



A woman walks past an NBTC office advertisement for the 1800-megahertz spectrum auction. SOMCHAI POOMLARD

TECHNOLOGY

NBTC surprises with October auction

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The next round of the 1800- and 900-megahertz spectrum auctions has been rescheduled to take place in October, four months before the initial projected date.

The board of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) passed a resolution for the auctions yesterday.

The regulator decided that rescheduling was a key factor in deciding if Total Access Communication (DTAC) should be awarded a remedy period for its 360,000 customers using mobile service on the 850MHz network after the concession expires on Sept 15.

If the regulator awards a remedy period, it needs to determine how long it should be, said NBTC secretary-general Takorn Tantasith.

The third round of the 1800MHz auction and the second round of the 900MHz auction will take place simultaneously in October. They were initially scheduled for February 2019.

Details for the two auctions will be settled at a board meeting on Sept 12, along with the remedy approval.

DTAC REMEDY UNDECIDED

The seven commissioners on the NBTC board could not reach a resolution yesterday on whether to provide a remedy period for DTAC.

Mr Takorn said three commissioners voted to deny DTAC a remedy period to continue providing mobile service on the 850MHz network after the Sept 15 expiry of its concession.

Two commissioners voted to award DTAC a remedy period of up to 30 days to benefit consumers, and the final two abstained.

"The [remedy] issue is crucial and sensitive. The board will make a final decision next Wednesday," he said.

The commissioners want to grant a short remedy period to DTAC in order to press the mobile provider into entering the 900MHz auction in order to retain their 850MHz customers.

DTAC cited that overall 21 million customers may be disconnected from mobile service in some areas where there is only 850MHz coverage.

Mr Takorn also said the board questioned why DTAC bid only for a 5MHz licence in the 1800MHz licence auction and sat out the 900MHz auction, given that DTAC does not have enough spectrum bandwidth to serve users under the existing 2G mobile concession.

On July 2, the NBTC board approved a resolution pressing DTAC into the 900MHz spectrum auction as a condition for the remedy regulation.

DTAC earlier submitted its customer protection plan to the NBTC, asking the regulator to temporarily use 10x2MHz upload and download of bandwidth on the 850MHz spectrum until all customers are transferred off the network, as stipulated by the original concession terms.

DTAC provides service on the 1800- and 850MHz spectra under the concession, which will expire on Sept 15.

The NBTC held a second auction round

for the 1800MHz spectrum licences on Aug 19, and only two blocks of nine blocks of licences were sold, each block containing 5MHz of bandwidth (5x2).

For the 900MHz licence, the NBTC tried to auction one licence on the 900MHz to replace DTAC's existing 850MHz block. But none of the operators submitted bid documents at the June deadline.

Mr Takorn said the NBTC is amending the existing auction conditions for both the 1800- and 900MHz licences for a longer licence payment span, from three and four years, respectively, to eight years for both bands, with a view to boosting interest.

For the 900MHz licence specifically, the regulator will also lift the condition that licence winners must be solely responsible for any and all interference on upcoming railway projects, which are on both the 850- and the 900MHz spectra.