

MEGAPORT BEATS PIPE: Industry reacts to TIO verdict

AUST SPECTRUM REVIEW: Terms of reference released

NZ 700 MHZ: Comms minister proposes two options

FETCH TV

**IPTV wholesaler
changes tack,
plans retail offer**

COMMUNICATIONS DAY

26 MAY 2014

Daily telecom news & analysis since 1994

ISSUE 4663

C-band clash of the regulatory titans: senior ACMA alumni storm into debate

Two more distinguished Australian regulatory veterans have stormed into the escalating conflict between mobile and satellite players over the future of C-band spectrum.

The long-simmering debate is set to ignite again at next year's World Radiocommunications Conference, with both sides now manoeuvring for position in Australia and globally.

Mobile players, citing booming bandwidth demands, are looking once more for a slice of the band. But the satellite operators who have traditionally occupied the band say their opponents are inflating demand forecasts, and are also concerned about excessive interference if terrestrial mobile players encroach on the band.

Dr Andrew Kerans, previously executive manager for spectrum policy at the Australian Communications and Media Authority, has waded in to vigorously defend the ACMA's preliminary views on the issue against criticism from ex-Australian Communications Authority head and satellite industry lobbyist Dr Bob Horton.

As reported by CommsDay, Horton, who is a registered lobbyist for both Intelsat and Inmarsat, took the ACMA to task for being too passive in not opposing other countries' manoeuvres to allocate chunks of C-band for IMT. But Kerans (right) backed his ACMA successor and protégé Chris Hose in leaving other jurisdictions to their own affairs – and went a step further, arguing the Australian regulator should actually support an IMT allocation in the C-band.



On the other hand, Professor Reg Coutts – who just days ago resigned as a part-time ACMA board member – has contended that the Authority's position on the issue is too technical and narrow, and risks a 'chilling effect' for satellite use of the C-band globally that could affect other countries in-region and Australian commercial interests. He's therefore called for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which Coutts said used to take more of a direct interest in radio policy, to drive the government view on the issue.

KERANS: Horton had taken issue with Hose's statement that the ACMA itself would simply not seek an IMT allocation for key parts of the C-band, arguing that unless the regulator actively opposed other jurisdictions' calls for such allocations it was not seeking to protect satellite services in the band. Kerans, though, launched a spirited counterattack.

"I noted Horton's comment on where he thinks Australia should go on the C band issue, but I wonder whether this is in Australia's best interests or the interests of Intelsat?" challenged Kerans. "Hose correctly pointed out that the C band issue is up to each individual administration to decide... in East Timor the reliance on satellites for interconnectivity is high, so those bands should be preserved and protected. In other administrations, like Vanuatu where a fibre has recently landed, the reliance is still there but perhaps not as critical as it was before. In Australia the need for C band in the cities is in my view effectively zero."

But Kerans went a step further. "I don't fully agree with the ACMA's position on C band," he told CommsDay. "I believe they should support an IMT allocation, because that gives the flexibility to reassign the band at a later date. The WRC process at three years is slow, possibly too slow to

keep up with the rapid pace of developing technologies, and on occasion it becomes a four year cycle! Even if there is no current need for the spectrum, given the slow progress possible in the ITU combined with the long domestic lead times needed to replan, clear legacy infrastructure and reallocate I believe Australia should support a co-primary allocation in the entire 3600 - 4200 Hz band. With this done the domestic decision to reallocate the spectrum, and where that reallocation would occur, would depend only on the market, not a drawn out global political process.”

Kerans highlighted recent ACMA research showing substantial economic benefits derived from mobile broadband – and in particular the GDP difference with and without its impact. “In order to speed up that deviation and contribute to the economy broadband needs more spectrum; and in Australia at least, that spectrum lies in C Band,” he argued.

COUTTS: Coutts, on the other hand, however, called for the ACMA to be at least partly sidelined in the whole process, with DFAT brought in to help shape the government position.

“I think the question should really be about... the ACMA’s role. Because it seems to me that the ACMA’s view at the moment is a very narrow, immediate, ‘could C-band share with broadband mobile in Australia’ [position],” he told CommsDay. “And when you consider that the ACMA plans, as they’ve made quite public, to see satellite gateway facilities... over time, move out of metro areas... given the sorts of distances we’re talking about in Australia, and the limited propagation distance when you get into the C-band, the view of the ACMA is that you could co-ordinate C-band for satellite and C-band for mobile.”



“The argument, however, of the satellite industry is that if Australia just says that band can be identified as a possible IMT band, that will have a ‘chilling effect’ on C-band globally, and region 3 in particular, for the utilisation of the C-band – where Australia has a number of commercial interests: mining, etc,” he continued. “They’re issues that do have consequences both for Australia’s business interests and also, potentially, in terms of taking into consideration countries in our region.”

“Under the current structure, ACMA isn’t really looking at either of those two. And to me, the issue, in one sense, is broader than the ACMA... if they really want to progress the C-band argument, they should be briefing DFAT on the implications,” said Coutts. “Historically, DFAT used to get involved in world radio conferences; [recently], they’ve taken less interest.”

However, Coutts said that simply “beating up on Chris Hose or the ACMA” was the wrong tack, particularly in context of a level of consultation between the regulator and industry that he claimed was “overly bureaucratic” and “ineffective.”

“It’s jumped into a lobbying or shouting match rather than a rational discussion,” he said. “And you’ve got a mismatch between the ACMA looking at a narrow technical argument as to the possibility of co-working in Australia vs. a national interest argument and the potential impact of Australia’s decision – in other words, the ACMA position – on how it will be seen by our regional neighbours. Which, to me, takes us into a wider forum than the ACMA.”

THE ACOMMS COMMUNICATIONS ALLIANCE & COMMSDAY AWARDS 2014

BOOK YOUR TABLE NOW!

KEY DATES
Short-listed Finalists announced - 24 June 2014
Presentation Dinner - 30 July 2014

For any sponsorship or table booking enquiries, please contact Carolyn Todd on 1300 651 485 or email info@acomms.com.au
www.acomms.com.au

30TH JULY 2014 | SOFITEL WENTWORTH HOTEL SYDNEY

AWARDS RECOGNISING EXCELLENCE IN THE COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

TITLE SPONSOR
IT'S HOW WE CONNECT

GOLD SPONSOR
OPTUS

SILVER SPONSORS
iinet vasp vodafone

BRONZE SPONSORS
KPMG dgit AUSTINDO COMMUNICATIONS

Petroc Wilton