

File Reference: X2003/316

«Address_block»

Dear «Dear»

I am writing to invite you to the inaugural meeting of a standing national committee tasked with preparing and maintaining a national strategic plan to assist individual jurisdictions in the future planning of their radiocommunications networks. The Premiers and Chief Ministers of all jurisdictions, the Minister for Justice and Customs, the Minister for Defence, and the Attorney-General support the formation and work of this committee. It is anticipated that the committee would report to COAG from time to time on matters of significance.

The need for this committee arose from the work of the Intergovernment Spectrum Harmonisation Committee (ISHC), which formed in 2001 to explore the level of support across Commonwealth, State and Territory jurisdictions for such an activity. A consortia of jurisdictions felt it desirable for this exploration to occur, having recognised the disparate developments in government mobile radio networks and a diminishing capacity to support interoperability; the ACA facilitated the subsequent activity.

Last November, the ACA Chairman wrote to the above-mentioned parties on behalf of the ISHC, with advice that the ISHC believed it to be in Australia's long term interest for this work to proceed, and sought the support of jurisdictions. At its sixth and final meeting in August this year the members of the ISHC considered the summary of responses received and invited the ACA to now write to you, in accordance with the Chairman's letter. I have included a copy of the letter ([Attachment A](#)) and a summary of responses received ([Attachment B](#)) for your information, and note that the letter provides a useful summary of the issues facing the new committee.

In terms of the committee's constituency, members would represent the nine national, state and territory jurisdictions, with four government groups with national interest in mobile radio having observer status. They are:

- the Australian Communications Authority¹;
- the Department of Defence;
- Emergency Management Australia; and
- the Security Services Spectrum Committee.

¹ The ACA is a federal government regulator of radiocommunications and telecommunications.

The new committee might choose to invite further observer groups or otherwise change the existing arrangements in the future, should the need arise. The new committee might wish also to consider a suitable name for itself, now that the task is defined.

As the ACA Chairman advised last year, the ACA would be pleased to organise the initial meeting and then leave the committee to appoint its own chair and agree on its procedures. The recent ISHC meeting undertook some preliminary work in this regard and raised the following possibilities for the position of chair:

- Australian Communications Authority;
- Emergency Management Australia (EMA);
- Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA);
- rotating chair; or
- paid external chair.

The ACA remains of the view that it should not chair the new committee, as achieving the broader objectives, including the required degree of radiocommunications interoperability, relates principally to jurisdictions developing and maintaining a collective political will to do so, supported by consistent service delivery strategies. The ACA believes that leadership from the jurisdictions is therefore the appropriate approach.

The EMA representative at the ISHC meeting advised that EMA did not believe it would be appropriate for that organisation to chair the new committee, concerned that the committee could then be perceived as commonwealth led. EMA also noted its observer status.

Since the meeting, DCITA has advised that it considers it would not be appropriate for it to chair the committee; DCITA iterated that the Department's role is to maintain an understanding of the issues in order to effectively administer the Radiocommunications Act on behalf of the Minister (hence the value of being kept informed of the new committee's activities).

The first challenge for the new committee appears to be to find a suitable chairing arrangement. To this end, I ask addressees to discuss the matter off-line and come to the next meeting with advice on a chairman for the new committee. It would be appropriate also to determine off-line how the committee's associated secretarial needs might be supported. Members might also see a collective benefit in having two personnel to represent their jurisdictions more effectively, namely a high level policy officer and a technical adviser. I note that some jurisdictions have already adopted this approach.

During its life the ISHC established a set of objectives that it saw as relevant to this activity. I have included them at [Attachment C](#) to assist the future work of the new committee.

I think it would be appropriate to hold the first meeting as soon as practicable, and propose Wednesday, 26 November 2003. The venue would be the ACA's offices at

200 Queens Street, Melbourne, starting at 10:00 am. Following the appointment of a chairman and secretary at the start of the meeting, it would be appropriate to progress the following matters:

- terms of reference, if needed;
- affirmation of membership, including observers;
- review of suitability of objectives developed by the ISHC;
- funding arrangements to support the committee's work, if needed;
- reporting to COAG;
- relationship of this standing committee to other high level committees, eg, APMC committees;
- strategies to expand agency awareness of the committee and its role within jurisdictions; and
- scoping and development of the core task.

You might wish to add other matters when the agenda is being prepared.

I have written to all proposed nominees for the new committee – contact details are at Attachment D. I encourage those of you who were not previously members of the ISHC to approach your past ISHC member(s) for any additional information that might assist in your preparations.

