

Summary of Report No. 8 (2010 – 2011) to the Storting

Norwegian proposal on the digitization of radio

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NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF CULTURE

On 4 February 2011 The Norwegian Ministry of Culture presented a report on the digitization of radio to the Storting (the Norwegian national assembly)¹. The report determines the conditions that must be met and a target date for switch-off of FM radio-services.

Introduction

A terrestrial radio network based on DAB-technology (Digital Audio Broadcasting) has been operative in Norway since 1999 (trials were conducted 1995–1999). At present the network covers 80 per cent of the population. Currently, the NRK, Radio Norge and P4 as well as a number of local city-based radio stations transmit radio-services in both FM and DAB.

In 2007 the Storting debated the digitization of radio on the basis of a report by the Ministry of Culture on broadcasting in the digital era². The majority of the parties represented in the Storting supported the Ministry's proposals. Norwegian policy to date is based on the conclusions of this report:

- The digitization of radio should primarily remain the domain of the industry with respect to choice of technology.
- A target date for analogue switch-off of FM-radio will be fixed when at least 50 per cent of Norwegian households have acquired a digital radio set.
- Analogue switch-off may not be completed until the following additional criteria have been fulfilled: (1) the population as a whole has access to digital radio (2) digital radio must offer added value to listeners.

Broadcasters have however called for a revision of these principles, based on their estimation that the digitization-process will be unduly protracted unless the authorities give a more firm signal as to when digitization will take place. The Ministry of Culture's decision to present a new report on digital radio to the national assembly at this time is partly also due to the investments necessary to maintain an aging FM-network as well as the indications that several large countries in Europe are preparing active digitization efforts.

The Ministry's proposals

The proposals of the report build on the following principles:

- Digitization of radio should be industry-driven.
- The authorities should actively stimulate the digitization-process by developing a plan for the migration to digital radio.

The Ministry of Culture maintains that the migration to digital radio should remain industry-driven. The digitization of radio will benefit listeners and broadcasters alike.

The authorities should therefore actively stimulate the digitization-process by providing a plan for migration to digital radio.

The Ministry of Culture proposes that the authorities should accept that FM-radio will be switched off in January 2017 under the proviso that certain criteria are fulfilled.

¹ *Meld. St. 8 (2010–2011) Digitalisering av radiomediet (publ. 4 February 2011)*

² *St. meld. nr. 30 (2006–2007) Kringkasting i en digital fremtid (publ. 11 May 2007)*

The following three conditions are absolute and must be fulfilled regardless of when switch-off takes place:

- Digital coverage for the NRK's radio services correspond to that of NRK P1 on FM.
- The multiplex that carries commercial national services (Riksblokka) must cover at least 90 per cent of the population.
- The digital radio offer must represent added value to the listeners

The above three conditions, as well as the two following conditions, must be fulfilled by 1 January 2015 for the switch-off to take place in January 2017:

- Affordable and technically satisfactory solutions for in-car radio reception must be available.
- At least 50 per cent of daily radio-listeners employ digital platforms, exclusively or in combination with FM-radio.

Provided the absolute criteria (1-3) are fulfilled in 2015, switch-off may nevertheless take place in 2019, even if criteria 4 and 5 are not fulfilled.

The Ministry of Culture will determine by year-end 2013:

- Whether the coverage obligation on NRK services should be attached to the DAB-network alone or whether the requirement could be fulfilled by employing additional technologies
- What is to be understood by the criteria "affordable and technically satisfactory solutions for in-car radio reception"

The Ministry of Culture will decide by 1 January 2015:

- Whether the digital coverage of NRK radio-services corresponds to that of NRK P1 in the FM-network
- Whether the commercial multiplex has reached a coverage of at least 90 per cent of the population
- Whether the digital radio-offer represents added value to the public
- Whether affordable and technically satisfactory solutions for in-car reception are available
- Whether at least 50 per cent of daily radio-listeners, partly or entirely, employ digital platforms

In the event that the Ministry of Culture decides that the conditions for switching off FM-services are met, it will furthermore decide a) what categories of local radio may continue transmitting in FM, and b) how small local radios may be accommodated in the local radio multiplex. The Ministry of Culture will submit the result of this assessment for the consideration of the Storting in 2015.

Technology

Although the Ministry of Culture is committed to the current policy of leaving technology choices to industry, the report nevertheless signals that the authorities take a favourable position towards a prospective migration to DAB+, as it is a more efficient radio standard compared to the original DAB-standard.

Local radio

It is vital for a successful migration to digital radio that the interests of local radio are safeguarded. The report proposes that the majority of local radio stations should have the right to continue transmitting in FM beyond 2017. The Ministry of Culture will determine in 2015 what categories of local radio may maintain the right to do so.

Local radios that wish to transmit in the local radio multiplex of the DAB-network should however also be able to do so. The Ministry of Culture proposes that the Post- and Telecommunications Authority and the Media Authority should accommodate parties that wish to establish services in the local radio multiplex. The Ministry, in cooperation with the frequency authorities, will decide in 2015 on a plan on how to provide for local radio in the DAB-network. No license in the local radio multiplex will therefore be given a duration exceeding January 2017.

Existing FM-services

In addition to three NRK-services, there are currently two national, commercial services in the FM-band – Radio Norge and P4 – Radio Hele Norge. The Ministry of Culture will decide on the possible prolongation of licences for nation-wide, commercial radio in the FM-band for the period 2014-2017; with a possi-

ble prolongation of two further years (in the event that switch-off be postponed to 2019).

P4 and Radio Norge will be offered direct assignment of these licences under the proviso that they uphold the public service commitments, as specified in the existing analogue licenses, pay a license duty and contribute to the development of a commercial multiplex (Riksblokka) with a population coverage of at least 90 per cent.

Spectrum

In accordance with international frequency spectrum agreements, five multiplexes are coordinated for digital radio, four in the VHF-band (174-240 MHz) and the remaining in the L-band (1452-1479,5 MHz). A sixth multiplex in the VHF-band is coordinated for digital television (DVB-T) but may also be employed for DAB/DMB.

In addition to the regionalized NRK-multiplex and the national commercial multiplex which are operative, applications for deploying a second commercial multiplex and a multiplex for local radio have been submitted to the frequency authorities.



Milestones for the digitization of radio 2010-2019

- 2011: The Ministry of Culture decides on the possible prolongation of commercial radio- licenses in the FM-network until 2017 (or 2019)
- 2013: The Ministry of Culture determines:
- Whether the coverage obligation for NRK radio-services shall be attached to the DAB-multiplex alone, or whether it may be fulfilled by employing other technologies in addition to DAB.
 - What is to be understood by the criterion "affordable and technically satisfactory solutions for in-car reception?"
- 2015: The Ministry of Culture decides whether the following conditions are met:
- The digital coverage of NRK-radio corresponds to that of NRK P1 in FM
 - The population coverage of the national, commercial multiplex > 90 per cent
 - The Digital radiooffer represents added value to the public
 - Availability of affordable and technically satisfactory in-car solutions
 - Usage of digital platforms > 50 % of daily radio-listeners
- 2017: Possible FM switch-off
- 2019: Prospective postponed final switch-off of FM

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