



Independent Communications Authority of South Africa
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MEDIA STATEMENT

ICASA extends temporary radio frequency spectrum assignments issued to licensees

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Pretoria – The Council of the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA/the Authority) has resolved to review the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) COVID-19 National Disaster Regulations (The Regulations) and extend the temporary radio frequency spectrum assignments issued to licensees for another two months (from 1 April 2021 to 31 May 2021).

The temporary release of high demand spectrum (HDS) to licensees aimed to mitigate the impact of the national state of disaster following the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, mainly by easing network congestion, maintaining good quality of broadband services, and enabling licensees to lower the cost of access to consumers.

The regulations made provision for, *amongst others*; the zero-rating of some critical health and education websites in order to promote universal access and service to health information and services, and to support the development of virtual classrooms for learners.

In this context, the Authority notes that, as of 25 January 2021, over a thousand web sites have been zero-rated, within the following categories:

- 651 sites added by the Department of Higher Education and Training;
- 413 sites added by the Department of Basic Education;
- 15 sites added by the Department of Health.

The 1 079 websites cover the following categories:

- Universities and ac.za;
- Public Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges;
- Public Community Education and Training (CET) institutions;
- Private Higher Education Institutions;
- Private colleges;
- Agricultural and Nursing Colleges;
- COVID-19-related websites identified by the Department of Health; and
- Approved local websites offering free access to COVID-19 health content resources.

Following the expiry of the temporary spectrum extension on 31 May 2021, the Authority will embark on a comprehensive review of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) COVID-19 National Disaster Regulations, which include the radio frequency spectrum extensions, as well as the relaxation of compliance requirements in respect of local content for broadcasters, and type-approval obligations.

According to the Chairperson of ICASA, Dr Keabetswe Modimoeng, the Authority needs to safeguard the interest of consumers within the temporary spectrum licensing regime.

“As mobile network operators continue to provide services while deriving commercial value from this high value spectrum resource, we need to delicately apply ourselves on these extensions in a manner that is justifiable and primarily beneficial to the South African public. We will be doing so over the next two months while expediting our appeal processes on the formal licensing court interdict. Industry needs to dig deep and assist the process further by modelling best pro-consumer offerings on the back of these temporary licences,” says Dr Modimoeng.

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