If you have any questions or require further advice on this matter, please feel free to contact Len Bray of my team on (02) 6219 5246, or len.bray@aca.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

[signed]

Geoff Hutchins
Manager
Spectrum Planning Team
Radiofrequency Planning Group

17 October 2003

Attachments:

A. ACA Chairman's Letter 12 November 2002

The following attachments are not included in the web release material:

B. Summary of Responses to ACA Chairman's Letter

C. ISHC – Objectives

D. New committee members

ACA CHAIRMAN'S LETTER 12 NOVEMBER 2002
COPY ONLY

File Ref: X2001/2306

<title> <fname> <lname> <letters>
<position>
<address>>
<citystate>

Dear <salut>

Planning for Government Radio Networks

Early last year the Australian Communications Authority (ACA) was asked to assist in facilitating a series of meetings to explore opportunities for the development of a strategic plan that would meet the future mobile radio needs of the Commonwealth and the States and Territories for their government radio networks. In late March and early April 2001, I wrote to Chief Executive Officers of Premiers' and Chief Ministers' Departments of all Australian jurisdictions, and to Commonwealth Government representatives, seeking agreement to such a proposal and asking for nominations of appropriate representatives.

All jurisdictions agreed to participate and their nominated representatives have met as a group five times since May 2001. The group's working title is the Inter-government Spectrum Harmonisation Committee (ISHC). The ACA has provided the chair and secretariat services in an interim capacity.

The ISHC has advised me of its findings, as follows.

- There are international moves to standardise the blocks of radiofrequency spectrum used for emergency situations and disaster relief. This issue will be debated at the next International Telecommunication Union (ITU) World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC) in June 2003 in Geneva, Switzerland. (The ACA strongly supports this objective of international harmonisation, and has been an active participant in this work.)
- Most Australian jurisdictions have, to varying degrees, introduced "whole-of-government" radio networks over the last decade or so, and some are currently working on the delivery of next generation government radio networks intended to provide new voice and data radio services for their agencies. Whole-of-government networks have been pursued by State and Territory jurisdictions for a range of beneficial reasons. (From the ACA's perspective, they deliver improved efficiencies in radiofrequency spectrum use.)

- The Australasian Police Ministers' Council has been considering the strategic communications needs of police agencies nationally to the extent of having commissioned the development of a strategic plan for law enforcement.
- Reports from the USA in the wake of September 11 strongly suggest that radio is a strategic communication application and the lack of a national approach is likely to cause significant problems in any operation involving different services from different jurisdictions.
- While there is support for national interoperability for certain agencies across jurisdictions, there is clearly a potential conflict between the proposals of individual jurisdictions to vertically integrate public sector radio networks and nationally based horizontal integration strategies across particular sectors.
- Unless there is a national agreement to look for solutions that accommodate all these issues, the ACA's ability to find adequate spectrum to meet all needs is made even more difficult than it is now.
- It is recognised that any future domestic planning would sensibly take into account any decisions made by the ITU in 2003.

It should also be recognised that, of itself, harmonisation of spectrum will not achieve interoperability. Compatibility of the equipment is also necessary. There are also likely to be other issues relating to operational procedures and agency cultures that are unrelated to spectrum or equipment. So, if interoperability is an objective, it cannot be brought about by spectrum allocations alone; it needs to be underpinned by the collective political will of the jurisdictions and pursued through future government radio network acquisitions.

As a consequence, the ISHC has concluded that there is a need for a standing national committee, whose members can represent Commonwealth, State and Territory jurisdictions, to prepare and maintain a national strategic plan to assist both the ACA and individual jurisdictions in planning their radiocommunications requirements.

Accordingly, the ACA has been asked to write again to seek your support for such a proposal, which would be a significant step forward for national and local radiocommunications planning for government. Without initial and ongoing jurisdictional support the proposal cannot succeed.

The proposed committee would represent the nine National and State and Territory jurisdictions, and the ISHC has suggested that four government groups with a national interest in mobile radio should be granted observer status. They are:

- the Australian Communications Authority;
- the Department of Defence;
- Emergency Management Australia; and
- the Security Services Spectrum Committee.

If there is agreement to the proposal, the ACA would be pleased to organise the initial meeting and then leave the committee to elect its own chair and agree on its procedures. I understand that there are arrangements in place for sharing the costs of such inter-Government projects. Consideration

could also be given as to whether the Council of Australian Governments should endorse the committee's deliberations.

The ACA would welcome a coordinated national approach to radiofrequency spectrum planning for government purposes. I appreciate the support given by the jurisdictions and their representatives in reaching agreement on the concept.

I look forward to receiving your response and confirmation of your representative.

All Premiers and Chief Ministers, the Attorney-General, the Minister for Justice and Customs, and the Minister for Defence have received this letter.

Yours sincerely

[signed]

A J SHAW

12 November 2002