

CHANGE UP

The regulator and DES Ministry indicated an auction for 5G bandwidth on the 3500MHz range may not happen until 2021. **B3**

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

3500MHz likely delayed until 2021

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The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) has signalled the 3500-megahertz range is unlikely to be auctioned for the 5G network this year, a move that could affect Total Access Communication (DTAC), which holds less spectrum bandwidth than bigger rivals.

Referring to talks with Digital Economy and Society (DES) Minister Buddhipongse Punnakanta on Sunday, NBTC secretary-general Takorn Tantasith said the minister believes the planned auction for the 3500MHz range may not have to be sped up.

He said Advanced Info Service (AIS), through its subsidiary Advanced Wireless Network (AWN), won 100MHz of bandwidth on the 2600MHz range on Sunday's 5G licence auction, while True Move H Universal Communication (TUC) won 90MHz of bandwidth on the range and this "could be enough for both of them to develop their 5G adoption".

Mr Takorn said both he and Mr Buddhipongse believe mobile operators have already shouldered a substantial financial burden for 4G and 5G licensing, which has dampened their desire to gain additional spectrum ranges.

He said 5G use cases also need time for real commercial development for vertical industries.

Last month, the NBTC set up a working panel responsible for preparing the 3500MHz licence auction.

The 3500MHz range is being used by SET-listed satellite service provider Thaicom through its Thaicom 5 C-band satellite.

Mr Takorn accepted the 3500MHz range is the most popular spectrum or key band for 5G adoption for mobile operators.



We understand DTAC is aiming for 3500MHz, but it may not be available until late 2021.

PISUT NGAMVIJITVONG

Senior equity research analyst,
Kasikorn Securities

Eleven countries in Europe have launched 5G commercial service on the 3500MHz range through a variety of networks and devices provided by vendors.

An industry analyst who requested anonymity said the uncertain timeline for the 3500MHz licence auction would inevitably affect DTAC, which now holds less spectrum bandwidth than its rivals.

Pisut Ngamvijitvong, senior equity research analyst at Kasikorn Securities, regarded DTAC's decision not to participate in the 2600MHz range auction as a mistake.

AWN won 10 licences on the range and TUC secured another nine. CAT Telecom, which also bid, won none.

"DTAC lost the chance to piggyback on CAT as CAT failed to win any 2600MHz block," said Mr Pisut.

"We understand DTAC is aiming for 3500MHz, but it may not be available until late 2021."

He said if DTAC fails to deliver 5G services at the same time its rivals do, its brand would deteriorate and it would be at risk of losing high-end customers.