

Bird & Bird Satellite Bulletin

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Spectrum for UAVs- The Outcome of the WRC-15

The WRC-15 in Geneva has just concluded.

One issue that was a high priority for some administrations, particularly the US and Germany, was the allocation of a portion of the commercial Ku-band or Ka-band spectrum used by commercial satellites for UAV command and control on transoceanic or transcontinental routes.

The use of Ku and Ka bands for UAV command and control

The governments advocating for the use of the Ku and Ka bands for UAV command and control did so on the basis that UAVs would need to meet the standards and recommended practices and procedures established by the International Civil Aeronautical Organisation (ICAO).

A draft ITU document, which was published on 16 November, and which summarised the common position of many governments which backed the UAV allocation stated that UAVs would be bound by the same no-interference constraints that currently apply to satellite Earth stations and that UAVs would not be granted any special rights.

However, opposing the UAV spectrum allocation were several Asian, Middle Eastern and European (including the Netherlands and the UK) governments, which put forward varying reasons for their opposition. Some governments noted their concerns about safety and the allocation of fixed

satellite services spectrum to UAVs, being in nature mobile platforms.

Russia insisted that further studies be carried out before agreeing to the UAV proposal, and that the issue be put off until the 2019 WRC.

The difficulty facing the UAV community is that many do not see that there is any other spectrum, apart from the fixed satellite services spectrum, that could meet the requirements of the UAV industry across transoceanic or transcontinental routes.

Outcome of WRC-15

The pro-UAV campaign had the support of 50 countries and ICAO and by the end of WRC-15 had persuaded several of the undecided countries out of the 163 ITU administrations attending the WRC-15 to grant the spectrum to the UAV community.

Colin Thomson, Director at Access Partnership, comments on the outcome of WRC-15 in relation to the allocation of spectrum to the UAV community:

“WRC-15 adopted a new Resolution enabling use of the geostationary fixed-satellite service spectrum by UAVs, but significant regulatory challenges need to be overcome first, including: no use of the spectrum before ICAO adopts relevant standards and recommended practices (SARPS), and no satellite network filings that support UAVs should be processed by the ITU before further technical studies are concluded.”

For more information on this topic or our satellite group please contact:

Joanne Wheeler

Partner, UK

Tel: +44 20 3017 6847

joanne.wheeler@twobirds.com

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Get in touch



Joanne Wheeler
Partner, UK

Tel: +44 20 3017 6847
joanne.wheeler@twobirds.com



Graeme Maguire
Partner, UK

Tel: +44 20 7905 6218
graeme.maguire@twobirds.com



Hamish Fraser
Partner, Australia

Tel: +61 2 92269815
hamish.fraser@twobirds.com



Marjolein Geus
Partner, The Netherlands

Tel: +31 70 353 8806
marjolein.geus@twobirds.com



Anne Federle
Partner, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 282 6088
anne.federle@twobirds.com



Kelly Tymburski
Partner, UAE

Tel: +971 2610 810
kelly.tymburski@twobirds.com



Michelle Chan
Partner, China and Hong Kong

Tel: +852 2248 6111
michelle.chan@twobirds.com



Frédérique Dupuis-Toubol
Partner, France

Tel: +33 1 42 68 6023
frederique.dupuis.toubol@twobirds.com



Sven-Erik Heun
Partner, Germany

Tel: +49 69 74222 6158
sven-erik.heun@twobirds.com



Adriano Ros
Associate, UK

Tel: +44 20 7982 6487
adriano.ros@twobirds.com



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