

Question 1: How should Ofcom manage the process of taking advice from users, regulators and government on efficient apportionment of AIP fees in the maritime and aeronautical sectors? Are any new institutional arrangements needed?:

You need to engage properly with users. The document contains highly technical information which I am not qualified to understand.

Perhaps a few roadshows to organisations rather than putting out such a complex document.

It is clear from the initial reading that your focus seems to have been on raising money from the spectrum and from users.

Little has been acknowledged about the reasons for our using the spectrum or the safety aspects by non-commercial organisations and individuals.

GA is a sector that brings in £1.4bn per year to the UK economy and over 80% of the aircraft movements are by this sector of aviation. Yet you appear to be concentrating on passenger movements as a scale of measure.

Please engage more closely with, say, the Light Aircraft Association, the BMAA and AOPA to gain their input outside of this, rather limited, consultation.

They will give you chapter and verse about how radio is used in the majority of UK movements.

Your paper sadly lacks any recognition of our need for a reasonable priced and widely available network of ground stations and navigational aids.

Question 2: If you consider that our proposals for pricing ground station users for any spectrum would be likely to have a detrimental impact on safety, please let us know. In order for us to understand your assessment fully, it would be helpful if you could outline the mechanisms whereby this might happen.?:

I am a private pilot operating an aircraft at the low-end of general aviation. I operate from farm strips and from small airfields and rely on my vhf radio to transmit and receive information on runway direction, wind strength or other hazards.

In flight, I try to receive a service to assist in navigation where ATIS will give me information as to conflicting traffic or weather conditions en-route or to assist in planning diversions.

At the destination, aircraft call on radio to report positions and intentions.

Anything that stops me from using frequencies is obviously detrimental to my safety and that of others.

Your charging policy, as I understand it excludes shipping but does not specifically exclude the aviation sector. Pricing will impact on the small airports and airfields who are least able to afford any increase in charges.

Question 3: Do you have any evidence which indicates that AIP charged to ground stations could have a material detrimental impact on UK competitiveness?:

GA airfields are operated at the margin of affordability mainly due the costs of regulation being imposed by organisations such as yours..

Over recent years the cost of fuel has let to a reduction in activity and there are more signs that owners and operators will sell up for development, where the income is guaranteed.

As a result, with less activity in flight training, the UK will suffer in terms of development of flight training within the UK against other countries, such as the USA where the regulatory burdern is less.

Question 4: Taking into account the information available in this document, including that set out in Annex 5, our initial views on VHF radiocommunications licence fees and on the reference rates for bands in other uses, and any information you have about the organisations to whom we are proposing to charge fees, please provide any evidence that you think is relevant to us in considering the financial impact of the fees we intend to propose for VHF radiocommunications, or for other uses:

Your paper seems to have ignored completely the provision of radio by small airfield operators.

This is not surprising as even the CAA have ignored this sector for many years.

However, you must understand that if your fee structure means the closure of a small airfield's radio and its transfer to a major airport - as is happening currently with Belle Vue in Devon - then you lose no income (possibly even gain from it) whereas we are thrown back on the Safetycom frequency where ground use is limited at best.

Question 5: Do you agree that there is little to be gained, in terms of economic efficiency, from charging AIP to WT Act licences for aircraft:

No opinion as yet

Question 6: Do you consider that we should discount fees for any particular user or type of user? Specifically, do you consider that there should be a discount for charities whose object is the safety of human life in an emergency:

Of course there should be discounts, but not just to organisations such as the RNLI, who do have a healthy income stream.

Question 7: Do you agree that Ofcom should apply AIP to ground stations? use of maritime and aeronautical VHF radiocommunications channels, to help manage growing congestion in current use and to ensure that the cost of denying access to this spectrum by potential alternative applications is faced by current users?:

No.

Allocation of frequencies should be based on demonstrable need, not on ability to pay.

I am surprised to learn that you do not consider that aviation use of radio should be treated differently from marine use.

Both need the radio spectrum for safety purposes, and this is not conducive to 'market forces'

Question 8: Do you agree with our initial view that it would be appropriate to apply a pricing system similar to that already existing for Business Radio licences to maritime and aeronautical VHF communications? If not, what are your reasons for proposing that we should develop a fee structure for maritime and aeronautical VHF channels which is distinct from that already established for Business Radio?:

Not at all.

The problem is for us, that radio is a safety aid, and we are encouraged to use it to help in navigation.

A number of users would simply go non-radio rather than compete for frequencies or if the price were to be set at a market rate.

How could a small airfield like Henstridge or Eaglescott compete on a level playing field with the operators of Bournemouth or Exeter or Birmingham?

Others, where flight training take place will need to retain radio in order to gain the requisite licences.

This proposal appears to have been started as a money-raising 'opportunity. Aviation use is not once conducive to market forces.

Question 9: Are there any short term reasons specific to the sector(s) why it would be inappropriate to apply fees from April 2009?:

Not enough time to prepare for the change, nor long enough to consider the results of this consultation.

You already admit that you have not formulated a firm proposal and are waiting information from all sectors before proceeding.

You cannot therefore in all honesty rush a charging regime in by April 2009 without fully costing the effects of a charging scheme which has not been put through the full Regulatory Impact Analysis.

That is, unless you already have the proposals in place but have gone through this exercise purely because it was required of you.

It is clear that there are likely to be serious downsides to your proposal due to you having overlooked certain sectors, such as ours.

In GA we have become used to such cynical behaviour by regulatory authorities. Please don't give us further cause to doubt the 'good faith' of our regulators.

Question 10: Ofcom would welcome stakeholders' views on the factors which should be taken into account when apportioning fees between individual users of radars and racons:

Not qualified to answer as yet

Question 11: Do you agree with our initial view that a reference rate of £126k per 1 MHz of national spectrum for L band and S band radar spectrum would achieve an appropriate balance between providing incentives to ensure efficient use of spectrum while guarding against the risks of regulatory failure in setting the reference rate too high? If you consider a different rate would be more appropriate, please provide any evidence that you think we should take into account.:

Not qualified to answer

Question 12: Do you agree with our initial view that a reference rate of £25k per single MHz of national spectrum would be appropriate for deriving fees for licences to use X band radar?:

Not qualified to answer

Question 13: Do you agree that, generally, spectrum used by aeronautical radionavigation aids is currently uncongested? Do you believe that this may change during the next few years and, if so, approximately when?:

Generally it is ok at present, and I can see no reason why the current level would increase markedly.

Question 14: Do you agree with the basis on which Ofcom has arrived at its initial view on reference rates for aeronautical radionavigation aids?:

Not qualified to answer

Comments:

I am particularly disturbed by the initial assumption that the radio spectrum for aviation should be subjected to market forces - spectrum trading, opportunity to raise money by selling off the spectrum etc etc.

Radio for me, as the pilot and operator, is a safety aid. I take my own safety very seriously, but this plan is fraught with inherent risk.

We could lose many of our existing ground stations and aids on the grounds of cost, and, while this may help the major operators, it will cause great concern to those of us at the low-end of aviation.

Please bear this aspect in mind and remember that this use is every bit as important as a money-raising opportunity for the Government