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July 12, 2018

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Canada Gazette, Part I, June 2018, Consultation on Revisions to the 3500 MHz Band to Accommodate Flexible Use and Preliminary Consultation on Changes to the 3800 MHz Band (SLPB-004-18)

Dear Madam/Sir:

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Consultation on Revisions to the 3500 MHz Band to Accommodate Flexible Use and Preliminary Consultation on Changes to the 3800 MHz Band.

FCM has been the national voice of municipal government since 1901. With 2,000 member municipalities, FCM represents the interests of municipal governments on policy and program matters that fall within federal jurisdiction. Members include Canada's largest cities, small urban and rural communities, and provincial and territorial municipal associations.

Broadband Internet access has become fundamental to modern life, and has the power to transform rural and northern Canada. Achieving the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission's (CRTC) basic service objective of universal access to high-speed broadband is critical to enhancing Canada's global competitiveness and ensuring that all Canadians have access to affordable and reliable broadband service.

FCM acknowledges the policy objectives of this consultation, in particular, the recognition by ISED that "some rural areas may continue to rely on fixed wireless access in the 3500 MHz band over a longer period of time than urban areas". The policy objective states that, "in accordance with one of the objectives of the *Telecommunications Act*—to promote the availability of reliable and affordable services to all regions of Canada—ISED continues to consider options for promoting access in rural areas within the context of managing this spectrum resource".

Closing the broadband gap and reducing the significant lag-time in bringing faster speeds to rural and remote areas will require building off the success of the federal government's *Connect to Innovate* program and the CRTC's new funding regime. Spectrum in the 3500 MHz and 3800 MHz bands has the potential to increase network capacity to meet the traffic demands of higher usage rates and to support the deployment of next-generation wireless technologies. However, ISED must ensure rural and remote communities do not suffer from a loss of access, or decrease in quality of service, when changes to the use of spectrum are considered.



FCM has consistently called for the federal government to ensure licensing and auction processes be designed to incent and encourage an increase to broadband and wireless coverage in rural, remote and northern communities. Our comments below reflect that driving priority.

FCM has actively participated in previous federal consultations related to spectrum and to rural broadband. In 2014, FCM provided a submission to the federal government's consultation on policy changes in the 3500 MHz band and a new licensing process in rural areas, recommending that existing fixed wireless access (FWA) providers that meet established conditions of licence continue to have access to 3500 MHz spectrum, regardless of where they are providing service. We continue to advocate for the federal government to ensure rural communities have access to adequate broadband services. With regard to the currently proposed revisions to the use of the 3500 MHz band, FCM encourages ISED to consider how to maintain the provision of fixed and wireless broadband services to rural and remote communities if current 3500 MHz license holders are required to return portions of their spectrum licenses.

ISED is proposing to allow flexible use in the 3450-3475 MHz band, which has been previously limited to the provision of fixed service. It is proposed that this change will enable the continuation of existing services and support the growing demand for new services, such as 5G. FCM recommends that the federal government ensure that the continuation of existing services in rural areas is indeed supported, in addition to new services. To facilitate the proposed transition, ISED is suggesting a transition policy that would allow incumbent licensees to continue operating where such operations do not prevent deployment by new licensees. Furthermore, ISED is proposing longer transition periods for rural areas with a population centre of less than 30,000 people. According to ISED, this would provide additional time for incumbents to transition to the new band plan where and when required, and possibly longer in rural areas until such a time as transition is necessary to accommodate new licensees. FCM welcomes the initiative to address the particular challenges smaller operators in rural and remote communities may face during this transition period.

FCM appreciates the opportunity to share its views with ISED on how the proposed revisions to the 3500 MHz band can address the needs of rural, remote and northern communities in accessing reliable and affordable broadband services. FCM encourages the federal government to engage local governments on any changes to the use and allocation of spectrum, given the important potential impact these changes may have on rural and remote communities across Canada. As the revision process for the 3500 MHz and 3800 MHz bands move forward, FCM welcomes the opportunity to provide further comments.

For additional information or inquiries, please contact Jean Lawson, Policy Officer, at jlawson@fcm.ca or 613-907-6246.

Sincerely,



Brock Carlton
Chief Executive Officer
Federation of Canadian Municipalities