

BROADCASTING

MCOT president Siwaporn Chomsuwan discusses the frequency return at a meeting with the NBTC on Wednesday.

MCOT wants fair payout for return of spectrum

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SET-listed MCOT Plc, a state-owned broadcaster, is willing to return part of its 2600-megahertz spectrum for future auctions if the regulator pays it a proper compensation.

The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) told MCOT on Wednesday that it should return at least 60MHz of 144MHz of bandwidth on the 2600MHz spectrum.

MCOT used the bandwidth to give a 15-year contract to Playwork Co to operate pay-TV business in 2010.

However, Playwork never launched the service due mainly to problems related to importing high-tech equipment.

MCOT president Siwaporn Chomsuwan said it could return part of its spectrum for fourth-generation wireless auctions next year if the NBTC pays it appropriate compensation.

MCOT will soon hold discussions with Playwork to find a good solution for both sides. Details for the possible spectrum return will be known by the end of March.

"We don't know how much bandwidth we can return at the moment, but we will try our best in the negotiations," Mr Siwaporn said.

After MCOT has concluded its talks with Playwork, it will discuss compensation with the NBTC.

MCOT executive vice-president Pholchai Vinichaikul said the broadcaster was delighted to follow the NBTC's request to serve people's interests.

"But the compensation should be fair and appropriate for MCOT to offset our business opportunity loss in the future," he said.

NBTC secretary-general Takorn Tanta-sith said it could not yet determine appropriate compensation for MCOT because it must wait for the new NBTC law to come into effect in July.

In fact, MCOT still wants to help Playwork solve its difficulties and push for the commercial launch of its pay-TV service, which would generate additional income for MCOT at a time when digital TV operators face intense competition.

The broadcaster has a weak TV operation with declining ratings among the 24 digital TV channels.

It has made efforts to improve itself by switching to be a digital TV network provider, modernising its channel positioning to draw younger audiences and offering more new programmes.

In the last nine months of last year, the broadcaster posted a net profit of 129.4 million baht on revenue totalling 2.86 billion baht.

MCOT shares closed yesterday on the Stock Exchange of Thailand at 9.40 baht, up 45 satang, in trade worth 16.8 million baht.