

Developments in spectrum availability for programme making and special events (PMSE)

Digital Switchover (DSO) - the move from analogue to digital terrestrial television in the UK - is proceeding on a region by region basis and will be completed in late 2012. The UK is also committed to clearing the 800 MHz band (790 – 862 MHz) to facilitate the introduction of new mobile broadband technologies. One of the impacts of DSO and Clearance is that some of the spectrum cleared of analogue broadcasting will be released for new uses. This is known as the Digital Dividend Review¹.

A consequence of these developments is that the configuration of spectrum currently available for PMSE use in UHF Bands IV and V (470-862 MHz) is changing.

600MHz Award (Ch31 to Ch37, 550 MHz – 606 MHz)

Use of the 600 MHz band was due to finish at the end of 2012 for PMSE because of the planned auction of the band. Following recent international developments relating to the possible future use of spectrum that neighbours with the 600 MHz band, Ofcom will not be proceeding with this auction for the time being. Therefore, in the absence of a 2012 award, Ofcom has decided that PMSE can continue using the spectrum until it is released for an alternative use. Consequently, access to the band 550 – 606 MHz for PMSE will continue until at least 1st April 2013 subject to a minimum notice period of 6 months. Such notice would not be given earlier than 6 months before 1st April 2013 i.e. before 1st October 2012. Access may carry on beyond that time subject to Ofcom's conclusions about the approach to releasing this band. JFMG will continue to issue 12-month licences but with a condition allowing for revocation with a minimum of six months notice.

Channels 69 and 38

In June 2009 Ofcom confirmed that channel 69 (854-862 MHz) will be cleared of PMSE use² in response to developments at a European level towards harmonising the 790-862 MHz band (the 800 MHz band) for new mobile broadband technologies. However, to help limit disruption to PMSE use, channel 38 has been set aside as a replacement to channel 69. Whilst channel 69 and indoor use of channel 38 are available across the whole of the UK, outdoor use of channel 38 is restricted in some areas until DSO is completed. The UK Wireless Microphone Licence authorises UK wide access to channel 69 and channel 38 indoor but contains geographical restrictions on outdoor use of channel 38.

To help with the sector's transition, for locations where channel 38 is not yet fully available outdoors, temporary access to additional frequency ranges in channels 39 or 40 has also been given. Availability of the permissible frequency ranges must be confirmed for each location prior to use through JFMG³

Terms of access for channel 38 differ from channel 69 in that the licence does not state specific spot frequencies; instead the permitted frequency ranges are given. Coordinated frequencies are not available in channel 38.

¹ <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/spectrum/project-pages/ddr/>

² <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/800mhz/statement/clearing.pdf>

³ <http://www.jfm.co.uk/JfmGcom/Wireless/Public/MicrophoneSh600.aspx>

Interleaved spectrum

While the outcome of international negotiations is not complete, and therefore a risk of changes to the DSO and Clearance Plan remains, it is considered that it is sufficiently stable in order to indicate future spectrum availability for PMSE. Ofcom has published a Statement on “Future access to interleaved spectrum for programme making and special events”⁴ which provides further details.

JFMG have produced a lookup tool⁵ which provides future geographical spectrum availability information for wireless microphones and monitors after DSO and Clearance is complete.

Temporary access to cleared spectrum

Ofcom has published the second consultation on assessment of future mobile competition and proposals for the award of 800 MHz and 2.6 GHz spectrum and related issues⁶. The consultation provides an update on spectrum availability for PMSE in the 800 MHz band (790 – 862 MHz). It states that as there is no clear evidence that the band would be used for new services before the end of 2012, and the clearance of Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) from the band will not be sufficiently advanced to allow access to the band by new services, PMSE use of channels 61 – 69 can continue throughout the UK until 31st December 2012.

Spectrum Access to 2010-2025 MHz

In its Statement, “Release of 2010 – 2025 MHz”⁷ published in February 2011, Ofcom considers that the band 2010 – 2025 MHz will be released through a competitive award and will not be reserved for PMSE use.

Temporary use of the band for PMSE is allowed on a rolling three-month notice period pending an award, with fees for access set on the same basis, and with technical licence conditions aligned with, other spectrum used by PMSE at 2-3 GHz. Ofcom will consult further on the detailed award process as soon as practicable

In the meantime, licences to access 2010-2025 MHz for PMSE use can still be obtained from JFMG.

Wireless camera use in the 7GHz band

The 7GHz band (7110-7250 MHz and 7300-7450 MHz) is already allocated for PMSE and annual UK-wide licences are available in a number of frequencies. Ofcom will keep this arrangement under review and reserves the right to stop issuing annual licences in the band where there is evidence of increased demand to use this spectrum.

You may also wish to note that the **band 5850-5925 MHz** is also available for wireless cameras, with geographical restrictions in the Hebrides and West Wales.

⁴ <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/bandmanager09/statement/pmse-future-access.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.jfmg.co.uk/jfmgecom/wireless/public/microphonedso.aspx>

⁶ <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/944166/summary/combined-award-2.pdf>

⁷ http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/release_2010_2025/statement/statement.pdf

Temporary access to the 2500-2690MHz band (the 2.6GHz band)

JFMG has been authorised by Ofcom to grant short-term licences for PMSE use of the band until the 2.6 GHz award takes place. Access to this spectrum is granted on three months notice to ensure PMSE licensees stop using the band by the time of the award. This access arrangement is detailed in the first consultation on assessment of future mobile competition and proposals for the award of 800 MHz and 2.6 GHz spectrum and related issues⁸ and is still in place.

In its Statement, "Reserving the band 2500 – 2690 MHz for the London 2012 Games"⁹ published in December 2010, Ofcom states that it will reserve the band for wireless cameras between 28th June and 23rd September 2012 in order to help satisfy the significant spectrum demand for the London 2012 Games.

Changes to PMSE uses in the 3.4 to 3.6 GHz band

In early December 2008, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) informed PMSE users that there was significant uncertainty surrounding their continued access to the 3.5 GHz band (two blocks at 3400-3440 MHz and 3500-3580 MHz). This followed a MoD Statement¹⁰ on its programme of spectrum liberalisation which had identified the 3.5 GHz band as a possible candidate for release to commercial users.

As of the 3 November 2011 the MOD has made the band 3500 – 3580 MHz available for short term sharing.

The MoD will advise Ofcom of any requests for spectrum sharing and define a geographical area within which PMSE use has to cease. No further licences will be issued for PMSE within these areas but any use already authorised will be allowed to conclude. Outside these exclusion areas PMSE access is allowed to continue under short-term licences.

The MoD will be releasing 3.4 – 3.6 GHz to market in 2015/2016.

The MoD has agreed that the PMSE blocks above should be available for PMSE use in and around official Olympic venues for the Olympic Games in 2012.

⁸ <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/combined-award/summary/combined-award.pdf>

⁹ <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/band-2500-2690-london-2012-games/statement/statement.pdf>

¹⁰ http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/40622FC9-DC7B-40FC-B48A-90408F6F7676/0/spectrumstatement_051208.pdf