

Independent review of government spectrum holdings commissioned

To help it achieve an appropriate balance between government use of the radiofrequency spectrum and its use by the broader community, ACMA has commissioned an independent review of government spectrum holdings.

Due to the growing demand for spectrum from all users, ACMA must sometimes arbitrate on government versus non-government use of the spectrum. While it is vital that governments continue to have access to sufficient spectrum to discharge their functions, spectrum access is emerging worldwide as a 'key enabler' for the information economy.

As ACMA faces growing demand for spectrum from both the government and non-government sectors, this is a looming and important challenge for ACMA and requires a preparedness to re-think the status quo and traditional paradigms to continue to optimise the

overall public benefit it is charged to deliver.

ACMA has engaged SpectrumWise Radiocommunications Consulting to conduct the review over the next six months, involving extensive consultation with spectrum stakeholders. Strong interest and contributions to the review are expected from major spectrum users such as the Department of Defence, as well as from other stakeholders.

ACMA's responsibilities include managing access to the radiofrequency spectrum, including the broadcasting services bands. These responsibilities, as they relate to the review, are principally discharged under the *Radiocommunications Act 1992*. Subsections 3(a) and 3(b) of the Act are particularly relevant to the Review.

Subsection 3(a) states:

- maximise, by ensuring the efficient allocation and use of the spectrum,

the overall public benefit derived from using the radiofrequency spectrum;

Subsection 3(b) states:

- make adequate provision of the spectrum: for use by agencies involved in the defence or national security of Australia, law enforcement or the provision of emergency services; and for use by other public or community services.

These requirements are often in contention, which can result in a challenge for ACMA to resolve.

The review will provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to articulate their views on the issue and for established processes to be reconsidered, to assist ACMA to continue to satisfactorily meet its obligations.

Objects of the review include describing the current and potential uses of major government spectrum holdings and identifying those

holdings for which existing or potential demand indicate that the overall public benefit will be maximised by making all or part of the band available for non-government use.

In addition, but equally relevant, the review will seek to identify mechanisms and approaches that will assist ACMA in considering requests for new government spectrum holdings and the way that might best be achieved.

Similar reviews have been undertaken internationally, most notably the Cave Review in the United Kingdom. The report of that review is on the website at www.spectrumaudit.org.uk.

More information about the review commissioned by ACMA is on the SpectrumWise website at <http://spectrumwise.net/>.

Embargo preserves options for replanning channel 27

ACMA has embargoed the radiofrequency band 518–520 MHz to preserve options for the eventual replanning of UHF television channel 27 (currently 520–526 MHz).

Channel 27 is currently only 6 MHz wide, while all other television channels are 7 MHz, which has led to the channel not being used for analog

or digital television and is essentially vacant Australia-wide. This embargo signals the beginning of a replanning process that could eventually lead to the release of channel 27 with a 7 MHz bandwidth (519–526 MHz) for new services.

ACMA also embargoed the immediately adjacent 1 MHz from 518

to 519 MHz, which will enable it to examine sharing scenarios between new services and existing ones.

Channel 27 is immediately adjacent to land mobile services below 520 MHz and to UHF television channel 28 above 526 MHz. Channel 28 currently carries SBS analog television in many areas. This proximity to analog television channel 28 meant that the channel may be unsuited for promising emerging applications such as mobile television until after analog television services are switched off.

On present indications, channel 27 is unlikely to be available for mobile television for several years. Nor can ACMA rule out other applications for

the channel emerging in the interim.

The frequency range 518–520 MHz is currently used for the land mobile service (two frequency, 25 kHz channelling) and for the land mobile and fixed services (single frequency, 25 kHz channelling). The type and number of licences in the 518–520 MHz range is shown in the table. In the frequency range 518–520 MHz, there are currently 896 frequency assignments to 298 licensees.

More information about the embargo is on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to Industry > Radiocommunications > Frequency Planning > Spectrum Embargoes).

NUMBER OF LICENCES BY TYPE, 518-520 MHZ BAND

Licence type	Number
Ambulatory	307
Land mobile	397
Point-to-multipoint	100
Point-to-point	86
Radiodetermination	6