AUSTRALIAN AIRPORTS ASSOCIATION

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Manager, Spectrum Licensing Policy
Australian Communications and Media Authority
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Law Courts
Melbourne VIC 8010
By upload: spectrumworkprogram@acma.gov.au

Submission – Next Generation Body Scanners and the Draft Five-Year Spectrum Outlook 2026-31 and 2026-27 Annual Work Program

Dear Manager

The Australian Airports Association (AAA) welcomes the opportunity to lodge this submission in response to the Australian Communications and Media Authority's Draft Five-Year Spectrum Outlook 2026-31 and 2026-27 Annual Work Program.

The AAA welcomes ACMA's indication in the draft work program that it intends to undertake preliminary scoping studies into the requirements of body scanners and potential new market offerings, with a view to possibly reviewing the Radiocommunications (Body Scanning - Aviation Security) Class Licence 2018. This is a constructive and timely step in ensuring the spectrum framework remains fit for purpose as technologies evolve.

The AAA supports progression of this work as part of the 2026–27 work programme and recommends that the scoping include consideration of whether the current class licensing framework remains sufficiently enabling to accommodate emerging technologies, including systems that may operate in the 20–40 GHz frequency range alongside existing authorised technologies.

In doing so, the AAA encourages ACMA to consider mechanisms that allow for sufficient regulatory flexibility to readily accommodate changes to frequency ranges as new and emergent technologies become available, enabling ongoing optimisation of security outcomes without the need for disproportionate regulatory amendment. The AAA also encourages ACMA to provide, where appropriate, an indicative pathway for stakeholder consultation on any proposed regulatory changes arising from that work.

The AAA's submission is directed to the spectrum licensing framework only. It seeks to support a technology-enabling regulatory environment that does not unnecessarily preclude consideration of newer body scanner systems where they may become suitable for Australian use. The AAA is not proposing any requirement to replace existing scanners, adopt any particular technology, or alter current aviation security settings, procurement decisions or deployment obligations. Any decision to approve, procure, deploy or operate particular screening technologies should remain

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subject to separate security, operational, regulatory and commercial assessments by the relevant agencies and operators.

Recommendation

1. proceed with the proposed preliminary scoping studies into body scanner requirements and new market offerings
2. ensure the scoping considers whether the Radiocommunications (Body Scanning – Aviation Security) Class Licence 2018 remains appropriate, including whether it accommodates potential future technologies operating across a broader frequency range (such as 20–40 GHz), alongside existing authorised technologies
3. examine the technical, coexistence and implementation issues associated with any such change, including appropriate operating conditions and safeguards
4. indicate an expected pathway and timing for public consultation on any proposed amendments to the class licence

About the AAA

The AAA is the leading advocate for appropriate national policy relating to airport activities. The AAA represents the interests of more than 340 airports and aerodromes across Australia, including all Designated, Tier 1 and Tier 2 security controlled airports where aviation security screening equipment is deployed. The AAA also represents more than 150 corporate members who provide products and services to the aviation industry, including security screening technology providers.

Why this issue matters for the aviation sector

Body scanners are an integral part of aviation security and are a key frontline tool in the detection of both traditional and emerging threats. However, airport operators and screening authorities continue to experience operational challenges with existing technologies, including high false alarm rates and limited ability to reliably detect smaller metallic and non-metallic threat items.

High false alarm rates slow screening processes, contribute to longer passenger queues and increase the volume of secondary inspections. These outcomes reduce screening efficiency, increase staffing and operational pressures, and in some cases cause distress or discomfort for passengers.

The body scanners currently deployed at Australian airports also do not offer the same degree of passenger privacy or gender neutrality as newer technologies now entering the market. The AAA is keen to reduce the incidence of secondary inspections and to support the adoption of equipment that better protects passenger privacy and dignity while maintaining strong security outcomes.

Newer body scanner technologies may offer improved resolution and have been reported in overseas regulatory and program materials to improve threat detection and reduce false alarms compared with legacy systems. Their higher system capability may also provide greater flexibility to respond to changes in the threat environment over the life of the equipment.

There may also be passenger facilitation benefits if improved performance reduces friction at the security screening point. Any assessment of suitability for Australian use should remain subject to separate security, operational and certification processes.

Current class licensing framework

Body scanners currently operate at Australian airports under the Radiocommunications (Body Scanning - Aviation Security) Class Licence 2018, made under section 132 of the Radiocommunications Act 1992. Under section 6(1) of that instrument, an authorised person must operate a body scanner in either the frequency range from 24.25 GHz to 30 GHz or the frequency range from 67 GHz to 80 GHz.

The AAA understands that some newer body scanner systems now available internationally operate across the 20-40 GHz frequency range. These systems are not presently accommodated by the Australian class licence. Overseas regulatory and program materials indicate that some such systems may offer operational and passenger benefits, including improved resolution and the potential for reduced false alarms, improved privacy outcomes and enhanced threat detection capability.

Response to the draft work program

The AAA welcomes ACMA's proposal to undertake preliminary scoping studies into body scanner requirements and potential new market offerings. That proposal is an important acknowledgement that the current framework may need to be reconsidered in light of technology developments and emerging market offerings.

The AAA has raised this issue in earlier submissions, and the inclusion of preliminary scoping work in the draft 2026-27 work program is therefore welcome. However, the issue now warrants timely consideration so that the spectrum framework remains enabling rather than restrictive.

In particular, the AAA considers that the scoping work should be directed not only to the existence of new body scanner technologies, but also to the practical regulatory question of whether, and if so how, the current class licence could be amended to permit systems operating in the 20-40 GHz range alongside existing authorised technologies.

To assist orderly planning, the AAA encourages ACMA to make clear that the scoping studies will consider likely operational requirements for next-generation body scanners, coexistence and interference management issues associated with operation in the 20-40 GHz range, whether amendments to the current class licence are the most appropriate regulatory mechanism, and what consultation and implementation pathway would be required if ACMA decides to pursue change.

Why timely action is needed

Timely progression of this work will assist in maintaining a clear and enabling regulatory pathway for consideration of future technology. Even where there is a sound case for regulatory change, there is necessarily a lead time between preliminary scoping, public consultation, final decision-making and the commencement of any amended licensing arrangements.

For airports and screening authorities, procurement planning for major security screening equipment can begin well in advance of deployment. If the spectrum framework does not allow

for consideration of newer systems, Australian airports and screening authorities may have fewer lawful options available to them when assessing future equipment needs.

Progressing this work within the current 2026-27 cycle will help to provide greater clarity to the market and support the continued use of existing authorised systems and enable informed, forward planning by industry participants..

Next steps

The AAA and its members would welcome the opportunity to work with the ACMA, the Department of Home Affairs and the Cyber and Infrastructure Security Centre to support this work. We would be pleased to facilitate engagement with airport operators, screening authorities and equipment manufacturers to assist ACMA's scoping studies with relevant operational and technical input.

For any further information about this submission, please contact [redacted], Senior Manager Regulatory Affairs, on [redacted] or at [redacted].

Kind regards

[redacted]

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