

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?:

Ofcom should organise formal stakeholder consultation groups including representatives of recreational associations (such as the RYA and LAA) as well as industry and industry associations. These groups should operate during the entire process, including the phases in which proposed new charges are presented and introduced. And please, let's have some expert stakeholder input into the RIA process (instead of those consultants again).

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.?:

YES - the detrimental effect on safety will be considerable for light aviation. One of the main safety systems in place is the air to ground VHF radio which is used at most small airfields. Without this radio system the number of mid-air collisions and other dangerous or fatal incidents will certainly increase. Most airfields are operated by small businesses or aeroclubs which are already taxed and regulated (by various agencies of government) to the point where survival is at stake. Some airfield operators will not be able to afford to pay substantial additional sums to maintain this radio service and it will be phased out. Then watch for the headlines about light aircraft crashes. It wasn't your fault. It was the policy.

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

YES - GA and light aviation generally, with its network of small airfields and numerous associated businesses in training and maintenance, etc., provides a genuine alternative transportation system for the UK, unaffected by road congestion, etc. It employs many thousands of people. However, it is currently balanced on a knife edge, under pressure from European regulation and the airlines. Tax the UK GA industry just a bit more and it might collapse. Where's the tipping point?

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:

The entire UK light aviation system uses the 25kHz spacing, to be priced at £5k pa (and on up, whenever the Treasury is a bit short). This is a lot of money to a small airfield operator, or an aeroclub such as the one of which I am a committee member. Note that the lower price for 8.33kHz spacing is only applicable to bigger high-flying aircraft and hence big airport operators. Hence the cost falls disproportionately on the smaller companies, who must try to pass them on to a smaller customer base. Simple rules result in unfair outcomes, as usual.

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:

YES - but there is also a considerable downside if charges were to be introduced, as it would further discourage small aircraft, microlight and glider operators from fitting and using VHF radios (which they are not legally obliged to do). This would degrade safety for all air travellers (including you and your family, on your holiday trip to Palma)

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:

YES - but wait - surely the entire logic of the AIP policy means that only commercial considerations are at issue. There's no money for HMG in discounts! Is Ofcom going soft? Nah, its politics, of course....

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 - this is the economics of the madhouse. Ofcom should address its proper remit and develop a policy to manage spectrum efficiently for the overall benefit of the country, like most other nations manage to do. Balance business and other interests with reference to a set of logical resource allocation principles, please, the market is too blunt an instrument for this task. The entire spectrum policy was discredited by the government's blatant money grab over the 3G licences. Who is paying through the nose now? The mobile phone user!

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?:

NO - because they are SAFETY CRITICAL services essential to travellers, unlike Business Radio, which is just there for business people to make money from. Hence, they need a different approach to developing a fee structure which recognises the safety issue. There is world of difference between a taxi firm or a security company and a small airfield.

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

Errr - because they can't afford to pay... Samller organisations will have more difficulty in budgeting for immediate new taxes.

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:

Radar operators (LARS providers) who provide a service available to light aviation, should have the safety benefits of the service they provide to all air travellers recognised and taken account of by . Their situation is different from those of a radar service provider who provides only services to aircraft landing and taking off at their airport and can thus readily recoup the new spectrum charges in landing and passenger fees.

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.:

No opinion

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?:

No opinion

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?:

Some aeronautical nav aids are dinosaurs, especially the NDBs. GPS is making them redundant. If you want to grab some spectrum to auction, take that used by the primitive old NDBs. Why are these not shown in your Figure 6?

Your proposed charges should also get rid of many UK VORs pretty quickly, so no worries there (especially if the MoD can be persuaded to stop jamming the GPS signal whenever it wants, for trivial trials).

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

NO - Because 1) the price per 1 Mhz means nothing to most readers. Why not publish the proposed cost per installation? If you can't calculate it, I'm sure I can't. 2) The cost of aviation safety loss is not factored in. Remove radio aids and reduce safety for both large and small aircraft. Reduced safety means more accidents. Accidents cost a lot of money. Where is that cost shown in your approach?

For example: ILS is the standard radionav landing aid at both large and many smaller airports. It's the one that many private pilots are trained to use, and has saved innumerable lives over the years. Passing on the cost is no problem at Heathrow, but what about at a smaller field where it is only used occasionally? Of course, to ensure efficient, market-driven use of spectrum, it will disappear! Pity the private pilot when weather closes in, and there is no ILS approach for many miles.

Comments: