

Reference: 01713131

Information Requests
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

28 November 2023

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information concerning DAB frequency blocks 5A, 8C, 8D, 9D, 10A. Your request was received on 8 November 2023 and we have considered it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('the FOI Act').

Your request & our response

"Anyway, one issue I have identified is that certain blocks in early DAB consultations were earmarked for use for SSDAB but they would need clearing of PMSE. These are 5A, 8C, 8D, 9A, 10A.

I have monitored these blocks and PMSE use is extremely low. I'm trying therefore to find out more about what the plans are. I also appreciate clearance can take some time.

The questions therefore are:-

1: Why did the plan to reassign these to DAB not go ahead?"

We would like to clarify that one of the frequency blocks you are requesting about 'block 9A' is actually in use for small-scale DAB, not PMSE (Programme Making & Special Events). We have therefore provided our responses in relation to block **9D** instead of block **9A**, as block 9D is used by PMSE.

The frequency blocks enquired about are in use by assisted listening devices (ALDs) and PMSE (in block 5A) and PMSE (in blocks 8C, 8D, 9D, 10A).

At the ITU Geneva 2006 Broadcast planning conference, block 5A was allocated to a local DAB service for Suffolk. However, in 2012/13 Ofcom carried out coexistence [research](#) between DAB and ALDs and decided that the two services could not co-exist and as such Ofcom negotiated an agreement to use block 10C for Suffolk which has been brought into operation on that block, replacing 5A.

We do not hold any Ofcom consultations relating to small-scale DAB that considered reallocating blocks 8C, 8D, 9D or 10A for DAB use, nor do we have any plans to do so.

"2: What is the levels of usage of PMSE in these blocks? This may be a FOI - "How many PMSE licences have been issued in these blocks, and ideally break down per block"."

PMSE users have three options for gaining access to spectrum in the frequency blocks you are enquiring about. One option is to use a wireless microphone that operates on one of the licence-exempt frequencies (173.800, 174.000, 174.200, 174.400, 174.600, 174.800 or 175.000 MHz) which are all in block 5A. These frequencies are available for anyone with a compliant device to use. As we do not issue licences for these frequencies, Ofcom does not hold data on their usage.

The second option is to apply for an Ofcom light licence which gives users access to 15 shared frequencies that I have listed in the table below. Of these, 11 are within or on the boundary of the frequency blocks you have listed.

Shared freq (MHz)	Relevant DAB block	Shared freq (MHz)	Relevant DAB block	Shared freq (MHz)	Relevant DAB block
175.250	5A	193.000	7C	208.600	9D
175.525	5A	199.700	8C	209.000	9D/10A
176.600	5B	200.300	8D	209.200	10A
191.900	7C	200.600	8D	209.600	10A
192.800	7C	208.300	9D	209.800	10A

We do hold information on the number of light licences issued. From 2019 to date, Ofcom has issued 380 light licences authorising access to those 15 frequencies. Users holding a licence can use any of the frequencies, and we do not hold information regarding which of those specific frequencies licensees have actually used or are using.

The third option is to apply to Ofcom for an allocated and licensed frequency, and we do hold information on the number of licences issued, and the frequencies allocated. Since 2019 there have been 157 allocations made in the frequency blocks you have listed. I have provided a table breaking down the number of licensed allocations made over that time by DAB block in the table below. We do not hold information regarding the levels of usage for each block, however, the number of allocations is a good indication of usage for each block.

Frequency block	5A	8C	8D	9D	10A
Number of allocations from 2019 to Nov 2023	9	43	23	71	11

“3: Is there any long-term plans for these blocks or to reassign them to SSDAB?”

There are currently no plans to make any changes to the allocation of Band III spectrum, including to the blocks you have listed. We will keep this under review bearing in mind usage by current users, and demand from other uses (and other considerations).

If you have any further queries, then please send them to information.requests@ofcom.org.uk quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely

Information Requests.

If you are unhappy with the response you have received in relation to your request for information and/or consider that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you ask us for an internal review of our decision, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom.

The following outcomes are possible:

- the original decision is upheld; or
- the original decision is reversed or modified.

Timing

If you wish to exercise your right to an internal review **you should contact us within two months of the date of this letter**. There is no statutory deadline for responding to internal reviews and it will depend upon the complexity of the case. However, we aim to conclude all such reviews within 20 working days, and up to 40 working days in exceptional cases. We will keep you informed of the progress of any such review. If you wish to request an internal review, you should contact information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Further information about this, and the internal review process can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office [here](#). Alternatively, the Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF