



COMMONWEALTH HELD SPECTRUM CONSULTATION PAPER

Introduction

In March 2015, the then Department of Communications released its Spectrum Review. The Review recommended better integrating the management of public sector spectrum to improve the consistency and integrity of the framework. This paper considers Commonwealth use of spectrum.

As a user, the Commonwealth Government is the largest holder of spectrum in Australia with 36 Commonwealth agencies licenced to access spectrum as of March 2017 (excluding national broadcasters and Government Business Enterprises). The consultation paper proposes an overarching governance body to identify and implement whole-of-government efficiency improvements for the management of Commonwealth held spectrum.

Issue

As a significant spectrum user, the Commonwealth is looking for opportunities to identify and improve its spectrum management. Individual agencies have their own governance arrangements for planning and procurement of licences. There is no coordinated approach to future public sector demand or systematic approach to policy issues that government may need to consider as both user and regulator. There are no whole-of-government mechanisms to ensure holdings are managed efficiently or effectively. Public visibility of prices paid, the purposes for which agencies hold spectrum and the extent to which these holdings are used or plan to be used could be improved.

Detail

The consultation paper concludes that a coordinated governance framework will enable flexible approaches to the management of Commonwealth spectrum holdings. Increased transparency is key to improving this management. Transparency encourages policy development that is coordinated and looks to achieve economies of scale and other policy synergies. A comprehensive whole-of-government examination of significant spectrum requirements prior to allocation will identify issues early and consider potential economies of scale. It will ensure that procurement processes take account of the needs of government users, the Commonwealth's broader spectrum policy framework and the wider Australian economy.

The consultation paper proposes an overarching governance body, a 'Government Spectrum Steering Committee', to facilitate whole-of-government consideration on spectrum policy. Under this framework each agency will continue to manage its own spectrum holdings. The committee will provide guidance to the Minister for Communications and the Government on issues of spectrum policy and management. This includes:

- > identifying, evaluating and driving initiatives to improve efficiency of spectrum management
- > formulating whole-of-government positions on Commonwealth spectrum issues such as sharing, trading and emerging technologies (noting international forums and harmonisation obligations),
- > identifying and evaluating emerging risks and opportunities across the broader spectrum management landscape where they relate to the Government as a user of spectrum, and
- > oversight of a coordinated report of Commonwealth spectrum holdings to improve transparency of holdings.