



## COVERSHEET

<b>Minister</b>	Hon Paul Goldsmith	<b>Portfolio</b>	Minister for Media and Communications
<b>Title of Cabinet paper</b>	Engagement on reallocation of radio spectrum for mobile use	<b>Date to be published</b>	15 December 2025

### List of documents that have been proactively released

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>
November 2025	Engagement on reallocation of radio spectrum for mobile use	Office of Minister for Media and Communications
3 November 2025	Engagement on reallocation of radio spectrum for mobile use CAB-25-MIN-0376.01 Minute	Cabinet Office

### Information redacted

**YES** / **NO** (please select)

Any information redacted in this document is redacted in accordance with MBIE's policy on Proactive Release and is labelled with the reason for redaction. This may include information that would be redacted if this information was requested under Official Information Act 1982. Where this is the case, the reasons for withholding information are listed below. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Some information has been withheld for the reasons of Commercial information, Fee and frank opinions and Confidential advice to Government.

## In Confidence

Office of the Minister for Media and Communications

Cabinet Economic Policy Committee

## Engagement on reallocation of radio spectrum for mobile use

### Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks agreement to:

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- 1.2 release a discussion document on allocating rights to use the 2300 MHz and 2600 MHz radio spectrum bands.

### Relation to government priorities

- 2 Effective management of radio spectrum supports economic growth and prosperity of New Zealanders through the provision of telecommunication services. Radio spectrum is a key input for the provision of communication services. Engagement with industry and Māori will inform policy decisions on future spectrum allocations.

### Executive Summary

- 3 Rights to the use of the 2300 MHz band and 2600 MHz band of radio spectrum expire in 2030 and 2028 respectively. These two bands of radio spectrum are commonly used for the provision of cellular mobile services (like 4G and 5G). By convention, Cabinet's approval is sought for significant commercial allocations, such as the 2300 and 2600 MHz bands, and industry is informed of the approach to allocations several years in advance of rights expiring.

- 4 In 2022, Ministers entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (the MOU) with the Māori Spectrum Working Group (MSWG) which affects future allocations of radio spectrum rights. Confidential advice to Government

Free and frank opinions

- 5 Confidential advice to Government, Commercial information

Confidential advice to Government

6 Free and frank opinions

- 7 To enable decisions on future allocations to be made in a timely manner (which provides industry with certainty and continuity of services), I propose to undertake Confidential advice to Government public consultation on the future of the 2300 MHz and 2600 MHz radio spectrum bands. The public consultation will inform future allocation decisions.
- 8 Following public consultation Confidential advice to Government I will seek policy decisions from Cabinet on future allocations of these bands Confidential advice to Government

## Background

### *Allocation and management of radio spectrum*

- 9 Radio spectrum is used to transmit and receive communication by wireless technologies – such as Wi-Fi, mobile phones, satellite services and AM/FM radio. The amount of usable spectrum for wireless technologies is limited and therefore requires a balance to be struck between economic benefits, social benefits, technical optimality, broader policy objectives and Māori interests.
- 10 The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) is responsible for managing spectrum – including the allocation of private commercial rights. However, by convention, Cabinet approval is typically sought for significant commercial allocations.
- 11 Effective management of radio spectrum seeks to ensure:
- 11.1 New Zealanders can choose and use the best wireless technologies for their needs
  - 11.2 radio spectrum is made available to service providers in a way that is in line with our national interest, including balancing economic and social benefit, and that aims to be technically optimal.
- 12 Allocations of rights to use radio spectrum can also generate significant revenue for the Crown. Commercial Information

**Commercial Information** While generating revenue is not the primary objective of spectrum allocation, competition can be enhanced and efficient use of spectrum incentivised through market-based allocation mechanisms (eg auctions).

*Rights for two spectrum bands expire within the next five years*

- 13 Rights in the 2300 MHz band and 2600 MHz band expire in 2030 and 2028 respectively. These frequencies are currently used by two mobile network operators (Spark and One NZ) for cellular services (4G and 5G) and regional wireless services (such as regional broadband).
- 14 Once expired, the spectrum reverts to the Crown, and any services using this spectrum must cease.

*Decisions on future allocations of the 2300 MHz and 2600 MHz bands need to be made in 2026*

- 15 To ensure continuation of services, new rights need to be allocated before the current rights expire. Decisions on future allocations require consideration of technical and policy objectives that enable efficient use of radio spectrum frequencies. This needs to consider the evolution of technologies and market dynamics since these rights were last allocated 20 years ago, and Māori interests in spectrum.
- 16 MBIE typically reviews rights allocations ahead of their expiry to determine future use of the relevant spectrum – this requires engagement with industry.

**Approach to allocation of spectrum to Māori**

*Māori interests in spectrum*

- 17 Some Māori consider radio spectrum to be a taonga and have longstanding interests in radio spectrum allocations. Over the last three decades, spectrum allocation to mobile network operators by the Crown has been challenged by Māori claimant groups through various Waitangi Tribunal claims and the Courts.
- 18 In previous allocations of spectrum to the mobile industry, past Governments have rejected the findings of the Waitangi Tribunal but have simultaneously provided some spectrum and/or some funding to Māori.
- 19 In 2022, Ministers signed an MOU with the Māori Spectrum Working Group (MSWG)<sup>1</sup> **Free and frank opinions** At the time, this was envisaged to be an enduring solution to managing Māori rights

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<sup>1</sup> MSWG gains its mandate from claimants who have earlier made claims in the Tribunal on Māori interests in the radio spectrum. Its membership also includes representatives from the New Zealand Māori Council, the National Iwi Chairs Forum and Māori telecommunications industry representatives.


and interests in radio spectrum and enabling Māori participation in spectrum-related industries and the digital economy. The MOU made commitments relating to funding and to spectrum allocations – including an ongoing commitment to allocate to Māori around 20 per cent of all future nation-wide commercial spectrum rights.

