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ar son na hAeráide & Comhshaoil**
Department of Communications,
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Ireland's National Roadmap on the Use of the 700MHz Frequency Band

1. Introduction

Radio spectrum is the term used for the range of radio frequencies which provide the basis for a wide range of activities across a variety of sectors. It is essential for the provision of mobile communications and broadcasting services. It is also fundamental to the safe operation of air and maritime transport and is used widely by the military and emergency services. It also supports important scientific applications such as meteorology and radio astronomy. In social and economic terms, the benefits to Ireland from the use of spectrum are enormous.

The range of radio frequencies is finite and is a unique resource. It is important that spectrum is managed effectively and used efficiently. In certain circumstances, the use of certain parts of the radio spectrum (known as 'bands') is harmonised across different countries. A Decision has been taken at the European level¹ which will allow mobile phone and wireless broadband operators to use the 694-790MHz frequency band (the 700MHz band) across Europe, increasing the amount of radio spectrum available to them to provide such services. In Ireland, this also means moving out the broadcasting services currently using the 700MHz band so that the new mobile and wireless broadband services can be moved in.

The Decision requires all Member States to set out a roadmap detailing how they will achieve the aims of the Decision. This document is Ireland's roadmap. It deals with

- how broadcasting services will be moved out of the 700MHz band, and ensuring that they can continue to operate in the 470-694MHz band (section 2);
- the steps that the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) is taking to award the spectrum for mobile phone and wireless broadband services (section 3); and
- the agreements with other countries that Ireland has entered into in order to ensure that there is no interference with neighbouring countries, and vice versa (section 4).

Ireland is committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Decision, which allow the use of 700MHz band for mobile phone and wireless broadband services by 30 June 2020.

¹ Decision (EU) 2017/899 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on the use of the 470-790 MHz frequency band in the Union.

2. Moving the existing services out of the 700MHz Band

2.1. Broadcasting

The Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment entrusted RTÉ with the task of migrating its national digital terrestrial television services from the 700MHz band. This was achieved via a letter of entrustment dated 15 December 2016. Work to migrate Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) services away from the 700MHz band is being carried out by 2RN, which operates RTÉ's DTT transmission network. DTT services will cease in the 700MHz band on 4 March 2020.

Key milestones to achieve this are set out below, with indicative timelines.

No.	Milestone	Projected Completion Date
1	Minister entrusts RTÉ with the task of migrating its national digital terrestrial television.	15 December 2016
2	Beginning of simulcast of DTT services below the 700MHz band	4 September 2019
3	End of simulcast – DTT services cease in the 700MHz band.	4 March 2020

Whilst the Decision requires Ireland to move broadcasting services out of the 700MHz band, the Decision also sets out that those services should still be able to use the 470-694 MHz band until at least 2030.

Following public consultation on RTÉ's Radio and Television Broadcasting Licences (see ComReg Documents [18/64](#) and [18/97](#)), new DTT licences are to be issued to RTÉ on request following the expiry of its current DTT licences on 13 December 2019. These licences are for a maximum period of up to 12 years and shall in any event expire on 13 December 2031.

2.2. Programme Making and Special Events

The 700MHz band is also currently available for certain Programme Making and Special Events (PMSE) services, including wireless microphones. ComReg sets out the guidelines for radio licensing for PMSE use in Ireland in ComReg Document [08/08R](#).

ComReg will update this document to reflect the outcome of the 700 MHz spectrum award (see section 3 below). This will provide clarity to operators of PMSE services as to the spectrum that will be available to them for their services.

3. Awarding spectrum in the 700MHz Band for mobile phone and wireless broadband services

In order to allow mobile phone and wireless broadband services to operate in the 700MHz band once broadcasting services have ceased, ComReg must issue operators with a Wireless Telegraphy Licence. In order to do this, ComReg will run an award process. ComReg runs this process as it manages the radio frequency spectrum in Ireland, as part of its role as the statutorily independent regulator of the electronic communications sector.

There are a number of stages that ComReg needs to follow in order to award the spectrum in 700MHz for mobile phone and wireless broadband services. The first steps involve a series of consultations to help shape the award, and to assist ComReg in finalising its proposals. Consultations allow stakeholders the opportunity to engage with the process, and help to provide clarity to operators on the upcoming award as it develops. The exact timing of these consultations will be dependent on the quantity and nature of responses received, and the accommodation of any requests for extension of deadlines by interested parties. Additional consultations may also be required dependent on the nature of the responses received. The steps will be updated on an ongoing basis.

The award process itself involves several stages, which typically includes an application stage, followed by qualification, main, assignment and notification and grant stage. The award process will also typically include a presentation to interested parties on the process itself and its rules, and an opportunity for questions and answers to be asked. The timelines for these steps will become clearer once ComReg has published an Information Memorandum, expected in 2020.

Key milestones to achieve this are set out below, with indicative timelines:

No.	Milestone	Projected Completion Date
1	Proposed Multi Band Spectrum Award – Preliminary consultation on which spectrum bands to award (ComReg Document 18/60)	29 June 2018
2	Response to consultation (milestone 1) and further consultation on detailed award proposals, including licence conditions, fees and award format	Q1 2019
3	Response to consultation (milestone 2) and publication of draft Decision.	Q3 2019
4	Consultation on draft Information Memorandum.	2020
5	Response to consultation (milestone 3) and publication of Decision.	2020
6	Response to consultation (milestone 4) and publication of Information Memorandum.	2020
7	Present draft Regulations for the consent of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.	2020
8	Award process begins	2020

4. Agreements with other countries

Radio waves are not restrained by political borders; therefore Ireland must coordinate its radio spectrum plans with neighbouring countries. This aims to prevent or minimise any cross-border interference. In terms of meeting the obligations under the European Decision, ComReg, as Ireland’s spectrum manager, has already concluded several international agreements. These agreements were made following bilateral negotiations with the United Kingdom and with France, as well as through participation in wider multilateral regional planning with countries whose own spectrum plans could have an indirect effect on Ireland.

No.	Milestone	Date completed
1	<p>Conclude agreement with Agence National des Fréquences (France)</p> <p><i>ComReg document 17/23c: Agreement between the Administrations of Ireland and France concerning frequency co-ordination of Digital Terrestrial Television in the band 470-694 MHz</i></p>	28 April 2016
2	<p>Conclude agreement with wider regional group:</p> <p><i>ComReg document 17/23d: Western European Digital Dividend Implementation Platform – DTT frequency plan in the band 470 – 694 MHz between the Administrations of Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom.</i></p>	29 April 2016
3	<p>Conclude agreement with Ofcom (UK)</p> <p><i>ComReg document 17/23a: Memorandum of Understanding to Co-Ordinate DTT Frequency Plans between the Office Of Communications of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Commission for Communications Regulation of Ireland</i></p>	24 March 2017

5. Further Information

Additional information on the migration of DTT away from the 700MHz can be found on the [DCCAE website](#). This includes the Letter of Entrustment from the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to RTÉ.

With respect to the proposed Multi-Band Spectrum Award, further information can be found on the [ComReg website](#).

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