

400 MHz changes to benefit UHF CB radio users

Owners of UHF CB radios will now have access to more channels in the 400 MHz band, following a comprehensive three-year ACMA review, and subsequent release of its timeframes and plans to restructure the band.

Despite some incorrect media reports that users will have less radiofrequency spectrum as a result of the changes to the band, the ACMA's extensive consultation process means the UHF CB band has been restructured into 80 individual 12.5 kHz-wide channels. This is changed from the existing 40 individual 25 kHz-wide channels.

This restructure means the following changes to channelling arrangements in the UHF citizen band:

- > the UHF Citizen Band Radio Service will be extended upwards by 6.25 kHz to accommodate an additional 12.5 kHz channel
- > all voice channels will transition to 12.5 kHz bandwidth
- > existing repeater channels will transition to 12.5 kHz bandwidth, with new repeater channels created in the space between the existing channels.

There is a planned phase-in period for the new arrangements. Retailers will be able to supply 25 kHz equipment for approximately 18 months to clear existing stock, while radio owners will be able to keep using their current 25 kHz radios for six years.

The previous technical standard, which specified the technical performance limits and test methods for 25 kHz equipment, has been revised to accommodate the new channel arrangements. Standard AS/NZS 4365:2011 was published in January 2011.

Before new devices can be supplied to the market, the revised standard must be incorporated into the ACMA's equipment regulations, and the Radiocommunications (Citizen Band Radio Stations) Class Licence 2002 must be updated to reflect the new channel arrangements.

The consultation process on the changes to the class licence closed on 4 March 2011. After submissions have been reviewed, the revision of the class licence will be submitted to the ACMA for consideration. This is expected to occur before June 2011.

The ACMA has no plans to return to a system of individual CB operating licences, as claimed in some reports. ☞

Further information on the changes to UHF CB is available on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au (go to For licensees & industry: Service & technical requirements > Radiofrequency spectrum: Radiofrequency planning > The way ahead – 400 MHz band review).

ACMA welcomes convergence review

The ACMA welcomes the comprehensive review of media and communications regulation recently announced by Senator Stephen Conroy, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy.

'The promise of super-fast networks, global content and applications, widespread smart devices and intelligent networks offers a generational opportunity for Australians,' said ACMA Chairman Chris Chapman.

'As one of the world's few converged communications regulators, the ACMA is uniquely placed to contribute to the review and we are looking forward to playing an active role.

'Indeed, much of the current work of the ACMA is already being driven through a converged framework. The development of new approaches to numbering, digital services, spectrum allocation and premium telecommunications services are live examples. New delivery infrastructure such as optical fibre and the emergence of all-IP networks and devices are already seeing rapid change in consumer usage and industry structure.

'Some of the implications of this are the subject of a current public inquiry by the ACMA into customer care and complaints-handling in what is traditionally described as "the telecommunications space".

'We are genuinely excited about these opportunities and look forward to working with the committee to assist and advise on the development of the framework, its settings and principles, so as to ensure Australia has the best chance of seizing the immense opportunities that the transition to the digital economy promises.

'The evolution of media and communications services to digital platforms is relentless and many of the concepts which supported earlier industry, sector and consumer needs are rapidly becoming redundant; certainly they are in need of rethinking.

'The review is an opportunity to stay ahead of the game and administer modern rules for the modern world. At the same time, there do remain enduring concepts which we forget at our peril. Consumer safety and protections are as relevant today as ever; new insights will be required to enshrine them in our futures.'

Mr Chapman also welcomed the appointment of Glen Boreham and Malcolm Long to the Convergence Review Committee. ☞