

700MHz auction postponed from February to 3rd quarter

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The telecom regulator has extended the timeline for the 700MHz spectrum auction from the original date in February 2019 to the third quarter.

The soonest the 700MHz range could be used for wireless broadband service, 5G in particular, would be in early 2020, in line with the government's roadmap for 5G adoption in the country, said Col Natee Sukonrat, vice-chairman of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC).

The broadcasting entities now using 700MHz will be shifted to other ranges because this spectrum must be used for wireless broadband to comply with global standards.

News of the delay comes after the first meeting between the NBTC subcommittee working on recall of the 700MHz spectrum and related parties such as digital TV operators, telecom operators and broadcasting network providers. Col Natee chairs the subcommittee.

The procedure of recalling the 700MHz spectrum is in line with Section 27 of the amended Frequency Allocation Act that went into effect on June 22. The section states that the regulator must recall

spectrum slots not being used efficiently and reallocate them via the auction method.

In addition, the new law lets the regulator pay compensation to spectrum holders to facilitate greater arrangement of spectrum as a national resource.

The subcommittee aims to serve the digital transformation roadmap of Thailand 4.0 and 5G adoption, as well as ease the financial burden on digital TV operators.

Col Natee said part of the planned auction of 700MHz spectrum is targeted for use to subsidise the existing financial burden of digital TV operators.

After the first meeting, Col Natee said all parties expressed support for rearranging the 700MHz spectrum and helping digital TV operators.

Digital TV operators that use the 700MHz band want the NBTC to transfer part of the winning bids from the auction directly to an NBTC fund for the public benefit, the same concept as the previous auction of digital TV licences.

The telecom operators, meanwhile, want longer terms for licence payment that will not create too much financial burden.

The broadcasting network providers urged the NBTC to give a proper rate of compensation to them in exchange for the cost of upgrades and the spectrum reshuffle.