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MzansiSat written response to ICASA request

Landing Rights + Related Issues |



Preliminary Remarks

- MzansiSat (Pty) Ltd. understands that ICASA , in a public notice dated 27th January 2026 has extended the “deadline for written responses to I-ECNS (Individual Electronic Communications Network Services) Licence inquiry”.
- Said deadline has been extended until 16th February 2026.
- The present paper is to submit to ICASA our recommendations in this matter together with recommendations in relation to : (a) Satellite Landing Rights; (b) Satellite Ground-Earth Stations (GES); and I-ECS (Individual Electronic Communications Services) which includes satellite systems.

Definitions



- Satellite Landing Rights (“SLR”) : SLR are authorisations granted by national regulators to foreign licensed satellite operators , allowing them to transmit signals to and from the territory. These rights are independent of ITU registrations.
- Class or I- ECS or Individual Electronic Communications Systems: ECS licences grant the right to transmit electronic communications in a limited/predetermined geographical area. Class or I- ECNS or Individual Electronic Communications Networks: ECNS grant the right to transmit electronic communications nationally.
- Satellite Ground-Earth Stations (“GES”): a SGES Licence is an authorisation to operate a ground segment with several hubs . A SGES serves as the radio interface between space and ground networks handling tasks such as tracking satellites, receiving data (downlink) and transmitting signals (uplink) for telemetry, command and payload data.
- Gateway Earth Stations belong to the SGES class but specifically distinguishes these hubs that connect satellite networks to terrestrial networks.
We understand that ICASA is developing a specific “SatelliteGateway Earth Station Licence” including all regulatory clearances which are currently fragmented.

Supporting ICASA



- MzansiSat fully supports ICASA's development of a specific fully integrated Satellite Gateway Earth Station licence.
- However, these efforts aimed at facilitating the operations of foreign third party satellite providers shall not be pursued at the costs or expenses of the South African National Telecommunication Project approved by the Government in a White Paper a few years ago.
- Nonetheless it shall be stressed that the legitimate protection due to the SA national satellite shall be perfectly compatible with the finalisation of the new SGES Licence regime.
- The scope of the present note is accordingly propose here to carve a niche for Sentech in the new SGES Licence regime. To achieve full compatibility, we suggest to move the cursor of the new SGES Licence regime from zero to the maximum expected throughput of the national satellite with its predetermined frequencies and ground segment.

Regulatory Proposal

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As far as Satellite landing rights are concerned

- 1. Satellite Landing Rights. Currently there is no national satellite albeit the SA telecommunication demand is a big multiple of the throughput of the contemplated SA national satellite. In other words foreign satellite operators supply 100% of uplink and downlink communications.
- Our proposal is accordingly to reserve a minimum 50 Gbps capacity to the national satellite. 50Gbps of capacity correspond to a throughput of 600 Gbps annually or 9,000 Gbps during 15 years.
- As a matter of consequence the regime of landing rights granted to foreign operators shall not changed. It will simply start over 50 Gbps of capacity and over 600 Gbps pf throughput annually. In other words we propose to put not a cap but a FLOOR to foreign satellites landing rights.
- The proposed FLOOR at 50Gbps+ of capacity/600 Gbps+ throughput annually during a minimum period of 15 years renewable is fully compatible with ITU regulations.

Earth Gateway

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As far as the satellite gateway Earth Licence is concerned:

- We also propose that ICASA shall grant to SENTECH and the South African national satellite for a minimum period of 15 years renewable, a corresponding blanket Satellite Gateway Earth Licence matching the satellite specifications in the C, Ku, and Ka bands for twelve (12) gateways which shall cover 100% of South Africa.

Merit of Proposal

- a) ICASA has the authority to create a captive market for the national satellite. Indeed as long as the 600 Gbps throughput annually -during a minimum of 15 years renewable - shall not be reached , foreign satellite operators shall not be authorised to transmit signals.
- (b) The proposed regulatory adjustment shall trigger the following favourable consequences for Sentech, the lead project company: (i) the satellite fill rate shall be 100% ; (ii) the satellite and ground segment shall be fully financed with private commercial loans without public funds; (iii) the financial risks of the project shall no longer be Sentech or the PPP but the synthetic risk of default of South African telecommunications operators purchasing 9,000 Gbps from Sentech during a minimum of 15 years ; and (iv) the infrastructure shall generate substantial free cash flows.
- (c) Sentech is a South African State owned company which fully complies with all South African relevant regulations. Objections similar to those raised in the case of Starlink shall not apply.
- (d) Once the satellite is in operation Sentech shall be able to set up subsidiaries for : (i) training engineers at the University of Stellenbosch and elsewhere; (ii) ground segment system integration, maintenance and upgrade; (iii) border control and natural resources protection service.

Talk. To us.

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