

Digital Dividend: 600 MHz band and geographic interleaved spectrum

British Entertainment Industry Radio Group (BEIRG)

Consultation response

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Introduction

The British Entertainment Industry Radio Group (BEIRG), which works for the interest of all users and manufacturers of radio microphones, in-ear monitor systems (IEMs) and talkback applications, has responded in some detail to previous consultations on the Digital Dividend Review (DDR). Given that the points made in previous submissions relating to the provision of sufficient quality and quantity of spectrum for Programme Making and Special Events (PMSE) and the contribution that PMSE makes to the social, cultural and economic life of the UK still stand, we have been advised by Ofcom that it is not necessary to go into the same depth in this document. Instead then, we would like to take this opportunity to reiterate some critical points.

Response

1. Ofcom must not do anything that will negate their ability to redress any shortfall in current or future spectrum availability for PMSE. In this context, a 'shortfall' would involve there being insufficient interference-free spectrum for PMSE to deliver its services at current and anticipated levels.
 - a. Ofcom are apparently confident that, even with the clearance and sale of the 800 MHz band, the geographic interleaved awards and the reconfiguration of television transmissions, there will be sufficient bandwidth within channel 38 and the remaining post-DSO interleaved spectrum (as will be awarded to the band manager) to meet historical peak demand in all but a very small number of locations¹ across the UK. This has not been proven. The outcome of the international negotiations will not be known until mid-way through this year at the earliest. Therefore, final white-space maps will probably not be published until the third quarter of 2010. Until they are published, it will not be possible to assess whether there will be a shortfall. Since awarding additional cleared spectrum in the 600 MHz band to the band manager with PMSE obligations would be the only way to redress PMSE spectrum shortfalls, Ofcom must not make any final decisions on the future of this band (including clearance and auction) until the final white space maps are published. In terms of PMSE spectrum requirements, Ofcom must take the London 2012 Olympic Games into account.
2. The geographic interleaved awards pose an additional complication. Until there is certainty about how much spectrum is being 'pinched from the band manager's pot', it still will not be possible to ascertain with certainty whether there will be a spectrum shortfall for PMSE use in any UK location. Therefore, until Ofcom rule out any further awards of interleaved spectrum to anyone but the band manager with PMSE obligations, no final decisions should be made on the future of the 600 MHz band. Indeed, the possibility of further geographic interleaved awards, which signal a continued erosion of spectrum available for PMSE, adds to the case for additional cleared spectrum to be awarded to the band manager for PMSE use.
3. In response to the request that Ofcom hold back cleared spectrum for PMSE, Ofcom stated that *'we note that the certainty we need to award the 600 MHz band and the certainty PMSE users want about the availability of interleaved spectrum will both be delivered by the outcome of negotiations with neighbouring countries. As a result, we do not think it is necessary to take a position on this now but will instead keep it under review'*². We trust that publication of this consultation document on the release of the 600 MHz band in no way indicates that Ofcom's thinking has changed. If it does indicate as much we would ask Ofcom to say so.
4. If it is confirmed that there will be no future shortfall in PMSE spectrum availability relative to current and anticipated demand and Ofcom feel able to release the 600 MHz band for services other than PMSE as a consequence, Ofcom must provide guarantees (in writing) that any new services deployed in this band do not interfere with PMSE in either channel 38 or the interleaved spectrum.

¹ Which will be addressed on a case-by-case basis

² <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/800mhz/statement/clearing.pdf> 5.12