Report of the V-Chip Task Force
of the Federal Communications Commission
on the
Encoding of Television Ratings Information
for Use With the V-Chip

July 20, 1999

In May 1999, Federal Communications Commission Chairman William E. Kennard established a V-Chip Task Force, chaired by Commissioner Gloria Tristani. The Task Force has been working with equipment manufacturers and retailers, cable and broadcast programming producers, parents and other groups to ensure the effective implementation of the V-Chip.

One of the Task Force's primary goals is to ensure that the TV ratings information needed for the V-Chip to operate is actually being encoded and transmitted by programming distributors. Today's report describes the status of that goal. The V-Chip Task Force has surveyed the top broadcast networks, basic cable networks, premium cable networks and syndicators to determine whether they are encoding and transmitting ratings information on Line 21 of the Vertical Blanking Interval. Syndicators were included in the survey because not all broadcast programming is network originated, and it appears that local broadcasters are relying on syndicated programming distributors to encode such programming.

The Task Force's survey finds, among other things, that:

- The four largest broadcast networks are currently encoding their programming; all other broadcast networks surveyed are planning to encode -- most by Fall 1999.

- Most of the largest basic cable networks are already encoding their programming; most of those not encoding are exempt news or sports networks.

- Three of the top five premium cable networks are encoding their programming; the remaining two are planning to encode by January 2000.

- While only one syndicator among the distributors of the top twenty-five syndicated programs is currently encoding both their first run and library programming, all have plans to encode most of their programming in the upcoming months

TOP FORTY BASIC CABLE NETWORKS (BY SUBSCRIBERSHIP)

NETWORK	YES	NO	PLANNED	COMMENT
A & E	✓			
AMERICAN MOVIE CLASSICS	✓			
ANIMAL PLANET	✓			
BET		✗		
BRAVO	✓			
CARTOON NETWORK	✓			
COMEDY CENTRAL			✓	By Second Quarter 2000
COUNTRY MUSIC TELEVISION	✓			
DISCOVERY	✓			
DISNEY	✓			
E! ENTERTAINMENT	✓			
FOOD NETWORK			✓	By October 1999
FOX FAMILY CHANNEL	✓			
FX	✓			
HISTORY CHANNEL	✓			
HOME SHOPPING NETWORK		✗		
THE LEARNING CHANNEL	✓			
LIFETIME	✓			
MTV	✓			
NICKELODEON	✓			
QVC		✗		
SCI FI CHANNEL	✓			
TBS	✓			
THE NASHVILLE NETWORK	✓			
TNT	✓			
USA	✓			
VH1	✓			

Source: Fifth Annual Assessment of the Status of Competition in Markets for the Delivery of Video Programming, FCC No. 98-335 (rel. Dec. 23, 1998) at Table D-6.

TOP FORTY BASIC CABLE NETWORKS – EXEMPT OR NOT APPLICABLE

NETWORK	COMMENT
CNBC	Exempt – News Programming
CNN	Exempt – News Programming; non-exempt programming is encoded
CNN HEADLINE NEWS	Exempt – News Programming
COURT TV	Exempt – News Programming; non-exempt programming is encoded
CSPAN	Exempt – News Programming
CSPAN2	Exempt – News Programming
ESPN	Exempt – Sports
ESPN2	Exempt – Sports
FOX NEWS CHANNEL	Exempt – News Programming
MSNBC	Exempt – News Programming
TV GUIDE SNEAK PREVUE	Not applicable – No full length programming
TV GUIDE PREVIEW CHANNEL	Not applicable – No full length programming
WEATHER CHANNEL	Exempt – News Programming

Source: Fifth Annual Assessment of the Status of Competition in Markets for the Delivery of Video Programming, FCC No. 98-335 (rel. Dec. 23, 1998) at Table D-6.

PREMIUM CABLE NETWORKS

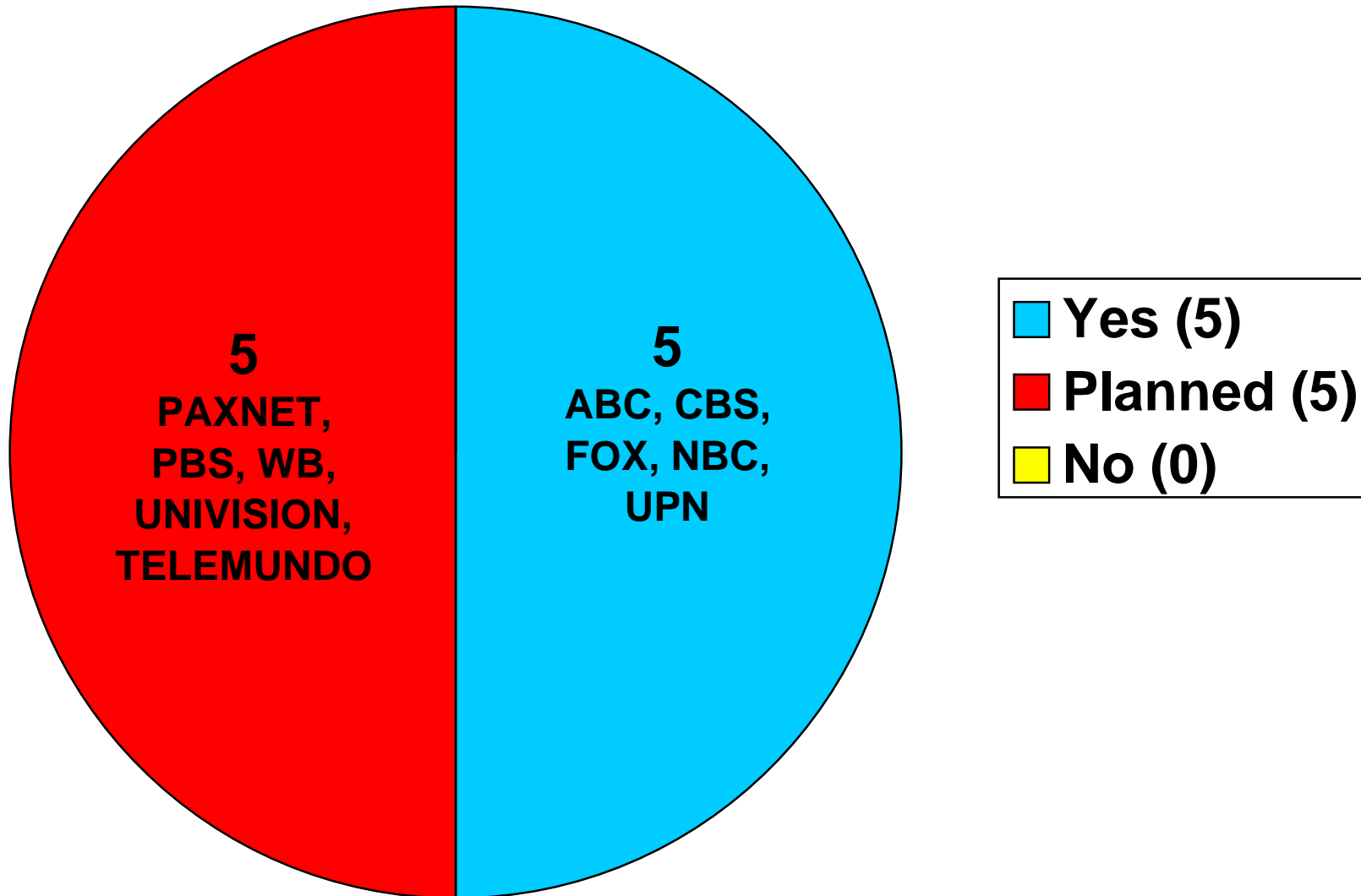| NETWORK	YES	NO	PLANNED	COMMENT
HBO	✓			TV Ratings for original programming; MPAA Ratings for unedited movies
SHOWTIME	✓			TV Ratings for original programming; MPAA Ratings for unedited movies
ENCORE			✓	By January 1, 2000
CINEMAX	✓			
STARZ!	✓			By January 1, 2000

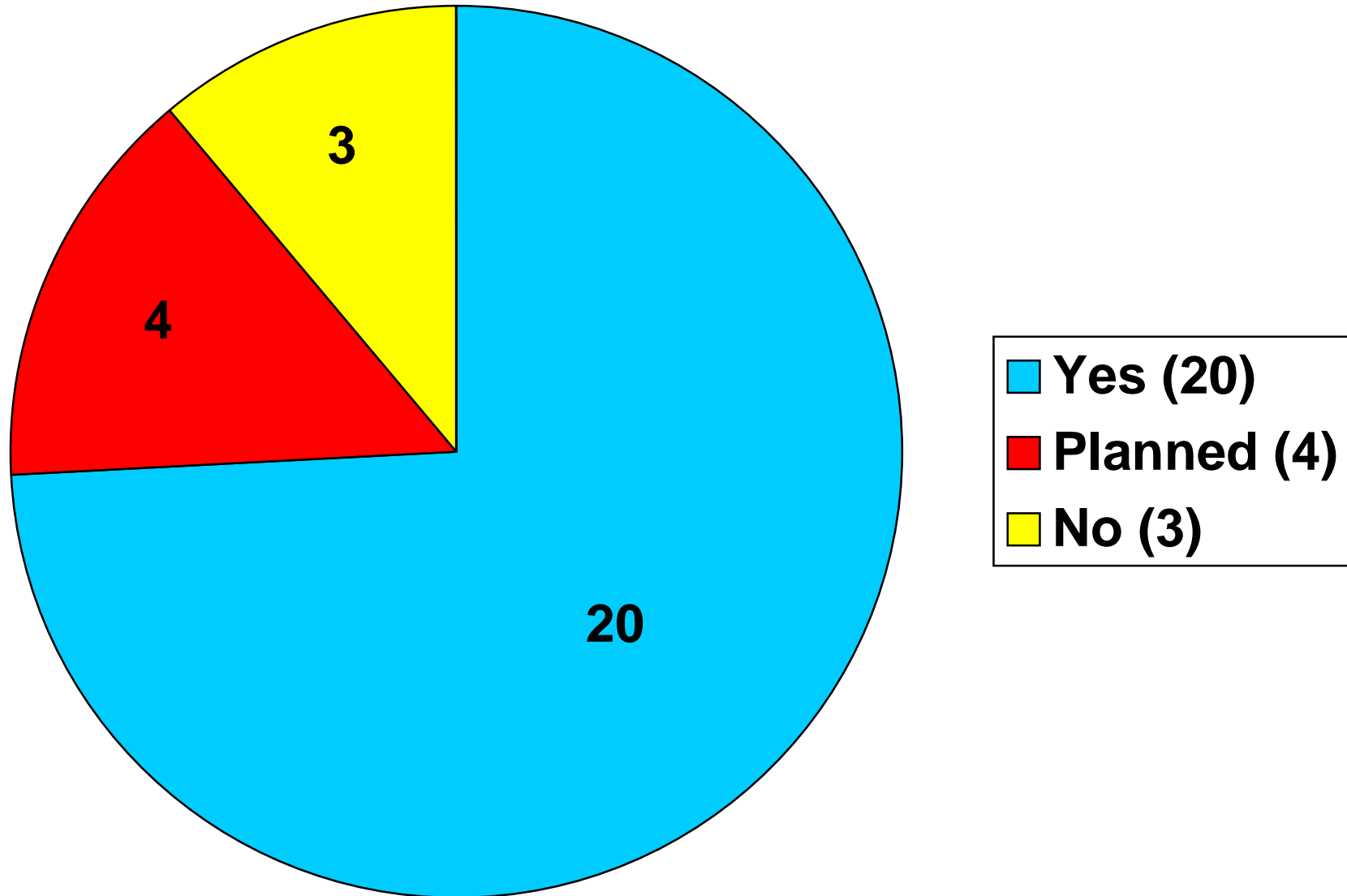Source: Top Five Premium Cable Networks from *Cable World*., June 21, 1999, p. 60.

SYNDICATORS

NETWORK	YES	NO	PLANNED	COMMENT
BUENA VISTA			✓	By September, 1999
COLUMBIA TRISTAR			✓	All first run and library programming encoded in coming weeks
KING WORLD			✓	Awaiting equipment arrival
PARAMOUNT	✓			All first run and most library programming encoded
STUDIOS USA			✓	Most programming encoded by the end of the week; remainder encoded when equipment arrives
20TH CENTURY FOX			✓	All first run and library programming encoded over next two months
WARNER BROTHERS			✓	First run and newly distributed library programming encoded by September 1999
WORLDVISION			✓	First run and most library programming encoded over next two to three months

