



# New priorities for spectrum planning

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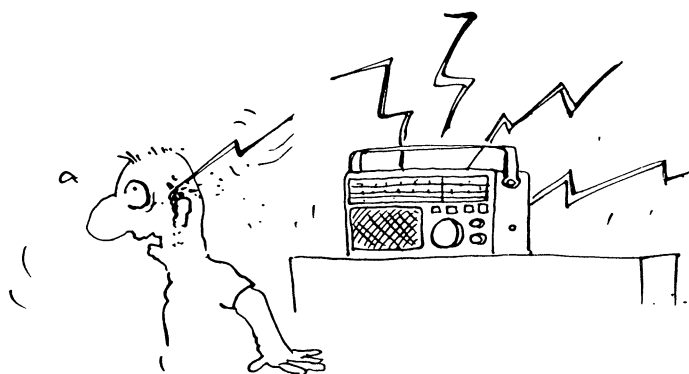
It is very timely to have the Government's decisions on the regime to apply after July 1997. From the perspective of managing access to the radiofrequency spectrum, the most significant element is, of course, the decision that there will be no limit on the numbers of carriers and that the carriers will not be defined either by the type of carriage technology they use (eg wire-based or wireless), nor by the type of service they offer. The critical elements rather are issues of control of access to telecommunications facilities and the significance of the services offered to the public.

Radiocommunications - use of the radiofrequency spectrum - is likely to be used by some carriers for the totality of their telecommunications service, and in other cases have a part in their infrastructure. The Government's decisions thus set new priorities for spectrum planning and allocation. The decisions include that additional spectrum, for example the 1.8GHz band, be allocated by the Spectrum Management Agency (SMA) as soon as possible, but in any event before mid-1997.

Some preliminary spectrum planning for spectrum likely to be valuable for new mobile telephony services has already been carried out, including from spectrum in the 1.8GHz band. As is often the case, this band currently has users (fixed links). A suitable means of facilitating access to this band for mobile use has to be found and existing users may

have to be cleared from the band if their use conflicts with other intended uses.

There is usually a considerable lead time in making spectrum available for other uses - although the policy principles indicate changes to the *Radiocommunications Act* to allow spectrum to be sold while occupied, with clearance proceeding after sale. Another spectrum segment likely to come under close attention for possible access by new carriers is the 900MHz band where spectrum is



likely over time to be made available for other uses.

The policy reinforces the methods for allocating licences in the *Radiocommunications Act*. It refers to release of new spectrum for mobile and wireless services being undertaken under price-based processes. Readers will be aware that in 1994/95 the SMA ran two auction-style price-based allocations for licences. We envisage further use of auction methods, perhaps picking up some of the features of the US's auctions for PCS licences.

The design of the appropriate methods will in future be done in a wider context. The policy explicitly draws the ACCC and competition policy considerations into develop-

ment of procedures for allocating spectrum for telecommunications uses. Obviously an issue for consideration in this regard will be the extent to which current telecommunications carriers might be able to acquire spectrum vis-a-vis possible new carriers.

At present, both the SMA and AUSTEL are involved in technical regulation, including development and enforcement of standards. The policy principles envisage a merger of the SMA and a number of AUSTEL's functions. There is already a good degree of coordination between AUSTEL and the SMA in technical regulation - for example in advancing Australian interests in international forums such as the International Telecommunications Union, in settling

standards where there is both a telecommunication system and a radiocommunications equipment aspect (such as the GSM handsets or DECT equipment). With the future merger of the SMA and AUSTEL announced now, and due to take effect from July 1997, the two organisations can strengthen their cooperative and coordinated efforts in technical regulation.

A regulatory body for the future which deals with both radiocommunications and telecommunications will incorporate functions which have a natural conjunction. It will provide a single point of contact for the communications industry, and is a move to be welcomed. □