

Media Release- 10 March 2009

ComReg publishes response on the future use of mobile radio spectrum

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) has today published a response to its public consultation on the future use of mobile radio spectrum, together with a further consultation.

In the 900 MHz band, two mobile network operators' licences will expire in 2011 while the third expires in 2015. ComReg wants to provide all stakeholders with early visibility of the market beyond the expiry of these licences. Furthermore, a mandatory European Commission decision is pending which aims to liberalise the current GSM bands to facilitate widespread deployment of third generation (3G) or compatible wireless services.

ComReg, as the National Regulatory Authority with responsibility for electronic communications, must ensure that radio spectrum, as a finite and valuable natural resource, is used efficiently and in the best interests of all citizens and consumers. The responses to the consultation demonstrated a broad consensus around the benefits of liberalisation.

ComReg is minded to award all new licences in the 900 MHz band on a liberalised basis, following an open and transparent competition. This will provide operators with additional flexibility in their use of spectrum, in the context of a transparent and predictable regulatory environment. It offers consumers the prospect of new and widely available high-speed broadband services. ComReg also believes that the 1800 MHz frequency band will be an attractive resource in the future but does not see sufficient need to hold a competitive award process in this frequency band currently.

ComReg is also pleased to set out its position on a number of key matters including the limit on 900 MHz spectrum per operator, spectrum block size, frequency coordination and interference mitigation, licence duration and potential spectrum award processes.

Some other elements in the initial consultation were however, less clear cut, or demonstrated a range of differing views. Consequently, and in light of comments received and recent developments at a European level, ComReg has set out some further issues for consultation.

Views had, for instance, been sought on the provision of hosting services for a Mobile Virtual Network Operator. While comments received were welcome, ComReg believes further consultation would be valuable. ComReg had also set out three Options as to how 900 MHz spectrum might be made available in the future. Following its review of responses, ComReg is pleased to set out two new Options for consideration on liberalising use of the 900 MHz frequency band while at the same time addressing licence expiry issues.

This consultation again addresses matters of considerable importance and therefore ComReg encourages all interested parties to respond to this consultation which will close 5pm on Friday 17 April 2008.

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Notes for Editors

In July 2008 the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) consulted on its initial proposals on the future use of the 900 MHz and 1800 MHz spectrum bands (ComReg Document 08/57).

Use of the radio spectrum underpins mobile communications. Without spectrum, there simply would not be any mobile services and no access for consumers or businesses to this vital means of communication. Mobile services have become a vital part of how business, entertainment and personal communications occur in our society.

ComReg's Spectrum Strategy Statement (ComReg 08/50) conservatively estimated that the direct contribution of the radio spectrum to the Irish economy is 1.67% of total GDP. The mobile sector alone accounts for 51% of this contribution, representing a total of €1.4 billion in 2006. Further, these estimates do not take into account the contribution made by consumers through the use of mobile services or the utility of these services to a variety of diverse users.

The widespread use of mobile communication is fundamental to how Irish society communicates. This is evidenced by the extent of mobile use in Ireland, with penetration now at circa 121.5%. The last year has seen the take up of mobile broadband intensify and currently nearly 23% of all broadband subscribers are supplied by mobile broadband services, an increase of 21% over the previous quarter.