



Regulatory Review

EUROPEAN REGULATORS FOCUS ON MOBILE SATELLITE SERVICE

By Gerry Oberst

Spectrum and regulation for mobile satellite service in Europe is a highly charged topic. A lot of the work on this controversy occurs at particular levels within the Electronic Communications Committee (ECC), which we have described in earlier columns as the pan-European body that draws together 46 countries from all corners of Europe to reach decisions on spectrum allocations and related subjects.



The difficulty in following the issues is always keeping track of which part of the ECC is involved. A substantial amount of the effort in the ECC happens at the working group level. Some of this work in the last month has occurred in three four specific groups, which contrast in levels of the ECC structure. Looking at these various groups helps explain, or at least to demonstrate, the complexity of the ECC.

The ECC maintains four permanent working groups: the working group on spectrum engineering (WGSE); numbering, naming and addressing (WGNNA); regulatory affairs (WGRA); and finally, frequency management (WGFM). These groups, each formally meeting about three times a year, maintain a set of project teams and other ad hoc groups.

In addition to those groups, the ECC also maintains project teams and other special groups, such as those for radio conference preparations, which makes keeping track of these busy spectrum managers very difficult. For mobile satellite issues concerning a potential MSS band, the ECC created a special joint project team on mobile satellite (JPT MSS) between the WGFM and the WGRA.

This so-called JPT MSS is relatively recent. Of older vintage is another ECC project team (the PT1) that has worked on yet another possible band for mobile satellite. This team was created to decide whether satellite services would have future access to expansion frequencies set aside for 3G services.

Thus, the mobile satellite operator must follow developments in at least the potpourri of the WGFM, the JPT MSS and the PT1, not to speak of other ECC groups that will have some say in the matter.

The ECC's PT1 met in mid January in Uppsala, Sweden. (ECC group meetings happen all around Europe, depending on which country will sponsor them, making for a hefty travel budget.) This group has engendered hundreds of documents in its four-year span. It has focused mainly on the use of the band 2500-2690 MHz and already is preparing for the next world radio question in 2007. Many hard battles were fought by that project team over satellite access to the band.

The WGFM also met in late January, with mobile satellite issues on the agenda, in Utrecht, The Netherlands. As usual, the meeting was held over a five-day period. The agenda covered topics as diverse as spectrum for radars used to measure fuel tanks, hearing aid and medical telemetry frequencies, mobile phones on aircraft and many other hyper-specialized issues. Some fixed satellite issues were on the table along with a substantial mobile satellite report.

To focus on mobile satellite, the WGFM in January reviewed a report from the JPT MSS on bands between 1 to 3 GHz. The report includes the results of a questionnaire sent to member administrations in the ECC and industry, which is a common practice within the ECC family to obtain information.

By December last year, the JPT MSS had collected replies from 29 countries and 7 industry or operator representatives.

The JPT MSS is dealing with the 1980-2010 and 2170-2200 MHz band. Its questionnaire revealed that administrations indicated that there was no current satellite use of the band, but seven European systems have the intention to operate there, with a wide diversity of characteristics such as the satellite interface, network architecture or orbit.

The WGFM reviewed this report before it was sent upward in the hierarchy. The effect of the split among different regulatory bodies within the ECC is shown by the inquiry that the JPT MSS posed about terrestrial repeaters. The group noted preliminary information about plans of various administrations or operators to allow ancillary terrestrial repeaters or "gap fillers." However, the JPT MSS was not sure that it had authority to deal further with this issue and so referred the question back to its parent working groups for more instructions.

The picture that comes from these multiple groups is that mobile satellite issues can arise all over the "spectrum" of ECC groups. Each group reports to the others as the proposed decisions, recommendations or reports wend their way upward in the hierarchy, presenting multiple opportunities for input or comment.

At the end of the day, most final decisions on spectrum allocations, license exemptions or other important regulatory measures will be taken by the parent ECC. Even so, some matters can be adopted at the working group level with only cursory review at the ECC level. Thus, to influence, or just plan follow, regulatory concepts within the pan-European structure requires on-going review of a whole set of different bodies. ♦

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