

ICASA'S PROPOSED SATELLITE SPECTRUM FEE CHANGES: WHAT OPERATORS NEED TO KNOW

Category: Infrastructure and Telecommunications
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The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (“**ICASA**”) has [published](#) proposed amendments to the Radio Frequency Spectrum Fees Regulations following its satellite licensing inquiry initiated in August 2024. The amendments are aimed at aligning spectrum fees with evolving satellite technologies and market realities.

The proposed changes follow extensive industry engagement. ICASA received 45 total submissions during the inquiry process and heard a number of oral representations at the public hearings. The Authority published its findings on 17 April 2025 and is now moving to amend both the Radio Regulations 2015^[1] and the Radio Frequency Spectrum Fees Regulations 2015.^[2]

At a high level, the amendments seek to clarify the licensing framework for satellite operators and revise how spectrum fees are calculated for gateway earth stations (“**GES**”) and satellite terminal networks.

No New Licence Category

One of the areas of uncertainty during the consultation process was whether ICASA intended to introduce entirely new licence categories for satellite services. ICASA has now clarified that it does not intend to create a new class of licence. Both GES licences and User-Terminal Network licences will remain radio frequency spectrum licences.

This clarification is significant because it provides greater regulatory certainty for satellite operators seeking to enter or expand within the South African market.

Changes to Gateway Earth Station Fees

After reviewing the submissions ICASA proposed replacing the existing “Hub Ground Station Fee” formula with the following:

$$\text{Fee} = \text{Max} (\text{RUL}; [3] \text{ UNIT}[4] \times \text{FREQ}[5] \times \text{BW}[6] \times \text{SEC}[7])$$

The key change is the introduction of the “**FREQ**” factor, which adjusts fees depending on the frequency band being used.

Under the proposal operators high-throughput satellite (“**HTS**”) operators and GES operators in the higher bands are expected to benefit due to the significantly reduced fees. ICASA’s rationale is that higher frequency bands are generally less congested. So, by reducing fees for those bands, the Authority hopes to incentivise operators to move into underutilised spectrum.

The proposed amendments also maintain the existing approach of calculating fees only on the uplink frequency band and uplink bandwidth. ICASA considers this compatible with an “Open-Sky” regulatory model.

In addition, a new Security (“**SEC**”) factor is introduced to provide fee benefits for satellite operations within the security sector.

Changes to User-Terminal Network Fees

ICASA is also proposing changes to the fee structure applicable to satellite terminal networks. The current VSAT fee formula would be replaced with:

$$\text{Fee} = \text{UNIT} \times \text{BW} \times \text{SEC}$$

Although the formula itself remains largely unchanged, the scope of the licence is expanded significantly. The revised framework will now apply to VSAT networks, satellite terminal networks and eSIM terminals. As with GES’s, only uplink bandwidth will be considered when calculating fees.

Importantly, ICASA clarified that the User-Terminal Network licence is necessary even if the terminals fall within the definition of subscriber equipment. It stated that the licence should be seen as the licence for the network enabling those terminals to connect.

Clarification of Regulation 9

The proposed amendments also update Regulation 9 to clarify how the revised satellite fee formulas will apply across different categories of satellite services.

In particular:

- satellite terminal networks, including VSAT and eSIM terminals, will attract the “Terminal Network Fee”;
- Gateway Earth Stations will attract the “Ground Hub Station Fee”; and
- fixed satellite news gathering and uplink broadcasting distribution earth stations will also fall under the Ground Hub Station Fee framework.

Why These Changes Matter

The proposed amendments signal ICASA's response to developments in satellite technology and market demand.

The changes are particularly relevant for satellite broadband providers, HTS operators, aviation and maritime connectivity providers, low-earth orbit satellite entrants and enterprise satellite network operators.

By incentivising use of higher frequency bands and adopting broader terminal network licensing, ICASA appears to be moving toward a more flexible and investment-friendly satellite regime.

A copy of the draft Amendment to the radio frequency spectrum fees regulations ("**the Draft Regulations**") can be found [here](#) or on ICASA's [website](#). The Authority invites interested parties to make written representations on the Draft Regulations by no later than **16:00 on 29 June 2026** electronically (in Microsoft Word) and marked specifically for the attention of: Mr. Mandla Mchunu – Project Manager. Representations should be sent by e-mail to RRamendments@icasa.org.za and copied to mmchunu@icasa.org.za.

If you would like assistance with making representations, contact us at info@ppmattorneys.co.za

[1] <https://www.icasa.org.za/uploads/files/Radio-Frequency-Spectrum-Regulations-2015.pdf>.

[2] <https://www.icasa.org.za/uploads/files/Radio-Frequency-Spectrum-Fees-Regulations-Ammendments-2015-38642.pdf>.

[3] Minimum fee for satellite uplink connections.

[4] Unit price.

[5] Frequency factor.

[6] Bandwidth in MHz.

[7] Security factor.