

# Submission on discussion document - AM/FM radio spectrum: 2031 expiry of licences and potential reassignment

## Your name and organisation

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## General questions

### Eligibility criteria for renewal

1

Should the Crown restrict eligibility to those with no outstanding fees? Should there be any exceptions to this?

The Community Access Media Alliance (CAMA) represents a national network of 12 independently operated, publicly funded media organisations across Aotearoa. While rooted in their local communities, CAMA media organisations share everyday infrastructure needs, a strong public interest mandate to facilitate media services by, for, and about underrepresented groups, and a proven capacity to support media plurality and emergency communications.

Established more than 40 years ago with the backing of UNESCO, Community Access Media was created as a sector to fill a critical democratic gap, serving diverse, minority, and underserved populations often excluded from mainstream media.

CAMA agrees that it is reasonable for the Crown to expect good standing from licence holders, including the timely payment of regulatory fees. However, we urge the Crown to consider the distinct circumstances of non-commercial, Community Access Media broadcasters that operate under a public interest mandate and rely on highly constrained, non-commercial funding streams.

Community Access Media organisations often face structural funding shortfalls as operational costs rise and public funding stagnates. Our [2024 Resourcing Snapshot](#) revealed that the annual transmission fees of some media organisations exceeded \$50,000. These pressures are not due to poor governance but reflect the undercapitalisation of public media infrastructure, reliance on third parties, and inconsistent operational funding.

Blanket restrictions could unintentionally exclude high-performing but financially stretched media organisations, particularly those serving Māori, Pacific, migrant, disabled, and rural communities. Instead, we propose a hardship exemption framework that considers:

- Demonstrated public service value (e.g., emergency broadcasting capability),
- Steps taken to manage and resolve arrears,
- Evidence of financial constraint due to funding cycles, inflation, or unforeseen circumstances.

This model reflects international best practice. UNESCO's 2022 [Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity](#) report identifies fee relief and sustainable financing mechanisms as essential protections for community radio operating in the public interest. Furthermore, the report found that fee relief and long-term security of spectrum access were critical to maintaining services in rural and minority communities worldwide. In New Zealand, these conditions are crucial for fulfilling the Crown's Treaty obligations and ensuring inclusive access to information.

## Moratorium prior to the rights expiry

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Please provide any feedback you have on the proposed moratorium date. In what circumstances should an exception to the moratorium on modifications be allowed?

CAMA notes that the proposed moratorium applies exclusively to commercial licences under Management Rights 206 and 207, and explicitly excludes community and iwi broadcasting licences managed by Te Puni Kōkiri and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage.

As such, CAMA supports the moratorium as a mechanism for fair and transparent spectrum management in the commercial sector. During the transition period, no commercial broadcaster must gain an advantage through last-minute licence changes.

While CAMA and its member organisations are unaffected by the moratorium, we support flexibility in exceptional cases where modifications are necessary.

- They are necessary for the continuity of public interest broadcasting services,
- Address unexpected technical failures or emergency infrastructure upgrades,
- Involve reallocating existing spectrum within the non-commercial sector to enhance resilience or reach (e.g., improving rural coverage).

We further recommend that MBIE work closely with Te Puni Kōkiri and MCH to ensure any non-commercial licence modifications after 2026 are guided by equity, resilience, and inclusion principles.

### Proposed policy objectives for the allocation process

#### 3 What amendments, if any, would you make to the proposed objectives and criteria?

While the objectives in Table 1 focus on commercial allocation, CAMA recommends making the following amendments to ensure consistency with the broader public interest obligations of the Crown:

- **Objective A** ("support the continued use") should explicitly state that the allocation process will safeguard non-commercial and community broadcasters by maintaining reserved spectrum access, even if this falls outside Management Rights 206 and 207.
- **Objective B** ("balance financial value with economic context") should reflect the non-market value of spectrum when used to serve at-risk, underrepresented, or hard-to-reach populations. This includes emergency communications, local democracy, te reo Māori revitalisation, [media plurality](#), and multilingual access.
- **Objective C** ("foster market competition") should be clarified to ensure competition does not undermine media diversity or public interest objectives. A highly concentrated or profit-driven market may conflict with the need for culturally (and regionally) inclusive broadcasting.

#### 4 Are there other objectives or criteria you would propose? If so, what are these?

Yes. CAMA proposes the following additions, which would strengthen the alignment of spectrum allocation policy with Aotearoa New Zealand's broader media, equity, and emergency management goals:

- Equity of access: Ensure that spectrum allocation serves all New Zealanders, including Māori, Pacific peoples, migrants, disabled communities, and rural populations. CAMA notes that several member organisations face transmission limitations due to terrain or reliance on AM-only or FM-only licences.
- Public interest and emergency broadcasting capacity: Prioritise or protect spectrum access for entities with formal emergency communications roles under the [National Emergency Management Agency Memorandum of Understanding](#) (NEMA MoU).
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi alignment: Acknowledge the unique role of iwi and Community Access Media broadcasters and ensure spectrum allocation supports Crown obligations under Te Tiriti.

These objectives align with international best practice as outlined in [UNESCO's Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity \(2022\)](#), which identifies community and indigenous media as essential to democratic infrastructure.

## Approach to pricing commercial licences

### 5 Which is your preferred approach and why?

As this question relates to pricing for commercial licences, CAMA offers no specific preference, but reinforces that any pricing framework must clearly distinguish between commercial and non-commercial use.

CAMA supports the Crown's intent to set market-based prices for commercial operators.

However, we strongly urge that:

- Non-commercial broadcasters are excluded from this model,
- A separate, subsidised pricing regime is maintained for Community Access Media, iwi, and other public-interest media organisations.
- Public interest value, not just market demand, is used for pricing decisions.

This differential pricing approach ensures equitable access to spectrum while reflecting the actual public value of non-commercial services. Community Access Media organisations operate on modest budgets and relies on public funding or in-kind support. Imposing commercial (or increased) pricing would risk undermining their viability and disproportionately impact marginalised communities that depend on these essential services.

International precedents support this approach. For example:

- [Canada's CRTC](#) applies differentiated regulatory frameworks to protect community radio.
- UNESCO advocates fee waivers or direct subsidies for public interest broadcasters (UNESCO, 2022).
- In Aotearoa, the NEMA MoU recognises Access Media as an essential public safety asset, underscoring the public interest served by these broadcasters.

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Is there another approach you would suggest? If yes, please explain how this approach would be implemented and how it would provide greater benefit against the policy objectives than the above approaches.

Yes. CAMA proposes a dual-track licensing model that separates:

- Commercial spectrum allocation, governed by competitive pricing and market demand, and
- Non-commercial/public interest spectrum, governed by equity, service value, and public accountability frameworks.

Key features of the model would include:

- Zero or minimal pricing for reserved spectrum blocks allocated to community, iwi, or non-commercial use.
- Licence conditions that emphasise public value outcomes (e.g. emergency broadcasting, language diversity, and underserved reach and participation).
- Light-touch compliance for non-commercial operators (in line with reporting mechanisms already established through NZ On Air, for example, to avoid reporting duplication and burden for operators and government), focusing on content delivery and engagement rather than commercial metrics.

This approach would:

- Simplify administration by clearly differentiating licence categories and improving transparency and efficiency.
- Enable non-commercial broadcasters to continue fulfilling Treaty and social obligations.
- Prevent the loss of public value in favour of profit-driven efficiency.

This approach ensures the Crown's equity, resilience, and Treaty commitments are upheld in best international practice.. CAMA recommends that MBIE work with Te Puni Kōkiri, MCH, and NZ On Air to ensure a cohesive, cross-agency strategy for non-commercial spectrum access, pricing, and renewal beyond 2031.

## Price formula

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Do you agree with the assumptions outlined to calculate a price offer? Why? Why not?

CAMA notes that this pricing model applies specifically to commercial licence holders. However, because the formula could set a precedent that influences the wider broadcasting environment, we wish to formally state our position.

We wish to highlight that the assumptions are inappropriate for non-commercial broadcasters.

- They rely on commercial acquisition data and advertising revenue trends, which Community Access Media organisations neither generate nor benefit from.
- Audience reach is not a performance indicator for the CAMA media sector; compliance with Section 36(c) of the Broadcasting Act 1989 is. Per capita pricing wrongly assumes that larger population coverage equals more value, even when a station's sole mission is to serve a small, legislatively protected, and underserved group.
- Terrain, tower access, and AM-only or FM-only constraints faced by organisations are not reflected in the model.
- They overlook the non-profit mandate and social return on investment delivered by CAMA and iwi organisations.
- They assume CAMA organisations have the same commercial resilience to absorb cost increases, which is not true in our sector. They also underestimate the impact of cumulative cost increases.

