

# Special events: licence guidelines

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# Background

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (the ACMA) is responsible for the regulation of broadcasting, radiocommunications, telecommunications and online content. The ACMA plans the availability of segments in the broadcasting services bands—VHF and UHF television, FM and AM radio.

The ACMA can make unallocated broadcasting spectrum available for alternative uses, such as open narrowcasting services. Open narrowcasting services are defined in section 18 of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (the Act) as being services whose reception is limited in some way. The limitation can be that they:

- > are targeted to a special interest group
- > are limited by location
- > are provided during a limited period or to cover a special event
- > provide programs of limited appeal, or
- > for some other reason.

In the case of services for special events, open narrowcasting services are services that are limited to the coverage of that event. When making spectrum available for services that cover a special event, the ACMA attempts to balance longer-term public interest considerations against high levels of immediate demand for access to broadcasting spectrum. While the ACMA is responding to this demand, it is not intended to be at the expense of the main task of planning spectrum for mainstream broadcasting services.

# What is a special event?

The ACMA defines a special event as:

**a distinct and organised event of major sporting, cultural or other community significance.**

The Explanatory Memorandum to the Act gives the following as examples of the types of events referred to in the legislation:

sporting events such as the Adelaide Grand Prix [now the Australian Grand Prix], the Olympic or Commonwealth Games, various championships etc.; cultural events such as horticultural or flower shows, artistic exhibitions, etc

For open narrowcasting services for radio, section 8 of the Broadcasting Services Clarification Notice 2016 states:

## *Special event*

- (1) This section applies if the broadcasting service is provided for a continuous period of not more than 30 days to cover an event that:
  - (a) has major cultural significance, sporting significance or other community significance; and
  - (b) is organised by 1 or more persons.
- (2) The broadcasting service is an open narrowcasting service.

*Note* While it is likely that cultural and sporting events of major significance will be organised by 1 or more persons, it should not be presumed that all events are organised in a way that meet the requirements of subsection (1). For example, events such as the Moomba Festival and the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race are clearly organised. On the other hand, the ski season, which occurs if and when particular weather conditions exist, is an example of an event which is not an 'organised' event for the purposes of this section.

However, this clause does not limit the ACMA's discretion in relation to services for special events.

Special event licences will be limited to coverage of the event, and will normally be granted to cover a short period (that is. licences will not normally be granted for a period longer than 30 days) coinciding with the duration of the special event, and may include one or two days before the event for testing.

# Approach to special event licensing

The following should be noted:

- > Special event applications must be received eight weeks before the licence is required.
- > Where there is no frequency readily available for special event purposes, the ACMA will spend a limited time (no more than two days) searching for an alternative lower power frequency for any special event licence. This will focus on 'highly localised' spectrum use, that is, spectrum using relatively low power that will serve only the precise special event purpose for the precise location.
- > One special event licence will be issued for one event to the event organiser or a peak body. If there is no event organiser, or where there are competing claims from applicants about who the peak body is (that is, for religious celebrations), if there is a frequency available, the ACMA will ask applicants (seven weeks prior to the event) to put forward a proposal for a shared air-time arrangement no later than three weeks before the event. If applicants do not come to a sharing arrangement, the ACMA will, after consultation with applicants, allocate licences equally to the applicants over the period of the event.

## **Note**

Under section 114 of the *Radiocommunications Act 1992*, open narrowcasting licensees may, in writing, authorise other persons to operate a transmitter under the licence. This arrangement is an agreement between the two parties only. However, upon request, the authorisation must be made available to the ACMA.

# Technical specifications

The transmitter signal power, commonly known as effective radiated power (ERP), is determined on the basis of the coverage requirements for a particular area. The useable signal strength requirement depends on the environment. Higher signal strength is required in urban (as distinct from rural) areas to overcome the higher level of manufactured noise.

Transmitter licences for special events may be granted for either television or radio and usually use planned FM radio frequencies and UHF television channels.



# How to apply

Follow the steps below to apply for a transmitter licence for a special event:

1. Complete form ACMA B12 and the ACMA Special Events Checklist (available on the [ACMA website](#)) to accompany an application for a transmitter licence for a special event.
2. Attach the checklist (and supporting documents) to the completed form ACMA B12 and send or email to the ACMA at the address below.
3. Applications must be submitted at least eight weeks before the special event. Applications submitted less than eight weeks before the event may not be processed in time.
4. If your application is approved, you will be required to pay a transmitter licence tax. Copies of the fee schedule are available from the [ACMA website](#).

## Where to get more information

For more information about special event licences, contact:

The Australian Communications and Media Authority  
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