



Media Release- 30th July 2003

ComReg outlines terms for new wireless broadband licences

ComReg today issued an Information Notice outlining the terms and application process for new Fixed Wireless Access Local Area (FWALA) licences, which will enable operators to offer broadband wireless services on a local area basis. Substantial interest has been shown in the scheme with 13 expressions of interest received in respect to a call made by ComReg in March last.

In view of the high level of interest, a special initial competitive phase will operate between 11 August and 5 September next. All applications received during that period will be reviewed after 5 September. Any applications which overlap in terms of spectrum requirements will be subject to a comparative evaluation in respect of performance guarantee and pricing for specified products, and questions of spectrum efficiency may also be taken into account in the major urban areas.

Ireland was one of the first countries in Europe to introduce low cost licence exempt broadband services in the 2.4 GHz and 5 GHz bands. This latest development provides local operators with the opportunity for cost effective rollout of high quality broadband services and should provide a significant boost to the availability of broadband in Ireland.

The Chairperson of ComReg, Etain Doyle said today: "I am very pleased that the way has now been cleared to offer spectrum for licensed services in the 3.5 GHz band in the light of the substantial level of interest and the importance of increasing availability of competing broadband services, in particular services that are independent of the incumbent network. While mobile is clearly the major player in Ireland's wireless communications development, this scheme is a useful complement to the national FWA licences and the w-lans regime."

Notes to editors

The national Fixed Wireless Point to Multipoint Licences (FWPMA) were issued in 2000. There were 4 broadband and 2 narrowband licences issued. The 4 broadband licensees were eircom, ESAT, Chorus and Formus and the 2 narrowband licensees were eircom and Chorus. Due to international funding difficulties, Formus closed in 2000 and its licence was revoked. A review of progress under the licences was initiated in 2001. As a result of this review, the FWPMA licences were amended, largely to reflect technological developments and to facilitate coverage and rollout of the FWPMA service.

However, in the case of Chorus, who had seriously breached their licence commitments, the amendments resulted in the expiration of their FWPMA broadband licence in March 2003 and the narrowband licence in June 2003. Chorus appealed the Narrowband licence decision to the High Court, but has now withdrawn the case. Chorus may apply under the new licensing scheme. However in order to protect customers, it is accepted that Chorus will notify them as to alternative suppliers as Chorus either do not apply for licences or fail to secure them.

The new scheme involves the re-utilisation of spectrum in the 3.5 GHz band which is now available due to the expiry of the Chorus licence. Part of the spectrum utilised by eircom in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford will also be made available. It is anticipated that service offerings will be similar to those currently available over DSL. A similar licensing scheme which offers licences in the 26GHz and 10.5 GHz frequency bands, on a first come, first served basis, is also offered by ComReg.

The original FWPMA licensing scheme offered two licence categories – Narrowband (at 3.5 GHz) and Broadband (at 26 GHz). This categorisation was used because at 3.5 GHz, there was less spectrum available and service offerings of up to 2 mbps were expected. In the 26 GHz band, more spectrum was available and service offerings in excess of 2 mbps had been anticipated. Since then, the categorisation of service offering has changed and, for example, DSL offerings at 256 kbps are commonly referred to as broadband.

ComReg has published an information notice ComReg 03/92 on this matter and it can be found on our website: www.comreg.ie

ENDS

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