CAMA supports a differentiated pricing structure based on licence type and intended use. Commercial operators should pay market-based prices, while non-commercial/public-interest broadcasters, such as Community Access Media, should be exempt.

The distinction is critical:

- Community broadcasters are not commercially funded and are required under Section 36(c) of the Broadcasting Act 1989 to make facilities and broadcasting services available to underserved groups, including women, children, disabled communities, and ethnic minorities. Audience size is not their focus - programming mandate is.
- Introducing pricing based on audience size or demographic complexity (pursuant to Broadcasting Act programming requirements) would require intensive reporting and analysis - something many organisations do not have the capacity to undertake. It would also place additional administrative burden on MBIE to differentiate audiences by type, region, and demographic, which is not the appropriate oversight body for programming compliance. These responsibilities already fall within the remit of NZ On Air and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage.
- CAMA organisations are only partially funded by NZ On Air and simultaneously restricted under the Radiocommunications Act from generating more than 50% of their revenue from advertising-making licence fee increases, which is effectively circular and counterproductive.

Any pricing mechanism should be transparent, tiered, contextual, and values-based. It should factor in the non-commercial nature of Community Access Media organisations and their reliance on fluctuating public funding and grants. What's more, Community Access Media organisations deliver a Crown-mandated service on behalf of the public.

For these reasons, CAMA urges that community and iwi broadcasters be exempted entirely from the per capita pricing framework and instead granted access in-kind in recognition of their public service role and statutory obligations.

## Duration of licences

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Which of the two options do you prefer and why?

CAMA strongly prefers the extended licence period option (20+ years) as organisations operate on long-term programming, funding cycles, and capital investments in transmission and studio infrastructure. Short terms create insecurity and administrative burden.

Any change must consider:

1. Stability and certainty: CAMA organisations need long-term guarantees to plan infrastructure investment, secure funding, and maintain continuity of service.
2. Funding alignment: Most CAMA organisations operate within NZ On Air's cyclical funding framework. Longer licence terms ensure no mismatch between capital planning and transmission rights.
3. Cost-effectiveness: Renewals and compliance processes are resource-intensive for the government and media organisations. Longer terms reduce administrative burden and encourage investment in quality and innovation.

Short-term licences (e.g. 10 years) do not reflect the realities of broadcast infrastructure lifecycles, which are often amortised over 15–25 years. Furthermore, as digital transition timelines remain uncertain in Aotearoa, there is no policy imperative for shorter terms.

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Is there another option that should be considered? What would this be and why?

CAMA recommends exploring a hybrid approach. One such model could be a 10-year licence with a conditional automatic renewal clause for non-commercial broadcasters that demonstrate a consistent track record of delivering public value.

Rather than introducing new or burdensome reporting requirements, this model could rely on existing mechanisms, such as the NEMA MoU, NZ On Air funding agreements, and established regulatory touchpoints, to assess eligibility for renewal. This would balance the government's desire for accountability and flexibility with the sector's need for stability and long-term planning.

This approach avoids duplicative or unnecessary reporting burdens for small media organisations with limited capacity. It would ensure that licence renewal is supported by a transparent, light-touch process that recognises the long-term service and community impact of non-commercial broadcasters without adding new compliance layers.

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What licence duration would make most sense for your company/organisation?  
Why?

For CAMA and its members, a 20-year licence duration is preferred. This timeframe aligns with the capital investment cycles required to maintain and upgrade transmission infrastructure and reflects the long-term service commitment that community broadcasters make to their audiences. It would:

- Provide certainty to plan equipment upgrades, negotiate site access, and invest in digital transitions.
- Enable alignment with funding models such as those from NZ On Air.
- Reduce administrative burden on the Crown and licensees, notably smaller media organisations with limited staffing.

Shorter licence durations would not reflect the longevity or public service value of CAMA organisations, and could inadvertently discourage essential long-term investments.

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What should be the difference in tenure for AM vs FM, if any?

CAMA supports differentiated tenure if justified by strategic or technical rationale. Given their wide reach and superior reliability in adverse conditions (e.g., during natural disasters or in hilly terrain), AM frequencies should be allocated on the longest possible terms, potentially with rollover provisions, as long as they remain in active use.

