

RSPG Position Paper on the Digital Dividend



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1. Introduction

Between 2004 and 2007 the RSPG produced a number of Opinions¹ offering guidance to the European Commission (EC) on a range of spectrum issues. Among the spectrum issues which are currently being examined by the EC is the Digital Dividend – the spectrum in UHF Bands IV and V (470-862 MHz) released as a result of the switchover from analogue to digital terrestrial television (DTT).

2. Objectives of the RSPG on the Digital Dividend

All of the European stakeholders with an interest in this issue, including the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the RSPG have recognised that there are significant societal and economic benefits to be gained from the unique opportunity of releasing a digital dividend in the UHF band. The issue for Europe is what and how best to harness those additional benefits to be realised at the national and European levels if Member States make available their digital dividends in an EU coordinated manner.

This Position Paper identifies a number of key issues to be reflected in a new RSPG Opinion on a part of the digital dividend, specifically the 800 MHz band (790-862 MHz), where a consensus view is emerging in Europe regarding its use on a non-mandatory harmonised basis for electronic communications networks and services, other than broadcast transmission networks and services. While not addressed in the new Opinion the RSPG recognises the importance and value to society of the digital dividend below the 800 MHz band, (i.e. 174 – 230 MHz and 470 – 790 MHz) where it is foreseen that new enhanced broadcasting services will mainly be developed.

The key objective of the RSPG in undertaking this latest work on the Digital Dividend is to provide strategic policy advice to the EC on how best to support Member States' realisation of the digital dividend. In doing so, the RSPG encourages the promotion of competition and innovation in the provision of wireless services to society, the

¹ In particular the following: (i) RSPG Opinion on the EU Spectrum Implications of Switchover to Digital Broadcasting. RSPG04-55. 19 November 2004; (ii) RSPG Opinion on Wireless Access Policy for Electronic Communications Services (WAPECS). RSPG05-102. 23 November 2005; (iii) RSPG Opinion on the Introduction of Multimedia Services in particular in the Frequency Bands Allocated to the Broadcasting Service. RSPG06-143. 25 October 2006; and (iv) RSPG Opinion on the EU Spectrum Policy Implications of the Digital Dividend. RSPG07-161. 14 February 2007.

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application of technology and service neutrality principles and the potential benefits of an EU coordinated approach. It is the intention of the RSPG that this Position Paper and the related Opinion should promote a common understanding of the significant issues to be addressed.

While the detailed identification of the significant issues to be addressed is a matter for the new Opinion, in summary the issues include the range of potential services in the 800 MHz band; the availability of digital dividend spectrum in the 800MHz band on a coordinated basis; the timeframes for making available the digital dividend in the 800MHz band, international frequency coordination and the cost of clearing existing and current users from the 800MHz band.

The new RSPG Opinion will be subject to a public consultation before final adoption and onward transmission to the EC.

3. Proposals to address significant issues

The RSPG proposes that the Opinion should include the following recommendations to address the significant issues:

1. The EC to assess the advantages and disadvantages of options for a coordinated non-mandatory EU approach to the availability of the 800 MHz band for ECN and ECS, other than broadcast transmission networks and services.
2. The EC to act on the recommendations contained in the Opinion as quickly as possible in order to minimise EU level uncertainty in the ability of Member States to make available the 800 MHz band.
3. The EC to encourage Member States who are making available the 800 MHz band for new and/or enhanced ECN and ECS to apply WAPECS principles, particularly of service and technology neutrality, recognising that Member States may maintain broadcasting use in all or a portion of the band;
4. Any EU harmonisation of technical elements such as channelling arrangements and common and minimal (least restrictive) technical conditions should be based on the outcome of the CEPT work in response to relevant EC mandates;
5. The EC to encourage Member States to facilitate cross-border coordination agreements with the aim of enabling those administrations wishing to make available the 800 MHz band for ECN and ECS, other than broadcast transmission networks and services to do so, taking into account technical feasibility and the need for equitable access;
6. The EC to support Member States in renegotiating aspects of the GE06 Plan if necessary with countries outside the EU to allow them to realise and make available the 800 MHz band part of their digital dividend;
7. The EC to give further consideration through a review process to the merits of facilitating EU-wide long term availability of the 800 MHz band for mobile and fixed broadband applications;
8. The Member States, acting on a bi/multilateral basis should identify whether there are geographic clusters arising from commonalities between transitional activities and possible access to the 800 MHz band for ECN and ECS, other than broadcast transmission networks and services, noting the need to consider the requirements of countries adjacent to the cluster which may be affected.