May 22, 2012

Director General
Engineering, Planning and Standards Branch
Industry Canada
19th Floor
300 Slater Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C8


4-2 Industry Canada is seeking comments on whether to maintain the public benefit condition of licence for new satellite spectrum approvals:

The Government of the Northwest Territories is making this response in support for continuation of the public benefit condition of license for the new satellite spectrum approvals.

The recently commissioned Arctic Communications Infrastructure Assessment report documented the existing telecommunications situation in the Canadian Arctic Territories of Yukon, NWT, and Nunavut as of February 2011. Focusing on the NWT, the Report notes that the NWT, with 33 official communities, has the largest number of communities of the three territories. Of the 33 communities, 10 are fly-in only with no access to roads at any time of the year and 9 communities have winter roads only. Despite these physical challenges, a consistent means of telecommunications is still not readily accessible throughout the Northwest Territories.

Since 2003, the GNWT has had access to 6 MHz of Public Benefit bandwidth capacity. The bandwidth was made available to Territorial governments by Industry Canada, and is provided by Telesat. Telesat provides the bandwidth as part of an agreement with Industry Canada when Telesat first launched satellites over the Arctic. The agreement was designed to ensure that Telesat provided a certain amount of bandwidth capacity to the Territorial governments, to help address bandwidth concerns in the delivery of public services in satellite-served communities in both Territories.

In 2010, Telesat moved the Public Benefit capacity from Anik F2 to Anik F3. The current providers in the NWT (NorthwesTel and SSi Micro Ltd.) were both unable to access the Public Benefit bandwidth capacity on Anik F3, due to limitations in existing ground infrastructure. Their satellite infrastructure was not setup to “point” to Anik F3, and would require significant infrastructure investments in order to do so. The additional data communications capacity provided by the public benefit was important enough to GNWT programming that the territorial government paid for the additional capacity to
access Anik F3 for 18 months, until Telesat recently issued a new proposal to honour their Public Benefit obligation to Industry Canada.

The GNWT estimates that should the Public Benefit disappear, stakeholder costs to purchase replacement bandwidth at full commercial rates to the end of 2022, estimated at approximately $400,000 per year for the GNWT, or $4.4M to the end of the benefit period. This is not an option that the GNWT could afford to pursue.

The GNWT uses the Public Benefit capacity (6 MHz) to provide additional data communications capacity through its existing network services in the 10 satellite-served communities of the NWT (Colville Lake, Deline, Gamèti, Uluhaktok, Lutselk’e, Nahanni Butte, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, Trout Lake, and Wekweti). The additional capacity has benefited both education and tele-health programs. Most recently, the latest agreement provides for some additional redundancy which will improve the GNWT’s ability to continue to deliver some of its programming in the event of an outage. If the GNWT’s current Data Communications Network, experiences an outage, the new Public Benefit provider can now provide additional diversity and redundancy (i.e. a second provider). This provides improved public safety to the communities and could allow certain government delivered data communications services to continue operation.

Sincerely,

Dave Heffernan
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Government of the Northwest Territories
Department of Finance

c. Shari Scott, Senior Analyst, Industry Canada