FM frequencies could also warrant long terms, but with review checkpoints built in to align with technological advances or digital broadcasting milestones, should these emerge in New Zealand.

12

What duration of time of non-use would be appropriate for triggering the Crown's right to take back the licence?

CAMA proposes a three-year window of continuous non-use, with flexibility for media organisations to explain interruptions caused by force majeure events, infrastructure disruption, or significant funding loss. A shorter period could unfairly penalise CAMA organisations operating in high-risk or low-resourced environments, particularly those affected by climate events, pandemics, or natural disasters.

Importantly, this process should not require additional reporting or compliance burdens. Instead, MBIE should allow informal correspondence or declarations from media organisations where needed. Community Access Media organisations already report to funders such as NZ On Air and operate under MoUs (such as the NEMA MoU) that provide sufficient accountability. Any non-use assessment should respect existing regulatory frameworks and avoid duplicative oversight mechanisms.

## RNZ and Schedule 7 provisions in the Radiocommunications Act

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How do the sections of the Act advantage or disadvantage your business?

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CAMA acknowledges RNZ's essential public service role and supports its recognition under Schedule 7 of the Radiocommunications Act. However, this legislative preference creates a systemic inequity for other non-commercial broadcasters with comparable public service mandates.

CAMA member organisations are integral to New Zealand's emergency communications infrastructure and media plurality, as evidenced by:

- Broadcasting over 4,000 hours of local content monthly,
- Reaching over 1 million New Zealanders each year in more than 50 languages,
- Providing targeted services to underserved groups pursuant to s36(c) of the Broadcasting Act.
- CAMA's inclusion in the 2025 NEMA MoU reinforces its support for emergency communications in events such as the 2023 floods and Cyclone Gabrielle.

This disparity undermines the resilience and continuity of public interest media by failing to recognise other non-RNZ (and non-commercial) organisations as essential communication providers.

#### How might the Crown provide fairness to all licence holders?

The Crown could promote fairness by developing a “public interest broadcaster” category that includes RNZ, CAMA members, iwi radio, student radio, and other relevant non-commercial entities. This category would provide:

- Access to reserved spectrum blocks,
- Long-term licensing with public interest conditions,
- Automatic eligibility for fee waivers or subsidies,
- A clearly defined policy mechanism for operational parity with RNZ.

Additionally, the Ministry could work with NZ On Air and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage to create a joined-up regulatory, funding, and accountability framework that aligns licence protections with national media and cultural policy objectives.

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What options do you see for how the Crown might address its preference for 10-year licences, given this legislative barrier? Would you prefer the options developed are operational or legislative? Why?

CAMA supports legislative change as the most effective and future-proof method of addressing this issue. A purely operational workaround may introduce inconsistency and uncertainty over time, particularly as governments or policies shift.

Legislative reform would:

- Provide clarity and consistency for public interest broadcasters,
- Remove institutional barriers to equitable treatment,
- Codify the unique role of Community Access Media within New Zealand's public broadcasting system.
- Allow licence durations and protections to align with real-world infrastructure cycles and emergency management needs.

However, if legislative change is not immediately achievable, CAMA recommends that MBIE use operational policy tools to set out a clear and formalised pathway for extended, renewable, or rollover licences for non-commercial services.

#### **Non-commercial use of AM/FM radio broadcasting spectrum**

16

What changes, if any, should be made to the reservation of spectrum for iwi radio, community radio and RNZ?

CAMA strongly supports the ongoing spectrum reservation for non-commercial services such as Community Access Media, iwi radio, student radio, and RNZ.

These broadcasters serve critical democratic, cultural, and public safety functions, often providing the only available content in minority languages or region-specific formats.

We recommend:

- Maintaining all current non-commercial spectrum reservations,
- Ensuring access to FM and AM is preserved or expanded for Community Access Media organisations with terrain and coverage constraints,
- Updating policy settings to enable spectrum to better serve underserved, multilingual, and rural audiences.

The system must reflect the reality that some Community Access Media organisations rely entirely on AM or FM, and lack the infrastructure or funding to switch delivery platforms.

UNESCO (2022) identifies access to broadcast infrastructure as a key indicator of cultural rights and inclusion. In Aotearoa, this translates to a continued need for protective mechanisms such as spectrum reservation to preserve media pluralism.

