

TELECOM

Early auction quashed for Thaicom spectrum

KOMSAN TORTERMVASANA

The telecom regulator's plan to auction off the 3500-megahertz range before spectrum holder Thaicom's satellite operating concession ends in September 2021 has been scrapped because of technical difficulties and remedy measures for the company's clients who may be affected by the move.

The auction of 300MHz of bandwidth on the range may have to be held in 2022 instead.

Takorn Tantasith, secretary-general of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), told the *Bangkok Post* the NBTC's technical teams studying an early auction indicated there would be interference between satellite and mobile broadband signals if the plan presses ahead.

"The study pointed out the necessity of a guard band to prevent interference for 100- up to 200MHz of bandwidth, which would be too much bandwidth use," said Mr Takorn.

The NBTC would have to look into the most appropriate way to ward off signal interference.

"An auction for the 3500MHz range before September 2021 is definitely impossible," he said.

The 3400-3700MHz range is being used by Thaicom for its Thaicom 6 satellite and some foreign satellites the listed firm temporarily rents transponder capacity to in order to deal with technical

incidents happening with its Thaicom 5 satellite.

The foreign satellites comprise KTSat 8, Measat 3, Measat 3A and Apstar 7, rented between Jan 15 and Sept 10, 2021.

Mr Takorn said the NBTC still has to figure out compensation measures for the spectrum recall and gauge the impact from the move on Thaicom's clients and satellite TV viewers. There are around 12.4 million satellite TV household subscribers across the country.

Both the NBTC and the Digital Economy and Society (DES) Ministry announced expectations the 3500MHz range would be put on auction prior to the expiry of Thaicom's concession.

This range is expected to be the second batch for 5G spectrum licence auctions after the NBTC held the 5G licence auction on Feb 16 for the 700MHz, 2600MHz and 26-gigahertz ranges.

The delay of the 3500MHz range auction is unlikely to have a significant impact on 5G adoption in the country, he said.

"Major mobile operators hold enough spectrum bandwidth, especially 2600MHz licences, for efficient 5G network for business-to-business and business-to-consumer models," said Mr Takorn.

Mr Takorn said the 3500MHz range is the most popular band for 5G adoption, with 11 European countries rolling out 5G commercial service on the spectrum.