

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

New NBTC board preps panels to vet merger

KOMSAN TORTERMMVASANA

The newly appointed board of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) has resolved to set up four subcommittees to vet the planned merger of True Corporation and Total Access Communication (DTAC).

The subcommittees are in the fields of law; consumer protection and civil rights; technology; and economics.

These panels replace a subcommittee previously set up by the former NBTC board in February to scrutinise the merger after True and DTAC submitted a joint report of their merger plan to the regulator in January.

The new board is trying to deal with the merger cautiously as it is being watched by the public.

Trairat Viriyasirikul, deputy secretary-general of the NBTC, said the new board approved a task roadmap governing the merger deal.

Apart from establishing the four subcommittees, the board resolved to organise meetings with three focus groups: academics, consumers and related businesses. The board also assigned its management and independent advisers to study the social and economic impacts of the deal.

A source in NBTC management

who requested anonymity said the creation of the four panels was proposed by board member Suphat Suphachalalai.

Scrapping the former single subcommittee and setting up four new ones to vet the deal would inevitably affect the timeline of the planned merger, as the panel is responsible for ironing out measures to govern the deal, the source said.

"It is impossible for the four subcommittees to wrap up their work within the next two weeks. True previously expected the NBTC to unveil the measures governing the deal by May 15," the source said.

True has insisted its merger plan with DTAC cannot be delayed from its proposed timeline targeting completion by mid-June, despite a reshuffle of the telecom regulator's board. True sent letters to all five NBTC board members last week to update them on the merger procedure and reiterate the company's timeline.

The merger was announced in November 2021 as a plan to create a new technology company to move into advanced technology, such as artificial intelligence, the cloud, the Internet of Things and space tech. The merger has drawn flak from academics and consumer advocates who say it would lead to market dominance and reduce competition.