



News Release

TRA Discusses Radiocommunications Masts and Aerials with the Industry

Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain - Tuesday 8 September 2009

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) General Director Mr. Alan Horne met with representatives from Batelco, MENA Telecom, STC and Zain to discuss the future for radiocommunications networks in Bahrain.

It was discussed that a number of Municipalities have not issued permits for masts and aerial sites for more than one year. Further, until recently, Municipalities have not been concerned with the erection of aerials on building roof tops. Given this situation and the commitments of licensed telecommunications operators to offer mobile services and fixed wireless broadband services, licensees have been forced to erect masts and install aerials prior to the granting of permits by Municipalities.

Alan Horne stated that "To ensure the development of the Bahraini telecommunications infrastructure in an optimum manner, it is essential that the telecommunications operators, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, the Ministry of Municipalities and Agriculture Affairs (Municipalities), the Commission responsible for the environment (Public Commission for the Protection of Marine Resources, Environment and Wildlife) and the relevant planning authorities work together in partnership to produce the most favourable solutions. This infrastructure must be deployed in a strategic way that minimizes the impact on the environment and seeks to take into account the interests of the general public."

Muharraq Municipality has now ruled that masts erected without permits should be removed from service. The industry group unanimously agreed that this was an unacceptable position. The example of Switzerland was sighted where, when faced with a similar threat from authorities, the mobile operators cut off all service for a short period as a demonstration of the importance of telecommunications. There was a public outcry following which the authorities and industry worked together to resolve the situation.

To avoid any disruption in the telecommunications services provided to consumers in Muharraq or any other Municipality, the industry group agreed that the enforcement action by Municipalities should be frozen to enable the industry joint actions to be taken. The industry agreed that TRA should agree revised procedures for new masts erection and conduct a review of all mast sites without permits. If a site does not comply with the procedure, the operator shall upgrade the site to establish compliance. In the event that rectification work is not carried out, TRA will work with the respective Municipality to enforcement removal of all sites which do not comply.

Alan Horne concluded the meeting by thanking all the Licensees for their cooperation and for their faith in the sector and authorities in making the substantial investments in the essential infrastructure required to support the economy of Bahrain. "TRA will work closely with all authorities and the industry to ensure that consumers are able to receive the radiocommunications services safely and in a timely manner. We do not want existing services disrupted as it will affect the social and business fabric impacting jobs and the economy. We must all diligently carry out the actions agreed today and encourage the Municipal councils to take the route which meets the needs of the majority of consumers and businesses."



The Industry Group

Notes to Editor

The industry is making a significant investment in new broadband radiocommunications networks to satisfy the ever increasing demand from consumers and businesses for broadband internet connectivity as well as voice communications. The group agreed that Telecommunications systems play a vital role in bringing significant economic and social benefits to Bahrain and that radiocommunications are important to the provision of telecommunications services and of fundamental significance to the provision of any service requiring mobility as well as the provision of an alternative broadband access to the fixed line infrastructure.

It was unanimously agreed that the infrastructure needed to underpin radiocommunications must be delivered in a manner which keeps the environmental impact to a minimum.

There exist public concerns regarding the safety of radio signals emitting from masts and, despite extensive research conducted globally by qualified independent bodies, these concerns may always be present. In order to alleviate public concerns, Bahrain has adopted and is enforcing, the international guidelines for radio signal levels adopted by the World Health Organisation. The guidelines are the result of extensive research to establish radio signal levels at which there is no evidence of any harm to people, this level was then reduced by a further factor of 50 in order to establish the maximum permissible level of radio signal exposure for the general public. Ministerial

Order Number 4 of 2009 makes compliance with the levels adopted by the World Health Organisation mandatory in Bahrain.

TRA, in conjunction with the Public Commission for the Protection of Marine Resources, Environment and Wildlife, is charged with conducting an ongoing measurement campaign to verify that all radio signals from telecommunications masts comply with the levels adopted by the World Health Organisation.

The group agreed that the impact of the action being taken by the Municipality Councils was detrimental to consumers and the economy. The reason that masts and aerials had been erected without permits from the Councils was to satisfy demands from customers to improve the quality and coverage of services. Permits had however been obtained where required from the Commission responsible for the Environment and also the Civil Aviation Authority. Further, all radio signal levels comply with the WHO standard (adopted in the Ministerial Order No. 4). All operators had submitted their formal applications to the Municipal Councils but had no visibility of when or how they could be obtained.

The detailed procedures and guidelines must be followed by all stakeholders including telecommunications operators, TRA, Municipalities, Commission responsible for the environment and other relevant bodies. These should set out the responsibilities and the technical requirements for the erection of masts and antennas. The procedures should include the time frame in which each party must respond so that operators are able to meet their commitments to provide telecommunications services to the general public in a timely manner.

During the industry Meeting it was agreed that greater clarity was required in the whole process of obtaining permits to put up masts and aerials. Earlier this year the industry established a working group to cooperate in preparing detailed procedures and guidelines, taking into account the willingness of the industry to share radiocommunication masts. The processes are being guided by TRA's Wireless Telecommunications Network Facility Sharing Regulation. The procedures produced by Muharraq council were also being considered by the group with the view to incorporating the practical aspects set out therein.

The group requested that, before any drastic action was taken effecting the population of Muharraq or any other Municipality, TRA write to all Municipalities stating that enforcement action by Municipalities be frozen to enable the following joint actions to be taken;

1. Within 3 months, TRA shall agree revised procedures and guidelines for the erection of new masts and placing of new aerials on roof tops. Such procedures and guidelines shall be prepared in consultation with the Municipalities and Licensees;
2. Within 3 months of the publication of the revised procedures and guidelines, and in conjunction with the Municipalities, TRA shall conduct a review of all telecommunications mast sites without permits;
3. Within 3 months of TRA and the respective Municipality informing an operator that a site does not comply with the guidelines, the operator shall complete rectification work required to establish compliance;
4. In the event that rectification work is not carried out within the agreed time period, TRA shall work with the respective Municipality to enforcement removal of all sites which do not comply.

In addition,

5. TRA will prepare a public awareness campaign explaining the actions being taken by the

authorities and industry in addressing environmental issues surrounding telecommunications masts and aerials. This campaign should start within 3 months and focus on educational workshops, fact sheets and articles;

6. All requests for new aerials and masts should continue to be submitted to the concerned Municipalities to obtain the necessary permits using existing established processes and procedures. Municipalities should address the new requests in a timely manner and not wait for the new processes and procedures;
7. TRA will conduct a review of the benefits of radiocommunications, and give consideration to how masts and antennas will evolve from a smaller number of larger installations to a larger number of smaller, lower power, installations as networks evolve to support the 2030 Economic Vision for Bahrain. The study should take account of the provision of Broadband high speed internet access to meet the future needs of enterprises, government and consumers.

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About TRA

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) was established by Legislative Decree No. 48 of 2002 promulgating the Telecommunications Law. TRA is an independent body and its duties and powers include, among other things, protecting the interests of subscribers and users and promoting effective and fair competition among existing and new licensed operators. More information regarding TRA can be viewed at www.tra.org.bh

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