- 20 As a result of allocations to date, Māori currently hold rights to 175 MHz, or 19 per cent, of the current mid-band spectrum holdings (ie bands with similar frequencies that are broadly substitutable for similar uses). The spectrum allocated to date has enabled the establishment of 2 Degrees and a private network at Centreport in Wellington.


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31 Confidential advice to Government Cabinet will need to determine future allocations to industry. This decision is typically informed by public consultation.

32 To balance the interests of industry and Māori, I propose to begin Commercial Information Commercial Information public consultation on the future use of these bands. This will be done on the basis of reserving 25 MHz in the 2300 MHz band for Māori, consistent with the mandate sought in this paper.

33 Free and frank opinions

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35 Carrying out these engagements in parallel is necessary to:

35.1 **Enable timely allocation.** To minimise impact on industry and consumers, policy decisions need to be taken as soon as practicable to enable MBIE sufficient time to undertake a robust allocation process and industry to arrange finances to purchase these rights.

35.2 **Provide certainty to industry** of the spectrum that is likely to be available. Confidential advice to Government

35.3 Confidential advice to Government

Confidential advice to Government

## Release of discussion document for public consultation

- 36 I propose to release the discussion document included in **Appendix One** for public consultation on the technical configuration of these bands, processes for reallocation of rights and terms of rights. These issues will inform the preliminary decisions that need to be taken by Cabinet and provide industry with clarity over the proposed approach to allocations.
- 37 Confidential advice to Government the consultation is technical in nature and low risk. I expect most of the engagement will be from the telecommunications industry and wireless internet service providers. Satellite and space research industries may also be engaged Commercial Information
- 38 I expect to hear differing views from the consultation given the current market dynamics. Commercial Information

## Next steps

- 39 I propose undertake Commercial Information and public consultation in parallel and report back to Cabinet, Confidential advice to Government on the approach to the next round of spectrum allocations. This will enable timely allocation of any subsequent rights before the expiry of the 2600 MHz band in 2028.

Milestone/Activity	Timeframe
Public consultation (six weeks)	October 2025 – November 2025

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### **Cost-of-living Implications**

- 40 The release of the discussion document will not directly impact the cost of everyday expenses, such as housing, food, clothing or transport.
- 41 Subsequent decisions on spectrum allocations may have an impact on the delivery of communication services and costs that may ultimately be passed down to consumers.

### **Financial Implications**

- 42 There will be no direct financial implications from the release of the discussion document.
- 43 Subsequent decisions on spectrum allocations will generate revenue for the Crown. This revenue is usually paid into the Crown account and is available for debt reduction or spending through normal Budget processes.

### **Legislative Implications**

- 44 There are no legislative implications arising from the proposals in this paper.

### **Impact Analysis**

#### **Regulatory Impact Statement**

- 45 The proposals in this paper do not relate to any legislative changes and therefore not subject to Cabinet's regulatory impact analysis requirements.

#### **Climate Implications of Policy Assessment**

- 46 The Climate Implications of Policy Assessment (CIPA) team has been consulted and confirms that the CIPA requirements do not apply to this policy proposal at this time, as it is in the discussion document stage. The CIPA team will be consulted again when the proposal reaches a later stage, at which point a CIPA assessment will be prepared.

### **Population Implications**

- 47 The proposals in this paper will not have any direct impacts on particular population groups. Any implications arising from subsequent decisions (for example relating to Māori economic development opportunities) will be considered when policy decisions are sought.

### **Human Rights**

- 48 There are no human rights implications associated with the release of the discussion document.

## Use of external resources

- 49 External resources have not been used in preparation of the policy advice in this paper.
- 50 External resources will be used the development or implementation of the policy decisions that will be informed by this consultation (ie for valuations of spectrum to be allocated and possibly auction services for allocations). Details of this will be disclosed in the policy decisions that will be sought in 2026.

## Consultation

- 51 The Commerce Commission, Treasury and Te Puni Kokiri were consulted on this paper. New Zealand Defence Force and New Zealand Space Agency, which have interests in these frequencies, have been informed of the proposals.
- 52 Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (Policy Advisory Group) has been informed.

- 53 Confidential advice to Government

## Communications

- 54 MBIE will publish the discussion document and relevant supporting documents to their website. Key stakeholders (including mobile network operators and MSWG) will be notified and invited to make submissions.

## Proactive Release

- 55 Following Cabinet consideration, I intend to consider the release of this paper with redactions in line with the Official Information Act 1982. Proactively released papers will be published on MBIE's website when public consultation starts.

## Recommendations

The Minister for Media and Communications recommends that the Committee:

- 1 **note** that rights to use the 2300 MHz and 2600 MHz bands of radio spectrum are expiring in 2030 and 2028 respectively and decisions on future allocation of these rights need to be taken as soon as possible to provide industry with certainty regarding ongoing access to spectrum;
- 2 **note** that by convention, Cabinet approves allocations of significant commercial spectrum allocations taking into account technical and policy considerations to ensure spectrum is used efficiently for the benefit of New Zealanders;

- 3 **note** that future allocation of the 2300 and 2600 MHz bands falls within the scope of a 2022 Memorandum of Understanding between the Crown and Māori Confidential advice to Government

- 4 Commercial Information

- 5 **approve** the release of the discussion document attached in **Appendix One** for public consultation on the 2300 MHz and 2600 MHz bands with any minor or editorial changes that may be necessary;
- 6 **note** that the Minister for Media and Communications intends to report to Cabinet with final proposals for future allocations of the 2300 and 2600 MHz bands Confidential advice to Government

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Paul Goldsmith

Minister for Media and Communications