

**GSOA response to Consultation on the
Draft Amendments to the Radio Frequency Spectrum
Regulations and
Radio Frequency Spectrum Fees Regulations**

Introduction

GSOA is a global CEO-driven association representing the entire satellite ecosystem, including geostationary (GSO) and non-geostationary (NGSO) satellite operators, manufacturers, launch providers, and ground segment companies. GSOA leads industry collaboration, drives visibility at the highest policy levels, and provides a strong, unified voice for the satellite sector. GSOA promotes and advances the collective interests of the satellite industry, supporting policies and regulatory frameworks that expand connectivity, encourage innovation, facilitate investment, and ensure the sustainable development of satellite services worldwide.

South Africa is one of the most significant satellite markets on the African continent and plays an important role in enabling satellite communications services, gateway infrastructure, enterprise connectivity, mobility services, broadcasting, and emerging communications platforms across the region. As satellite technologies continue to evolve, regulatory frameworks increasingly play a critical role in ensuring that innovation can be introduced efficiently while maintaining effective spectrum management.

GSOA, and its members, would like to thank the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Amendments to the Radio Frequency Spectrum Regulations and Radio Frequency Spectrum Fees Regulations, as published in Government Gazette 54677 on 15 May 2026.

The satellite industry is experiencing a significant surge in innovation and growth. Satellite operators across the globe are deploying new-generation satellites with high data throughputs, enabling fast, flexible fixed and mobile broadband access services from anywhere.. These services are being used on both GSO and NGSO satellite systems and are bringing new and innovative services to users across the globe.

GSOA acknowledges the extensive work undertaken by ICASA through the Satellite Licensing Framework Inquiry and the subsequent publication of the draft regulations. The consultation process, including the publication of stakeholder submissions, public hearings, findings, and draft regulatory measures, demonstrates a constructive and transparent approach to regulatory development.

GSOA further notes that the draft amendments reflect substantial consideration of stakeholder views expressed during the consultation process. In particular, the proposed measures represent a positive step towards establishing a regulatory environment that accommodates the evolving nature of satellite technologies and services while supporting South Africa's broader connectivity objectives.

GSOA is broadly supportive of the proposed amendments and respectfully offers the following observations for the Authority's consideration.

Space Segment Registration Framework

GSOA supports an “open skies” framework, whereby no specific authorisation is required for satellite operators to provide satellite capacity to telecom operators already licensed in a country as, among other things, facilitates the timely deployment of innovative satellite services to end-users. However, GSOA welcomes the introduction of a dedicated space segment registration framework for foreign satellite operators and supports ICASA's decision to adopt a registration-based approach rather than a separate licensing or authorisation regime for satellite space segments. In GSOA's view, the proposed framework appropriately balances the Authority's objective of maintaining visibility over satellite systems serving South Africa with the need to avoid unnecessary barriers to satellite service provision.

The proposed approach is broadly consistent with regulatory best practice and provides an effective mechanism for engagement between the Authority and satellite operators. To preserve these benefits, GSOA encourages ICASA to maintain the administrative nature of the registration process and to ensure that the framework remains distinct part of market access authorisations, service licensing requirements, spectrum licensing processes, and other regulatory approvals that may be applicable under separate regulatory frameworks.

1. Earth Stations in Motion (ESIM)

GSOA welcomes the inclusion of a dedicated framework for Earth Stations in Motion (ESIM), reflecting the growing importance of mobility applications across the satellite sector. The proposed approach supports the deployment of satellite connectivity services across maritime, aeronautical, and land mobility platforms while recognizing the operational characteristics of these systems. GSOA also welcomes ICASA's proposal to establish an expedited licensing process for passing ESIMs, with a target processing period of less than 90 days. This represents a practical approach that acknowledges the temporary and transitory nature of such operations while reducing administrative burdens on both applicants and the Authority.

GSOA believes the proposed ESIM framework represents an important step towards facilitating satellite-enabled mobility services and is broadly aligned with international regulatory developments and best practices in this area.

2. Radio Astronomy Co-ordination Framework

GSOA recognizes the global significance of South Africa's Radio Astronomy activities, including the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) project, and supports the protection of Radio Astronomy services from harmful interference. GSOA welcomes ICASA's efforts to ensure the continued coexistence of satellite and radio astronomy operations through appropriate co-ordination mechanisms.

