

An open letter from Australian
Commercial and Entertainment
Technology Association (ACETA)
and the Australian Wireless Audio Group (AWAG)
and the Australian Music Association (AMA)



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Dear radio microphone retailer and importer,

Major changes to the operation of wireless audio devices announced by Government.....and complete silence on what it really means to users of radio mics and other wireless audio devices

You may or may not be aware that there will soon be changes to the use radio microphones, and other wireless audio devices within Australia. These changes are now **imminent and they will affect you and a large number of your customers.**

What's changing

It will be **no longer legal** to operate wireless microphones in the radio frequency spectrum between 694MHz and 820MHz after December 31st 2014 meaning that:

- Around 40% of the spectrum previously available for use is to be removed, and that
- At least 150,000 radio mics currently in use will need to be **switched off and scrapped**. That represents the scrapping of around **4 in every 5** radio mics currently in use in this country

To continue to use radio mics beyond December 31st 2014 **users** will either need to:

- Ensure the devices they use operate between 520 and 694MHz (just 1 in 5 currently deployed devices are likely to do this) or;
- Purchase new equipment that will operate within the new approved spectrum

Retailers will soon be restricted by law from selling radio mics and other audio devices outside of the 520-694MHz range and distributors from importing non-compliant devices.

The use, sale or importation of devices operating between 694MHz and 820MHz beyond December 31st 2014 is **punishable by fines and potentially jail** under the Radiocommunications Act.

What does it mean?

Scrapping and replacing the existing devices operating in Australia between 694MHz and 820MHz is estimated to cost the businesses and community groups operating them up to \$220 million¹.

Yet, no provision has been made by Government to assist with the transition despite:

- the Government pocketing over \$2 billion in additional income from the sell-off and re-use of the 694-820MHz spectrum
- the Government assisting the TV broadcasters with their digital transition through the removal of hundred's of millions of dollars of licence fees
- the Government being fully aware that the direct cost of replacing existing radio mics is in the order of \$220 million. A cost the Government expect business and community groups to bear.
- that radio microphone use enables more than \$32 billion worth of economic activity each year sectors as diverse as music, live performance and entertainment, the fitness industry, tourism, meetings and conventions, broadcasting and others, in

addition to the benefits derived through community activities such as worship, in schools and education and in community arts and recreation.

Despite this being on the agenda for more than six years the Government and the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) have not communicated with any users to date, save for a single posting on the ACMA website. Even now, less than 18 months from the switch off date the Government and the ACMA show no inclination to even advise users or key industry or community groups of these changes, let alone support wireless audio users in this transition. If you are feeling angry at this point you have every right to be. This issue was not of the making of radio mic users yet these users are having to bear the brunt and the costs of what increasingly looks like complete and utter regulatory failure by Government.

Grandfathering

The so called grandfathering period is of particular concern to the MI industry.

The normal period of time that a product can remain in the market but will soon become non-compliant with Australia standards is 12 months. That means that once a product is declared non-compliant the channel (importer, distributor, retailer) has 12 months to wash any remain stocks through the system. In the case of radio mics, the ACMA is intent on reducing this grandfathering period to just three months. This means that any goods on order, being shipped, in a warehouse or in a retail store must be sold or disposed of within three months.

This change to the grandfathering period will soon be signed off by Government meaning that any devices held (or on order) that are not-compliant post December 31st 2014 are likely to have to be sold or removed from the market prior to the end of 2013.

What happens next?

Inventory check

Both users, retailers and distributors should take some time to check the spectrum your existing devices operate within.

- If they are tuned to between 520 and 694MHz then they can continue to be used beyond December 31st 2014 and in the case of a retailer or distributor can continue to be sold without any further consequences.
- Any other devices need to be ear-marked for scrap prior to that date. Retailers or distributors may continue to sell product in the 694-820MHz spectrum but should advise purchases of the limited legal life of any devices they sell from this point forward.

Replacing your existing inventory

New compliant product from most of the major manufacturers is now available. When replacing or adding devices users need to:

- Ensure they operate between 520MHz and 694MHz **or** between 1790MHz and 1800MHz.
- Check if the product fits in and around the TV broadcasters in your area. This is a little harder but your supplier or the importer has this information.
- Encourage users to purchase product with the greatest agility or range they can afford. A product with a tuning range of say 520-560MHz (therefore tuning across 40MHz) will cost more but give users more flexibility than a product that tunes for example over just 8MHz- say from 520-528MHz.

Any recent product purchases (say from mid 2012 onwards) are *likely* to be compliant provided it has come from a major brand. Nonetheless you should check the product specification or with the supplier to be certain.

It's time your voices were heard

AWAG with the support of the AMA and ACETA have been discussing this with the Government and the ACMA for over 6 years. The solutions by and large are not that difficult to achieve but in order to achieve a fair outcome, with minimal disruption to users and the activities they undertake an investment of some of the digital dividend windfall of \$2 billion to Government is required. Otherwise through ignorance or intent, (as a result of users being left with no economic choice) at least 150,000 radio mic users will become Australia's newest class of criminal.

To assist in getting the message to Government join the petition at www.wirelessaudioaustralia.org. and add you voice to the more than 1,000 users who have already signed up and want to be heard.

More information

- Additional information and answers to frequently asked questions can be found at www.aceta.org.au/awag and www.australianmusic.asn.au or also at www.acma.org.au
- Friend the AWAG Facebook page for up to date information www.facebook.com/awagaustralia
- Consult your Australian distributor who will have specific information on both existing and compliant replacement products that will suit your users future needs.

Yours faithfully.



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on behalf of the Australian Wireless Audio Group



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