#### **Currently reserved blocks**

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Should the reservations in block 16 – 19 continue into the new right in their current form? What changes would you make, if any?

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Yes. These blocks should remain reserved. However, some updates are warranted:

- Block 17 (Youth) and 18 (National Māori) should be reactivated and reassessed in consultation with sector partners.
- Any temporary commercial use should not replace the original public mandate.
- Media organisations facing signal or tower limitations (especially in FM-only areas) should be prioritised for access.

If unused spectrum was to be released, what would bring greater benefits: reassigning these licences to commercial or other non-commercial use? If non-commercial, to whom? If commercial, how should it be made available to market?

CAMA strongly supports prioritising non-commercial reallocation.

Beneficiaries could include:

- Disability, migrant, and youth-focused broadcasters,
- CAMA media organisations constrained by existing licences,
- Public service emergency communication initiatives.

Any remaining spectrum should be made available to the commercial sector only after exhausting non-commercial avenues, and even then, through transparent, values-based processes (e.g., requiring community engagement obligations or local content provisions).

Releasing reserved spectrum solely to commercial interests risks intensifying media concentration and undermining the pluralistic media environment essential to democracy and inclusion.

### Local Commercial FM licences

19

Do you agree with comparing the original intent of LCFM with the proposals in this document to determine their continuation? If not, how would you prefer they were assessed?

CAMA notes that this question relates to commercial spectrum policy, which is outside the direct scope of our membership. However, given that LCFM licences were created to promote local, community-oriented content, we support an assessment approach that centres public interest outcomes and avoids commercial spectrum being used solely for private gain.

We encourage MBIE to ensure any evaluation framework considers how LCFM stations serve regional diversity, reach underserved audiences, and complement existing non-commercial services where CAMA or iwi media organisations are unavailable. Such a framework could help maintain a balanced and inclusive media environment.

20

Which option do you prefer: the proposal outlined or maintaining the status quo (Local Commercial licences remain, with strict conditions and are charged at a lesser price than commercial licences)? Please explain why you prefer this option.

CAMA notes that this question relates to commercial spectrum policy, which is outside the direct scope of our membership.

21	If maintaining the status quo, how should the price be calculated to account for the retention of strict content provisions in the licence agreement while acknowledging that these are commercial licences with revenue potential?
22	CAMA notes that this question relates to commercial spectrum policy, which is outside the direct scope of our membership. If the proposal outlined is to progress, will there be enough time to transition by April 2031? If not, why not?
	CAMA notes that this question relates to commercial spectrum policy, which is outside the direct scope of our membership.

## Closing comments

Are there any other comments you wish to make?

CAMA thanks MBIE for the opportunity to contribute to this significant consultation process. As the national representative body for 12 publicly funded Community Access Media organisations, we welcome the opportunity to offer a perspective rooted in equity, diversity, and the long-standing public service role of non-commercial broadcasters in Aotearoa.

The sector is critical in delivering content by, for, and about communities often underserved by mainstream and commercial media. This includes Māori, Pacific peoples, disabled communities, migrants, youth, regional populations, and people whose first language is not English.

### Our member organisations:

- Reach over one million people each year,
- Broadcast in more than 50 languages,
- Produce over 4,000 hours of original content monthly,
- Operate under mandates set out in Section 36(c) of the Broadcasting Act 1989, and
- They are recognised under the 2025 NEMA MoU as essential emergency broadcasters.

While many parts of this consultation are directed at commercial operators, we have provided responses to some of these questions that intersect with broader equity, access, and spectrum planning considerations. We appreciate the distinction MBIE has made in acknowledging the separate frameworks for iwi and community broadcasting.

### We urge MBIE to:

- Guarantee long-term and improve spectrum access for non-commercial broadcasters through in-kind licensing arrangements,
- Ensure non-commercial services are not subject to pricing models designed for commercial media.
- Create a “public interest broadcaster” category for spectrum policy, encompassing Community Access Media, iwi, student, and ethnic media.
- Coordinate closely with NZ On Air, Te Māngai Pāho, and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage to align policy and funding frameworks, and

- Uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations and the principles of inclusion and resilience in spectrum management.

CAMA looks forward to continued engagement with MBIE and partner agencies to ensure that the future of radio spectrum in Aotearoa serves all communities, not just those with the most significant commercial capacity.

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