To support regulatory certainty and facilitate effective co-ordination, GSOA encourages ICASA to ensure that the protection of Radio Astronomy services will continue to be implemented in accordance with the applicable provisions of the ITU Radio Regulations and relevant ITU-R Recommendations.

GSOA welcomes confirmation that the co-ordination processes applicable within the Radio Quiet Zone framework will remain transparent, predictable, and proportionate. This will enable satellite operators to assess and address potential co-ordination requirements at an early stage of network planning and deployment.

3. Gateway Earth Station Spectrum Fee Framework

GSOA welcomes ICASA's review of the gateway earth station spectrum fee framework, and particularly the proposed reduction in fee weighting for higher frequency bands. The revised approach appropriately reflects the operational characteristics of gateway infrastructure and recognises the important role that gateway earth stations play in supporting satellite connectivity services within South Africa and across the wider region. The proposed amendments are a positive step towards facilitating gateway deployment and encouraging continued investment in satellite infrastructure.

While GSOA is supportive of the overall direction, additional clarity regarding the practical implementation of the proposed fee methodology would further enhance transparency and predictability. GSOA welcomes clarification regarding the application of the Spectrum Efficiency Coefficient (SEC) factor. Given the substantial impact of this parameter on the resulting spectrum fees, clarity regarding its intended application would assist stakeholders in assessing the

practical implications of the framework. GSOA further encourages ICASA to consider adopting a baseline SEC value of 1, with adjustments applied only where justified by ICASA for specific characteristics of the authorised system of covering rural or underserved areas or governmental networks and projects.

GSOA further notes that gateway earth stations frequently may operate on non-contiguous frequency assignments within a single authorised gateway site. Accordingly, GSOA encourages ICASA to confirm that fee calculations appropriately reflect the total bandwidth utilised by the authorised gateway operation. In addition, GSOA welcomes confirmation that the proposed fee methodology is intended to be applied on a per-site basis for each gateway earth station.

4. Satellite User Terminal Spectrum Fees

GSOA welcomes ICASA's efforts to establish a spectrum fee framework that accommodates evolving satellite service models and user terminal deployments. However, additional clarity regarding the application of the Spectrum Efficiency Coefficient (SEC) factor would assist stakeholders in understanding the practical implementation of the proposed methodology.

Given the substantial impact of the SEC factor on the resulting spectrum fees, GSOA encourages ICASA to provide greater certainty regarding its application and to consider adopting a baseline SEC value of 1, with adjustments applied only where justified by ICASA for specific characteristics of the authorised system of covering rural or underserved areas or governmental networks and projects.

Finally, GSOA is committed to working collaboratively with ICASA and other stakeholders to support the development of an enabling regulatory environment for satellite services in South Africa and welcomes the opportunity to provide additional information that may assist the Authority.

GSOA requests an opportunity to make oral representations to ICASA to supplement our written submission.

Draft Amendments to the Radio Frequency Spectrum Regulations

Draft New Regulation 28B Satellite Space Segment

28(1) Foreign Satellite Space Segment Operator

The term Foreign Satellite Space Segment Operator is not defined. GSOA submits that the regulations should clearly specify what the criteria are to be classified as a Foreign Satellite Space Segment Operator.

28(2) Whilst registration does not grant any right to provide services in South Africa, the regulations should clarify what rights registration does confer on a foreign satellite space segment operator.

28(3) In terms of regulations published in Government Gazette 44365 on 31 March 2021, concerning revised radio frequency spectrum bands proposed to be exempted from the prohibition of its use in the karoo central astronomy advantage areas: "All space-to-Earth frequency bands allocated in terms of the ICASA National Radio Frequency Plan, are exempted from the prohibition on the use of spectrum in the frequency bands 100 MHz to 25.5 GHz within the Karoo Central Astronomy Advantage Areas.

GSOA, therefore submits that the requirement for the satellite space segment operator to co-ordinate with the Astronomy Management Authority before commencing operations is not applicable.

Draft Amendments to the Radio Frequency Spectrum Fees Regulations

General

All terms used in the spectrum fee formulas should be clearly defined

Satellite Hub Ground Station Formula

Hub ground station Fee = Max (RuLi UNIT * FREQ * BW * SEC)

It is not clear how the value of RuL (minimum fee for satellite uplink connections) is derived.