

CRAN SETS RECORD STRAIGHT ON MISCONCEPTIONS PERTAINING TO 5G IN NAMIBIA

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The Communications Regulatory Authority of Namibia (CRAN) is mandated to regulate telecommunications services and networks, broadcasting services, postal services and the use and allocation of radio spectrum.

The Communications Act (No. 8 of 2009) (herein after referred to as the Communications Act) prescribes for a service and technology neutral licence regime for Telecommunications Service Licensees. Thus, Licensees may deploy any service using any technology based on their internal business decisions. It is, however, a requirement that the deployment of any chosen technology complies with all provisions as set out in the Communications Act.

“CRAN has noted with concern the circulation of the baseless and unfounded misconceptions on social media linking the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) to the deployment of Fifth Generation (5G). The information further alleges that 5G towers have been erected in Namibia. In light of the above, CRAN deemed it necessary to set the record straight on this matter” said Jochen Traut, Acting Chief Executive Officer, CRAN.

“CRAN has to date, not awarded any Spectrum Licences for the deployment of 5G to any of the four (4) operators providing mobile services (IMT) in Namibia and there are consequently no 5G sites in Namibia” said Traut. The four (4) operators licensed to provide mobile services are Telecom Namibia Limited, Mobile Telecommunications Limited, MTN Business Solutions Namibia (Pty) Ltd (MTN) and Paratus Telecommunications (Pty) Ltd and are currently only providing 2G, 3G and 4G. Although the 3500 MHz spectrum band is allocated for IMT, it is not yet been utilised for 5G as Telecom Namibia Limited is still using this band for fixed services (Wimax) and MTN is using this band for TDD-LTE (4G).

Traut states that “to date, CRAN is not aware of any proven correlation between 5G and the COVID-19 pandemic. As an independent and responsible regulator, the nature and operations of CRAN will at all times be aimed at ensuring the public health and safety of all consumers of ICT products and services”.

Traut added “the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), (of which Namibia is a member), discussed during the World Radio Conference (WRC-19) held in November 2019, the allocation of radio spectrum for 5G”. The discussions were based on intensive technical studies conducted by the ITU and looked at various aspects including power limits, emission standards and other considerations. The discussions were further based on factual information and studies conducted

by international bodies, including health organisations which are concerned with the implementation of new technologies.

The WRC-19 resolved to allocate some frequency bands for the utilisation of 5G and member countries, including Namibia must review their Frequency Band Plans to assign these frequencies on a national level. As with all other technologies, the future deployment of 5G will be considered with stringent adherence to international standards and regulations to find a balance between the roll-out of new and reliable communications services, public health and the protection of the environment.

The Namibian policy and regulatory framework is thus prepared for the deployment of 5G. The only change required is for spectrum bands allocated for 5G at the ITU WRC-19 to be incorporated in Namibia's Frequency Band plan. Upon finalisation of the review of the Band Plan, new Spectrum Licenses will be issued for the provision of 5G services in Namibia and consumers will be informed accordingly.

The 5G technology provides for the development of a vast array of new applications and machine-to-machine telecommunications that will benefit, in particular, the agricultural, health, education and financial sectors and also supports the 4th Industrial Revolution. However, as is the case with the introduction of any new technologies into any market, the decision to deploy 5G will be dependent on consumer needs for new services and applications and the response from the Telecommunications Service Licensees to such needs.

We thus urge consumers to use the internet responsibly and avoid the circulation of unverified and unfounded information to avoid public hysteria, which will undermine the Government's efforts in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Ends”

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