Source: Syndicators of Top 25 Syndicated Programs for the week of May 23-30, 1999 from A.C.Nielsen as reported in Entertainment Weekly. Programs are: Wheel of Fortune (King World); Jeopardy (King World); Judge Judy (Worldvision); The Jerry Springer Show (Studios USA); The Oprah Winfrey Show (King World); Friends (Warner Brothers); Seinfeld (Columbia TriStar); Entertainment Tonight (Paramount); The X-Files (Twentieth Century Fox); Frasier (Paramount); Home Improvement (Buena Vista); Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (Paramount); The Rosie O'Donnell Show (Warner Brothers); Seinfeld (weekend) (Columbia TriStar); Xena: Warrior Princess (Studios USA); ER (Warner Brothers); Wheel of Fortune (weekend)(King World); Hollywood Squares (King World); Hercules: The Legendary Journeys (Studios USA); Sally Jessy Raphael (Studios USA); The Simpsons (Twentieth Century Fox); Live with Regis and Kathie Lee (Buena Vista); The Montel Williams Show (Paramount); Extra (Warner Brothers); Judge Joe Brown (Worldvision).
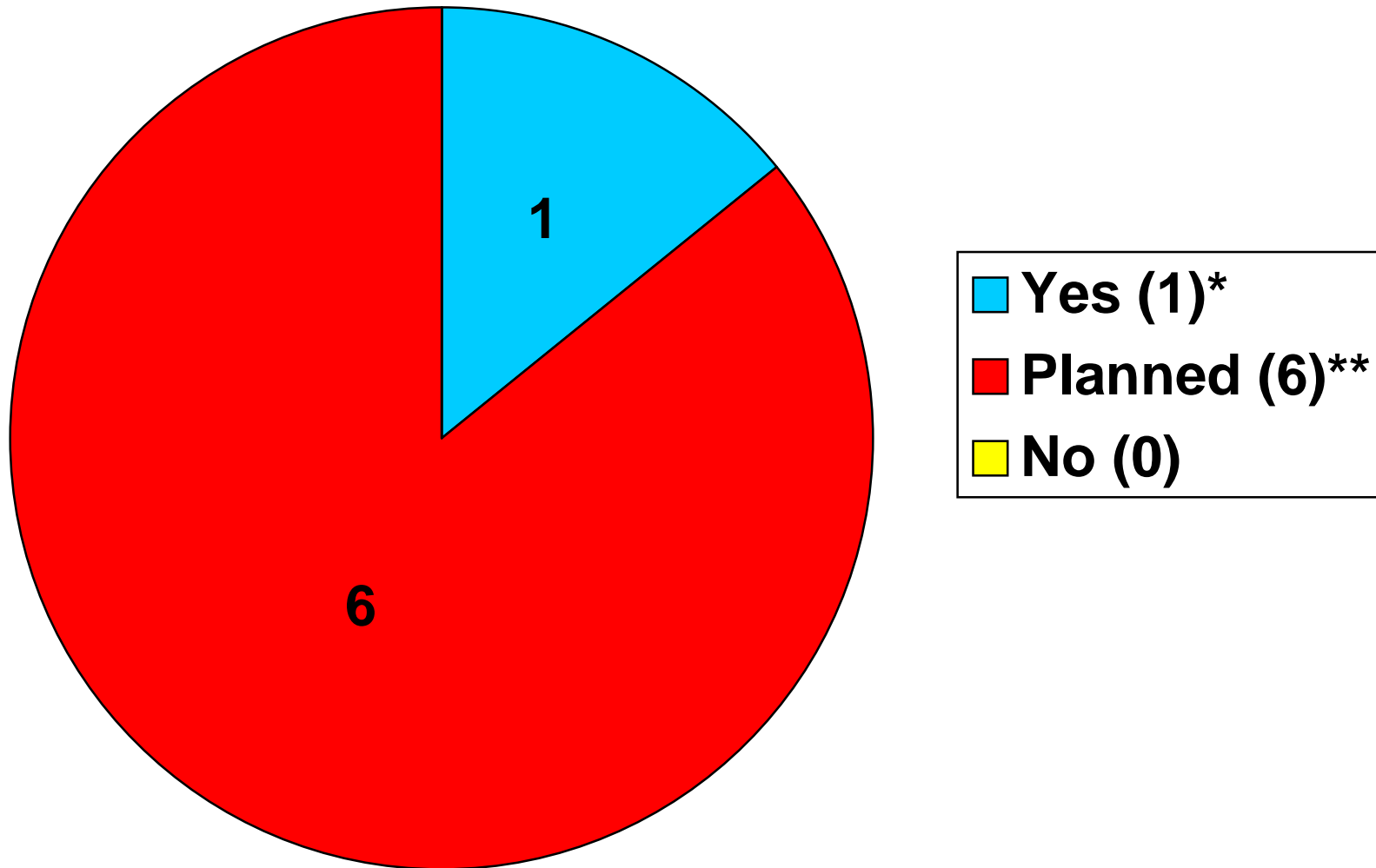
Encoding Progress By Broadcast Networks

5
**PAXNET,
PBS, WB,
UNIVISION,
TELEMUNDO**

5
**ABC, CBS,
FOX, NBC,
UPN**

- Yes (5)
- Planned (5)
- No (0)

Encoding Progress By Top 40 Cable Networks

3

4

20

- ☐ Yes (20)
- ■ Planned (4)
- ☐ No (3)

*Note: Thirteen of the forty cable networks are exempt from encoding requirements and are not represented on this graph.

Encoding Progress By Syndicators

1

6

Legend:
- Yes (1)*
- Planned (6)**
- No (0)

* Paramount
** Buena Vista, Columbia Tristar, Studios USA, Twentieth Century Fox, Warner Brothers, Worldvision

Encoding Progress By Premium Cable Networks

2
ENCORE,
STARZ

3
HBO,
SHOWTIME,
CINEMAX

- ☐ Yes (3)
- ☐ Planned (2)
- ☐ No (0)