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Telecoms & Media

Contributing Editors

Alexander Brown, David Trapp, Edoardo Tedeschi, Matteo Susta-, Christopher Götz, Martin Gramsch, Eva Stephan and Raza Rizvi

Simmons & Simmons

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Contributors

Singapore

Drew & Napier LLC

DREW & NAPIER

Lim Chong Kin chongkin.lim@drewnapier.com

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Regulatory and institutional structure

Summarise the regulatory framework for the communications sector. Do any foreign ownership restrictions apply to communications services?

Regulatory framework

The Info-communications Media Development Authority (IMDA) is the converged regulator for the info-communications and media sectors and is responsible for the development, promotion and regulation of the info-communications industry, which includes both the telecoms and IT sectors. The IMDA rests under the direct authority of the Ministry of Communications and Information.

At present, the telecoms and media sectors are governed by separate regulatory frameworks.

The telecoms sector is regulated by the IMDA under the Telecommunications Act 1999 (the Telecoms Act) and the Info-communications Media Development Authority Act 2016 (the IMDA Act).

'Telecommunications' is defined very broadly under the Telecoms Act as:

> [A] transmission, emission or reception of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds or intelligence of any nature by wire, radio, optical or other electromagnetic systems whether or not such signs, signals, writing, images, sounds or intelligence have been subjected to a re-arrangement, computation or other processes by any means in the course of their transmission, emission or reception.

The Telecoms Act is the primary legislation governing the telecoms industry in Singapore. It sets out the broad licensing and regulatory framework for the telecoms sector. Specific issues are dealt with through regulations, codes of practice, standards of performance, directions and advisory guidelines issued by the IMDA, pursuant to its powers under the Telecoms Act.

The Telecoms Act itself does not make a distinction between fixed, mobile and satellite services. This is consistent with the technology-neutral approach that the IMDA has taken in regulating the industry. There are, however, licensing and regulatory requirements that are service-specific. For instance, the Telecommunications (Radio-Communication) Regulations (the Radio-Communication Regulations) regulate the licensing process for radio frequency (RF) spectrum, the use of RF spectrum and the operation of radio stations and networks. This set of regulations applies primarily to mobile services.

Other regulations cover specific issues pertaining to fixed, mobile and satellite services. Examples of such regulations are the Telecommunications (Class Licence) Regulations and the Telecommunications (Dealers) Regulations. The IMDA has also replaced the Code of Practice for Competition in the Provision of Telecommunication Services 2012 (TCC) with the Code of Practice for Competition in the Provision of Telecommunication and Media

Services 2022 (Converged Code), a converged competition code to govern competition and market-related matters in the telecoms and media markets.

At present, the Telecoms Act does not apply to the licensing of any broadcasting service or any broadcasting apparatus that is already subject to regulation under the Broadcasting Act 1994 (the Broadcasting Act).

Foreign ownership restrictions

Since 1 April 2000, no direct or indirect foreign equity limits have applied to telecoms licensees. However, other than in exceptional circumstances, the IMDA's current practice is to issue facilities-based telecoms licences only to companies incorporated in Singapore, which can be wholly owned by a foreign entity. In the case of services-based licences, the IMDA would also issue licences to companies incorporated in Singapore (which can be wholly owned by a foreign entity) or to foreign companies with a locally registered branch. Controls on ownership on telecoms licensees exist under the Telecoms Act, the Broadcasting Act and the Converged Code.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Authorisation/licensing regime

Describe the authorisation or licensing regime.

Licensing framework

All persons operating and providing telecoms systems and services in Singapore must be licensed under section 5 of the Telecoms Act. The IMDA categorises licences for the operation and provision of telecoms systems and services into licences for either facilities-based operators (FBOs) or services-based operators (SBOs), and where RF spectrum is required for the provision of wireless services, additional licensing is required under the Radio-Communication Regulations.

