



# Communications policy objectives for the allocation of the 850 and 900 MHz bands

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## Introduction

The object of the Radiocommunications Act 1992 provides for the management of the radiofrequency spectrum in order to, amongst other objectives, “maximise, by ensuring the efficient allocation and use of the spectrum, the overall public benefit derived from using the radiofrequency spectrum”, and “support the communications policy objectives of the Commonwealth Government”. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has proposed to optimise and allocate, using a market-based process in Q4 2021, the 850 MHz expansion band and 900 MHz band to facilitate the efficient allocation and use of these bands. The below communications policy objectives for the 850 and 900 MHz bands are intended to help guide decisions of relevance to ACMA’s proposed allocation of these bands. In some cases, different objectives may need to be balanced against each other, or require trade-offs to be made.

## Communications policy objectives

### Supporting the deployment of 4G and 5G technologies

The Government’s [5G—Enabling the future economy](#) directions paper identified that the Government would support the early deployment of 5G in Australia by making spectrum available in a timely manner. The 3.6 GHz band was the first band made available in Australia for the deployment of 5G services, with spectrum licences allocated in December 2018. The 26 GHz band will follow, with an allocation planned in early 2021. Currently, the 850 and 900 MHz bands are not properly optimised for 4G or 5G services. A reconfiguration will support the deployment of 4G and 5G networks and support more efficient use of the spectrum. Lower-band spectrum, such as the 850 and 900 MHz bands, is important for broader 4G and 5G coverage, including in regional Australia, and will complement holdings of 5G-suitable mid and high-band spectrum.

### Promoting competitive market outcomes for the long term benefit of consumers

The Government wants to promote competitive outcomes for the long term benefit of consumers, in order to encourage a range of choice in consumer products and place downward pressure on consumer prices. The Government recognises that spectrum allocations contribute to competitive outcomes in telecommunications markets for the long term benefit of consumers. Allocation settings, such as price and allocation limits, can influence competition in spectrum markets and, subsequently, downstream markets.

## Encouraging investment in infrastructure, including in regional Australia

The Government supports continued investment in mobile and fixed broadband infrastructure and networks. It recognises that allocation processes and licensing arrangements can contribute to, or detract from, this objective. The licensing arrangement in the 850 and 900 MHz bands should provide industry with long-term certainty to encourage operators to invest in telecommunications infrastructure across Australia, including in regional areas.

## Supporting continuity of services

The Government recognises the existing uses and users of services operating in the 850 and 900 MHz bands. A reconfiguration of the bands can deliver greater capacity for wireless services and support carriers to deploy 4G and 5G wireless broadband services, improving the quality of services for existing customers. The Government will work with industry to promote continuity of services in the band and seek to minimise any potential impact to consumers as a result of changes to spectrum holdings.

## Supporting a national PSMB capability

The 850 MHz expansion band has been identified as a possible candidate to support a future public safety mobile broadband (PSMB) capability. The Government is prepared to reserve spectrum for PSMB, subject to the outcomes of continued discussions with state and territory governments. In December 2018, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to a Strategic Roadmap for a national PSMB network. All jurisdictions agreed to continue to work together to resolve supporting spectrum arrangements in parallel with proof of concept trials.