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Dear Licensee,

The Digital Dividend and availability of channel 69 for wireless microphones

This letter is to make you aware that Ofcom is consulting on important proposals concerning the future availability of channel 69 (854-862 MHz) for wireless microphones.

Throughout our Digital Dividend Review, which has considered how best to release the spectrum freed up by digital switchover (DSO) for new uses, we have noted the importance that wireless-microphone users place on having access to high-quality, UK-wide spectrum. We had therefore envisaged channel 69 remaining available for wireless-microphone use in the future, albeit that access would be granted by a band manager rather than by us or our agents (currently JFMG).

However, an increasing number of other European countries are creating their own digital dividends that include channel 69 as well as two other channels 61 and 62, currently planned for other use by (digital terrestrial television) in the UK after DSO. This is because this spectrum is likely to be particularly suitable for new generations of mobile-broadband services. As a result, we have considered whether we should include these channels in the UK's digital dividend and concluded that there would be very substantial net benefits from making this change.

If we were to include channel 69 in the digital dividend, we must find other spectrum that is a suitable replacement for wireless microphones. We must also make sure that the change has as little adverse effect on users as possible. This includes ensuring existing licensees do not bear extra costs that must reasonably be incurred to move from channel 69.

We have proposed channel 38 (606-614 MHz) as the best alternative to channel 69 for wireless microphones. Channel 38 is available now across the UK, subject only to restrictions to protect a small number of radioastronomy sites. These restrictions will be removed during by 2012.

To facilitate moving wireless microphones from channel 69, we have also proposed that:

- users should have continued UK-wide access to the spectrum being released by DSO until late 2012;
- funding should be available to cover the cost of modifying or replacing existing licensed equipment able to use channel 69 but not channel 38.

Our proposals can be found at http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/800mhz/800mhz.pdf. We invite responses by 20 April 2009 and expect to announce our decisions shortly after.

You may also wish to note that wireless microphones can and will continue to be able to use channel 70 (863-865 MHz) without the need for a wireless telegraphy licence. Wireless microphones that use channel 69 may well be able to use channel 70 with little or no modification. Your equipment manufacturer may be able to advise you. However, you should also be aware that using spectrum on a licence-exempt basis does not confer the same protection from interference as licensed use.

If you would like to discuss the contents of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me using the details given above.

Yours sincerely,

John Canavan