

The spectrum used for Programme Making & Special Events and licensed on behalf of Ofcom by JFMG is currently undergoing a number of significant changes. This information sheet provides a brief description of the most significant developments and how they could affect PMSE use of spectrum in future. Please read carefully and contact us if you have any further queries.

The impact of Digital Switch-over for users of 470– 862MHz

Digital switch-over (DSO) will affect the entire UK when it starts in the Border region at the end of 2008; however for PMSE licensees who use the spectrum 470-862 MHz (UHF channels 21-69) it will have an additional impact.

Digital terrestrial TV requires fewer channels than analogue to transmit to the whole of the UK. Digital switchover will therefore result in the release of 14 UHF channels from broadcast use. As some of these are currently used for radio microphones and talkback, PMSE users will also be affected.

The DSO plan proposes that 32 UHF channels will be retained for digital terrestrial broadcasting. It is possible that other services, such as PMSE, could be interleaved in this spectrum in a similar fashion as is done currently. Ofcom, in line with its obligations under the Communications Act, is considering carefully how best use can be made of the interleaved and cleared spectrum after DSO as part of its Digital Dividend Review (DDR) project, including full consideration of the needs of PMSE users.

Ofcom plans to publish a consultation document on the Digital Dividend Review (<http://www.ofcom.org.uk/radiocomms/ddr/documents/ddroverview/#content>) by the end of 2006. This consultation will be considering technical, economic, market and social issues relating to use of the UHF spectrum. It will consider PMSE use of UHF spectrum alongside all other potential uses.

JFMG customers who hold licences for this spectrum have already been informed of the potential changes to spectrum availability in this band, and once more information is available from the DDR process, further updates will be provided. Most immediately, users should take careful account of this risk before making any decisions to invest in equipment for PMSE use in this band.

Use of 2500 – 2690MHz

The Radiocommunications Agency notified licensees in December 2002, of the closure of the 2500-2690MHz band to PMSE users on 31 December 2006 and the opening of 2025-2110MHz and 2200-2290MHz from 1st January 2003 as an alternative. The closure of the band is expected to make way for additional services. No final date has been set by Ofcom for an auction of this spectrum, but it is expected to be held during the course of 2007.

Given that it is undesirable for the spectrum to be unused for any significant period, Ofcom will allow PMSE licensees to continue to use the band beyond 31 December 2006. Ofcom currently expects to offer PMSE use beyond 31st December 2006 subject to a final notice period of a minimum of 3 months. Affected licensees have already been contacted.

Users should however take into account the likely cessation of access to this band before making any decisions to invest in equipment for PMSE use in this band

RRC and DAB in Band III (174-230 MHz)

There are two factors that will impact PMSE use of Band III (174-230 MHz) from the end of 2006.

First, in line with its notice in December 2004, Ofcom has confirmed that part of Band III will be released to provide more T-DAB capacity in the UK, resulting in the need for PMSE users to vacate this spectrum in time for the new T-DAB networks to become operational. The DAB licences are expected to be advertised towards the end of 2006 with PMSE licensees needing to vacate 211 – 217 MHz by 31 December 2007.

Ofcom and JFMG are currently working on a channel plan for those parts of Band III that will continue to be used for PMSE. It is hoped that the majority of existing PMSE users can be accommodated in the remaining channels, although there may be a requirement for some to move within the band. Ofcom and JFMG are conducting the channel planning with the objective of causing as little upheaval for users as possible.

Secondly, the introduction of T-DAB and DVB-T in the rest of Europe will also affect PMSE use. As a result of this year's Regional Radio Conference, Europe will replace analogue TV transmissions in Band III with digital transmissions. This international re-planning may mean that it is necessary to move some PMSE users in Band III.

Most immediately, users should take into account that assignments within the affected frequencies will be required to move before making any decisions to invest in equipment for PMSE use in this band.

Further information about Ofcom's plans for T-DAB can be found on the Ofcom website at: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/vhf/>

Auction of L-Band spectrum (1488-1491 MHz)

In January 2005, Ofcom published the "Spectrum Framework Review: Implementation Plan (SFRIP)". This can be found on the Ofcom website at: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/sfrip/>.

The statement announced that 1452-1492 MHz (part of L-Band) had been identified as spectrum that would be made available for award during 2006/07. PMSE use of 1488-1491 MHz within L Band has been at risk for a number of years and as a result the Radiocommunications Agency allocated the 1517–1525 MHz band as replacement spectrum some years ago. As a result of the impending award process, PMSE use will no longer be available in the 1488–1491 MHz band from 1 April 2007. Notice has been given to the users of the band.

Ofcom recently conducted a consultation process on the award of available spectrum at 1452-1492MHz.

This consultation closed on 9 June 2006 and the non-confidential responses to the consultation are available on the Ofcom website. Ofcom anticipates issuing a statement by the end of 2006 with the award planned to take place in the first half of 2007.

If you require any further information regarding any of the issues mentioned in this information sheet please contact Ofcom at pmse@ofcom.org.uk.