FBO licence

A person deploying and (or) operating of any form of telecommunication network, systems and (or) facilities to provide telecommunication and (or) broadcasting services outside of his or her own property boundaries to third parties, who may include other licensed telecommunication operators, business customers or the general public will require an FBO licence. The IMDA generally adopts a technology-neutral approach towards the licensing of telecoms infrastructure. The configuration of the systems deployed and the technology platform (wireless or wired) adopted will be left to the choice of the licensee, subject to spectrum and other physical constraints. An FBO licence is on a higher hierarchical level than an SBO licence.

As such, an FBO licensee does not need an SBO licence if it wishes to provide services that on its own would have required an SBO licence, provided that the FBO licensee has already been licensed to provide the service. The converse, however, does not apply. An SBO licensee that

wishes to deploy telecoms infrastructure in the provision of telecoms services must apply for an FBO licence. The FBO licence will then replace the SBO licence.

Although the general conditions of an FBO licence are standardised across all FBO licensees, additional specific conditions may apply to each individual FBO licensee depending on the services that the licensee may provide.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of telecoms systems and services that may require an FBO licence:

- any terrestrial telecoms infrastructure for the carriage of telecoms or broadcasting traffic (be it cross-border or local traffic; network coverage may be nationwide or limited to selected local geographic broadcast), including but not limited to:
    - submarine cables (including the establishment of frontier stations, backhaul and sale of indefeasible rights of use);
    - satellite international gateways; and
    - domestic telecoms networks (including core backbone and local access networks);
- public switched telephone services;
- public switched integrated services digital network services;
- leased circuit services;
- public radio communication services;
- public cellular mobile telephone services;
- public trunked radio services;
- public mobile data services;
- terrestrial telecommunication network for broadcasting purposes only; and
- satellite uplink or downlink for broadcasting purposes.

FBO licences	Annual fees and duration
FBOs	Licence duration: 15 years, renewable for a further period as the IMDA thinks fit. Annual fee: • first S$50 million in annual gross turnover (AGTO): S$80,000; • next S$50 million to S$100 million in AGTO: 0.8 per cent of incremental AGTO; and • above S$100 million in AGTO: 1 per cent of incremental AGTO.

FBO designated as public telecoms licensee	Licence duration: 20 years, renewable for a further period as the IMDA thinks fit. Annual fee: • first S$50 million in AGTO: S$200,000; • next S$50 million to S$100 million in AGTO: 0.8 per cent of incremental AGTO; and • above S$100 million in AGTO: 1 per cent of incremental AGTO.
Public mobile data services Public trunked radio services	Licence duration: 10 years, renewable for a further period as the IMDA thinks fit. Annual fee: • first S$50 million in annual gross turnover (AGTO): S$80,000; • next S$50 million to S$100 million in AGTO: 0.8 per cent of incremental AGTO; and • above S$100 million in AGTO: 1 per cent of incremental AGTO.
Terrestrial telecoms network for broadcasting purposes only Satellite uplink/downlink for broadcasting purposes	Licence duration: 10 years, renewable on a five - yearly basis. Annual fee: S$5,000

SBO licence

SBO licences are granted to operators or providers that do not intend to deploy telecoms infrastructure. Such licensees may instead lease telecoms network elements (eg, transmission capacity and switching services) from FBO licensees to provide telecoms services or resell the telecoms services of other telecoms licensees. SBO services can be individually licensed or class-licensed. Class licensing is a licensing scheme where the standard terms and conditions that apply to the category of licences are publicly published. Licensees providing or operating the services within the scope of the class licence will be deemed to have read and agreed to the terms and conditions of the class licence. Generally, providers leasing international transmission capacity to provide telecoms services will be licensed individually.

Telecoms services that require SBO (individual) licensing include, without limitation:

- international simple resale;

- resale of local leased fixed-line connectivity services;
- public internet access services;
- internet exchange services;
- virtual private network services;
- managed data network services;
- mobile virtual network operation;
- live audiotex services;
- internet protocol (IP) telephony services;
- satellite mobile telephone or data services;
- mobile communications on aircraft;
- voice and data services with masking of calling line identity;
- machine-to-machine services;
- white space geolocation database services; and
- prepaid services for other telecoms services, such as:
    - call-back and call re-origination services;
    - internet-based voice and data services;
    - international calling card (ICC) services;
    - resale of public switched telecoms services;
    - store-and-retrieve value-added network services; and
    - store-and-forward value-added network services.

