with representatives from the public and private sectors, each of whom holds relevant experience in the broadcasting, media and technical fields associated with the initiative, comprises members from ICASA, the Department of Communications, SABC, e.tv, M-Net and Sentech.

April 2010 is being targeted as a commencement date for the dual illumination process, which means that television broadcasts will be in both digital and analogue formats while work is being done to enable full digital migration, which is planned for 2011. Only 60% of the country will be switched on in the coming year, but the DTT footprint will expand progressively, on a regular basis.

"The South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) has recently approved the hardware specifications for the set top boxes that will be required for TVs to display digital signals," said Lara Kantor, the chairperson of the Digital Dzonga. The manufacturing of the boxes will start as soon as the software specifications have been finalised by SABS.

The Digital Dzonga is aiming at pricing the box at R700 per set; "Poor households are set to receive a 70% subsidy from the government on this cost, although they

will have to prove that family members own a TV licence and receive either a government grant or a pension. R400 million has been allocated for this reason, from the universal access fund," said the Minister of Communications, Sphiwe Nyanda at yesterday's press conference.

Broadcasting on an analogue platform requires a large amount of bandwidth to transmit pictures and sound whereas digital technology uses less bandwidth. The result is more space is available for more channels, with the added benefit of improved picture and sound quality.

Upon the completion of the migration process, South African television viewers can expect to receive 16 TV channels, data channels and an electronic programme guide.