

Ban on mobile phone boosters updated for new technology

The ACMA is calling for comment on a proposed new declaration intended to protect the integrity of mobile telecommunications networks and safeguard end-users.

The Telecommunications (Prohibition of Mobile Phone Boosters) Declaration 2011 (the proposed declaration) prohibits the operation or supply, or possession for the purpose of operation or supply, of mobile phone boosters that are designed or intended to be used in connection with the supply of public mobile telecommunication services (PMTS).

A mobile phone booster is a powered radiofrequency amplifier that is physically connected to a mobile station (for example, a mobile handset). It amplifies the transmitted and received signals, purportedly to enhance the ability of the mobile station to communicate with the base station.

The use of mobile phone boosters has an adverse effect on mobile carriers' networks. Mobile phone handsets normally interact with the network to adjust their transmit power relative to their proximity to a base station.

The use of a booster means that a handset approaching a base station cannot reduce its power in response to signals from the base station. This has a 'deafening' effect on the base station, with a significant chance of the base station dropping more distant handsets or, at the very least, forcing the distant handsets to also wind up their transmission power in order to be heard.

The use of mobile phone boosters has previously been identified as a cause of significant interference to mobile telecommunications networks, affecting coverage and therefore consumer access to mobile networks. In the worst case, the use of mobile phone boosters can restrict access to the emergency call service.

To address concerns about the use of mobile phone boosters, in 2001 the former Australian Communications Authority made the Declaration of Prohibited Customer Equipment Mobile Phone Booster Amplifiers for Global System for Mobiles ("GSM") and Code Division Multiple Access ("CDMA") Mobile Telecommunications Services (the 2001 declaration).

The 2001 declaration prohibits the operation or supply, or possession for the purpose of operation or supply, of mobile phone booster amplifiers designed to operate in frequency bands used by GSM and CDMA mobile telephone services.

At the time the 2001 declaration was made, PMTS were supplied by means of GSM and CDMA technologies. The technical evolution of mobile telecommunications networks means that new technologies have been introduced, so the 2001 declaration does not reflect the contemporary technical and commercial operating environment.

The proposed declaration is intended to be technology-neutral. It does not refer to specific technologies such as CDMA and GSM but more generally refers to boosters that operate within the frequency bands used for the supply of PMTS.

In this way, the proposed declaration will be applicable to new technology developments, such as the introduction of Long Term Evolution (LTE) equipment that will likely be used in connection with the future supply of PMTS. ☞

Submissions

Comments to the ACMA on the proposed declaration are due by close of business on **6 April 2011**. Submissions should be sent by email to boosters.declaration@acma.gov.au or by mail to:

Technical Regulation
Development Section
Australian Communications
and Media Authority
PO Box 13112
Law Courts
Melbourne VIC 8010

Further information is available on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to About ACMA: News & media centre > Issues for comment > IFC 06/2011).

