Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement

Inquiry into the Spectrum for Public Safety Mobile Broadband

Submission by the Commonwealth Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy

Preamble

The Commonwealth Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy is currently working with the Attorney-General's Department and jurisdictions to support the development of a mobile broadband capability for public safety agencies. This submission provides a summary of progress to date in developing a mobile broadband capability for public safety agencies, and outlines the work still underway and to be completed.

The Department welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry and looks forward to expanding on the submission at the public hearings of the Committee.

Public Safety Mobile Broadband Steering Committee

In May 2011, the then Commonwealth Attorney-General and Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy met with jurisdictions, public safety stakeholders and industry to discuss a nationally interoperable mobile broadband capability for public safety agencies.

In June 2011, the Public Safety Mobile Broadband Steering Committee (the Steering Committee) was established. The Steering Committee was tasked with developing an implementation plan for a nationally interoperable mobile broadband public safety capability. The Steering Committee is chaired by the Commonwealth and comprises members from public safety agencies and jurisdictions, and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA).

Progress through the Steering Committee

Since June 2011, the Steering Committee has met seventeen times to develop the implementation plan and undertake associated work to gain greater clarity around the operational requirements of a public safety mobile broadband capability and the best way to deliver it.

The Steering Committee commissioned a report by Gibson Quai AAS (now UXC Consulting) that explored some of the metrics and scenarios that would apply to this capability. Informed by input from the agencies themselves as to their needs during 'business-as-usual' activities, planned response scenarios and major unplanned events, this report was drawn on by the ACMA in evaluating an appropriate allocation of spectrum for public safety agencies.

Spectrum Reservation and Initial Negotiations

On 29 October 2012, the ACMA announced that 10 Megahertz (MHz) of spectrum (2x5 MHz) in the 800 MHz band would be reserved for public safety agency use. In conjunction with 50 MHz of 4.9 GHz for high capacity local area communications, and the previously announced expanded capacity in 400 MHz for voice and low volume data, this allocation totals around 85 MHz of spectrum for public safety use, forming a 'multi-layered' spectrum solution for public safety agencies.

Consistent with the Commonwealth's commitment to support a nationally interoperable public safety mobile broadband capability, the Commonwealth determined to offer the spectrum to public safety agencies at a 'public interest' discounted price. On 29 October 2012, the then Attorney-General wrote to jurisdiction emergency service ministers offering the spectrum at a public interest discount of the commercial value of the spectrum. However negotiations have not progressed beyond this point.

Report to the Standing Council on Police and Emergency Management

On 23 November 2012, Standing Council on Police and Emergency Management (SCPEM) received the implementation plan from the Steering Committee. The implementation plan considered the most effective and efficient way for public safety agencies to obtain a reliable and robust mobile broadband capability, including outlining the key actions for all jurisdictions to develop the capability; processes for funding, accountability and reporting; and discussion of a potential allocation of radiofrequency spectrum for this purpose.

SCPEM endorsed the implementation plan and committed in-principle to the development of the capability. SCPEM also requested the Steering Committee continue its work in three specific areas:

- Jurisdictions provide any additional evidence on the adequacy of the 10 MHz reservation of 800 MHz made by the ACMA in October 2012;
- How 'overflow' capacity can be assured where the public safety mobile broadband capability is not available; and
- Next steps to agree the design and implementation of the network.

In response to this request, the Steering Committee established the following processes:

- Jurisdictions were asked to provide additional evidence to support the need for a quantum of spectrum above the ACMA's initial reservation;
- The Overflow Capabilities Sub-Group was established to explore options for how overflow could be assured; and
- The Project Timelines Sub-Group was established to lay out the process for design and implementation of the capability.

SCPEM requested a response on the additional requests in 2013.

Response to SCPEM

Additional Evidence on Quantum

The Steering Committee requested jurisdictions provide additional evidence to the ACMA on the quantum of spectrum needed. On 28 February 2013, jurisdictions provided a paper to the ACMA that outlined their concerns regarding the adequacy of ACMA's reservation of spectrum for public safety agencies.

The ACMA is considering this additional information and given the linkages between this reservation and work being done on options for overflow the ACMA is also awaiting the report of the Overflow Capabilities Sub-Group before making a decision on quantum allocation. The ACMA is expected to make a decision in July/August 2013.

Overflow Capability

'Overflow' describes the additional use of commercial telecommunications networks to supplement any purpose-built public safety network when events occur outside of the proposed network, or when the flow of communications traffic required exceeds the public safety network's capability.

The Overflow Capability Sub-Group is co-chaired by the Department for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and the NSW Telecommunications Authority. The Sub-Group's Terms of Reference are:

- define circumstances when overflow may be required;
- identify options and models for engaging overflow from a dedicated public safety mobile broadband capability to commercial networks;
- develop an engagement plan for industry and NBN Co; and
- work with the ACMA to clarify issues around the legislative framework and operational procedures.

In March 2013, the Sub-Group convened an industry roundtable where public safety agencies and industry had the opportunity to discuss the operational requirements of an effective overflow capability for a public safety mobile broadband network. The roundtable was useful in allowing the Sub-Group to better define the issues and the capability's operational needs.

The roundtable informed an interim report by the Sub-Group that was provided to SCPEM on 15 March 2013. The interim report noted the work to date and further work to be done to establish overflow capability, including the challenge of defining overflow of a network that was not yet built.

An industry forum is scheduled for 2 July 2013 in Sydney to be jointly hosted by industry representative organisations: the Communications Alliance, Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association and the Australian Radio Communications Industry Association. Informed by a high-level discussion paper, this forum will allow public safety agencies and industry to further refine some of the end-user operational requirements and progress development of arrangements to support overflow capability.

Planning and Timelines

The Project Timelines Sub-Group is co-chaired by the Attorney-General's Department and the ACT Department of Justice and Community Safety. The Sub-Group's Terms of Reference were:

- define the next steps to develop a mobile broadband capability;
- identify key deliverables and milestones;
- identify risks and strategies to manage them; and
- identify options for managing this work through the implementation.

The focus of the Sub-Group's report was:

- Governance
- Planning Approaches
- Procurement
- Requirements
- Core network infrastructure

The Sub-Group provided its report to SCPEM on 15 March 2013.

Next Steps

The overflow capability industry forum is scheduled for 2 July 2013 in Sydney. Coming out of this forum, the Overflow Capabilities Sub-Group will prepare a report on the methodology for specifying and negotiating overflow capability. The report will be submitted through the Steering Committee to SCPEM and ultimately the Council of Australian Governments later in the year.

The ACMA is considering the additional information received from jurisdictions on quantum of spectrum, and once it receives the report of the Overflow Capabilities Sub-Group is expected to make a decision on quantum of spectrum in July/August 2013.

Later in the year the Council of Australian Governments will consider the core elements of the public safety mobile broadband workstream, including the work on overflow, spectrum allocation and funding models, and the overarching governance framework for implementing this capability.

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