

State and industry discuss broadband

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26 Jan 2017

Discussions with leading operators in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector on the implementation plan for the government's radio spectrum policy are far advanced, says Telecommunications and Postal Services Minister Siyabonga Cwele.



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On Tuesday, he said the engagements were progressing well and would be finalised by the end of February. After this, the implementation plan would be submitted to the Cabinet and then to Parliament.

Speaking to Business Day on the sidelines of a meeting of Parliament's telecommunications and postal services committee, Cwele said the consultations aimed to ensure the policy was implemented in a manner that was least disruptive to industry.

The main aim of the policy was the equitable allocation of radio spectrum.

An issue that has been discussed is high-demand spectrum, which has been allocated until 2027, while spectrum is renewed annually.

Investments are made on the basis of allocated spectrum and Cwele said the aim of the discussions with industry was to provide certainty.

Discussions had also been held with the Independent Communications Authority of SA, which in 2016 instituted an unsuccessful bid to auction radio spectrum that was quashed in the high court following legal action by Cwele.

Vodacom Group CEO Shameel Joosub said on Tuesday: "While it is still early days in the entire process, we have been involved in constructive engagements... to find a workable solution to make broadband even more accessible and affordable for South Africans. These engagements are on-going and have the intent of delivering on the objectives of the white paper."

MTN SA CEO Mteto Nyati said: "MTN remains hopeful the concerns identified in the ICT policy white paper will be understood ... and a solution that is in the best interests of the industry and all parties involved will be found."

Telkom spokeswoman Jacqui O'Sullivan said: "The government's efforts should be geared towards creating an ICT sector underpinned by enhanced competitiveness, regulatory certainty and predictability."

Source: Business Day

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