

Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice
Additional Estimates Hearings February 2009
Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy Portfolio

Question No: 18

Hansard Ref: Written

Topic: Feasibility Study into Disability Communications Equipment

Senator Bernardi asked:

1. On 16 February Senator Conroy announced a feasibility study into a new disability equipment program, one that would be independent of telecommunications carriers. Who will conduct or be involved in this study?
2. When will the study start?
3. When will the study be due to report?
4. What is the Budget for this study?
5. Will people with disability be able to participate or contribute to the study in any way?

Answers:

1. The Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy will conduct the study.
2. The study has commenced. The Terms of Reference were released on 16 February 2009. A discussion paper was released on 13 March 2009.
3. The study is due to report to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy by the end of December 2009.
4. The study will be conducted within existing Departmental resources.
5. People with disabilities are being given the opportunity to provide submissions to the discussion paper released on 13 March 2009. Targeted face-to-face consultations will also take place with some people with disabilities, notably those with severe physical impairments.

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Question No: 51

Hansard Ref: Written

Topic: Spectrum allocation and management inquiries and reviews

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. What inquiries or reviews has the Department or ACMA completed in the last year, have underway or have planned in relation to spectrum allocation and management? Please detail these, their costs and, where applicable, their outcomes and whether those outcomes have been made public.
2. What is the current estimate on the value of spectrum the Government has available or might have available?
3. What current plans are in place in relation to the allocation of this spectrum?

Answer:

1. The Government will make key decisions on the potential size and timing of achieving a Digital Dividend and the approach to the forthcoming expiry of key spectrum licences currently used to provide mobile phone and broadband services. The Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE) and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) have been undertaking work to identify issues and options that will enable it to provide policy advice to the Minister. This work has included a number of consultancies.

In 2008 DBCDE commissioned two consultancy reports on the Digital Dividend and one scoping study on the 15 year spectrum licences due to expire during 2013-2017.

The consultancy reports were:

- The Digital Dividend Technical Consultancy – Stage 1 (the Kordia report). Cost \$150,000.

The Digital Dividend Technical Consultancy – Stage 1 (the Kordia report), received by the Department on 19 June 2008, provided a preliminary assessment of the potential quantity of spectrum that could be freed-up by digital television switchover under a range of policy and technical scenarios.

- The Digital Dividend Technical Consultancy – Stage 2 (the STM report). Cost \$40,000.

The Digital Dividend Technical Consultancy – Stage 2 (the STM report), received by the Department on 29 September 2008, provided a commercial valuation of some of the scenarios identified by the Kordia report.

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- Expiry of 15 year spectrum licences – Plum Consulting. Cost \$240,765.

Plum Consulting was asked to identify and discuss the issues and options available to the Government to maximise community benefit from the expiry and subsequent reissue of 15 year spectrum licences in the bands 800 MHz, 1.8 GHz, 2.1GHz, 3.4 GHz, 20 GHz, 27 GHz, 28 GHz and 30 GHz. The Report was provided to the Department on 5 December 2008. As part of the study there were consultations with a range of key industry stakeholders, including Optus, Telstra, Vodafone, Hutchison and the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association. The Plum study is assisting the Department develop advice to the Minister, including a proposed policy framework for progressing this issue.

All of these issues are under active consideration by the Government and none of the consultancy reports will be released at this time.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is primarily responsible for the regulation of spectrum, including spectrum allocation and management, under the *Radiocommunications Act 1992*.

ACMA has provided the following advice in relation to inquiries and reviews concerning spectrum allocation and management:

Completed ACMA inquiries and reviews:

Wireless Access Services (WAS)

The WAS review by ACMA was initiated to gauge the demand for future broadband wireless access services and associated spectrum requirements.

ACMA initiated the WAS review in early 2006 with the issue of two discussion papers, one in February 2006 and the second paper in December 2006. The discussion papers identified several frequency bands with the potential to support future wireless access services, including 3.6 GHz and 2.5 GHz. ACMA received 177 submissions in response to both discussion papers.

See below under ‘Outcome of the Wireless Access Service (WAS) Review’ for more details on ACMA’s proposals stemming from the WAS review.

Australian Radiofrequency Spectrum Plan 2009.

The Australian Radiofrequency Spectrum Plan (ARSP) is the legal basis for spectrum allocation in Australia and is prepared by ACMA in accordance with sections 30 and 34 of the *Radiocommunications Act 1992*. The ARSP divides the Australian radiofrequency spectrum into a number of frequency bands and specifies the general purpose for use.

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The ARSP was last revised by ACMA on 2 January 2009 following public consultation in 2008 to take account of the World Radiocommunication Conference 2007 revisions made to the International Telecommunication Union Radio Regulations. ACMA has advised printing costs for the 2009 ARSP were \$10,000.

Current ACMA inquiries and reviews:

Five-year Spectrum Outlook 2009-2013

The 2009-2013 Outlook contains ACMA's spectrum demand analysis and indicative work programs of spectrum-related projects for the next five years. The 2009-2013 Outlook is due to be released by ACMA on 31 March 2009 after public consultation in 2008 which resulted in 49 submissions being received. ACMA has advised that printing costs for the 2009-2013 Outlook will be \$15,000.

2.3 GHz

The allocation of residual spectrum in the 2.3 GHz band in rural and remote areas of Australia is nearing completion after public consultation in 2008 from which 7 submissions were received.

400 MHz (403-520 MHz)

ACMA initiated a review of the 400 MHz band in April 2008 to ascertain options for future use of the band. Public consultation in 2008 resulted in 75 submissions being received by ACMA.

A new ACMA discussion paper is being developed taking into account the submissions received in 2008. The new paper is expected to be issued shortly by ACMA and it will include proposals and options for the 400 MHz band. ACMA is working towards finalisation of its 400 MHz review by the end of 2009.

Planned ACMA inquiries and reviews:

Outcome of the Wireless Access Service (WAS) Review

ACMA is proposing to allocate spectrum in the 3.6 GHz band in regional and remote areas of Australia for wireless access services following options identified in the WAS review in 2008. ACMA expects to release a public discussion paper by the end of March 2009 outlining relevant policy and technical issues associated with the 3.6 GHz proposal.

ACMA is also reviewing planning and licensing arrangements in the 2.5 GHz band to permit maximisation of overall public benefit derived from the spectrum; and to deliver suitable long-term arrangements for electronic news gathering services, whether in the 2.5 GHz band, in other bands, or in a combination of bands.

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Review of Trading in Radiofrequency Spectrum

ACMA has commenced a Review of Trading in Radiofrequency Spectrum. ACMA issued a consultation paper and invited comments from industry and the general public. Public consultation on the review closed on 23 January 2009 and ACMA is currently evaluating the responses and developing outcomes from the review for publication. ACMA resource cost for the project is approximately 0.4 ASL in the 2008-09 year.

ACMA is also considering the application of opportunity cost pricing for administratively allocated spectrum. ACMA intends to issue a consultation paper in April 2009 for comment. ACMA resource cost for the project is 1 ASL and commissioned research from Plum Consultancy at \$80,000 which produced opportunity cost pricing ranges for two case study spectrum bands in the 400 MHz and 7.5/8 GHz bands.

2. The Digital Dividend Technical Consultancy – Stage 2 (the STM report) provided a valuation of some of the scenarios identified by the Kordia report. As indicated in the answer to Question 1, these issues are under consideration by Government and will not be released.
3. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is primarily responsible for the regulation of spectrum, including spectrum allocation and management, under the *Radiocommunications Act 1992*. See answer to Question 1 for information on ACMA proposed spectrum allocations.