Telecoms services that require an SBO (class) licence include, without limitation:

- call-back and call re-origination services;
- internet-based voice and data services;
- ICC services;
- resale of public switched telecoms services;
- store-and-retrieve value-added network services;
- store-and-forward value-added network services;
- audiotex services; and
- public chain payphone services.

The provision of certain services, such as audiotex and internet access services, are subject to concurrent telecoms and media licensing requirements. In this respect, audiotex and internet access services are also deemed to be class-licensed under the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification.

SBO (individual) licence	

SBO (individual)	Annual fee: • first S$50 million in AGTO: S$4,000; • next S$50 million to S$100 million in AGTO: 0.5 per cent of incremental AGTO; and • above S$100 million in AGTO: 0.8 per cent of incremental AGTO.
Live audiotex services only	S$200 every five years
SBO (class) licence	
Resale of public switched telecommunication services, public chain payphone services, and store - and - retrieve value - added network services (without the use of leased circuits)	No registration fee
All other categories of SBO (class) licences	S$200 (one - time payment)

Licensing – radio frequency

Pursuant to its exclusive privilege under the Telecoms Act, the IMDA can determine how the RF spectrum is allocated. The IMDA can also make decisions on the assignment of unused radio spectrum. Specifically, the Radio-Communication Regulations give the IMDA the right to prepare and publish radio spectrum plans and RF band plans. The Radio Spectrum Master Plan is a document prepared by the IMDA pursuant to such statutory right and it serves to inform the industry and interested parties on the allocation and availability of spectrum, technological trends in the use of spectrum and the IMDA's policy concerning spectrum allocation and reallocation for public communication networks. At the time of writing, the Radio Spectrum Master Plan is in the process of being updated by the IMDA, and the updated version has yet to be published. The IMDA has also published the Spectrum Management Handbook to provide information on spectrum allocations, assignment criteria and application procedures for various radio-communication services. The IMDA is also empowered under the Radio-Communication Regulations to vary or revoke any radio spectrum plan or RF band plan, in whole or in part.

RFs required for the provision of 2G, 3G and 4G mobile services, as well as wireless broadband services, have been granted as spectrum rights through an auction process. RFs required for the operation of a satellite are generally allocated administratively or assigned by the IMDA as part of the satellite licence. The Radio-Communication Regulations also regulate the installation and maintenance of radio communications stations or networks in Singapore.

Regarding the permitted use of licensed radio spectrum, the general powers of the Telecoms Act and the Radio-Communication Regulations give the IMDA the discretion to direct the

grantee concerning its use of the spectrum right. Additionally, the grantee may be restricted in its use of equipment within the allocated RF spectrum. For example, no station fitted in an aircraft shall be operated or used while such aircraft is at rest on land or water in Singapore, barring certain exceptional circumstances as stated in Regulation 36 of the Radio-Communication Regulations.

Provision of publicly available telephone services

Subject to the IMDA's licensing requirements, any person may apply to the IMDA for a licence to provide telecoms services to the public. There are no special conditions imposed by the IMDA for such services. A holder of an FBO licence may, however, depending on the scope and requirements of its operations, apply to the IMDA to be designated as a public telecommunication licensee (PTL) under section 8 of the Telecoms Act. A PTL is accorded certain statutory powers under the Telecoms Act to facilitate the deployment of telecoms infrastructure, including the power to enter state and private property to lay telecoms infrastructure. The IMDA will grant such applications only if the FBO licensee has committed to substantial telecoms infrastructure investment and roll-out to offer services to a significant proportion of the population within a reasonable time. At present, three licensees have been designated as PTLs (namely, NetLink Management Pte Ltd (as trustee-manager of NetLink Trust), Singapore Telecommunications Limited and Starhub Ltd). The IMDA also reserves the right to impose basic service obligations on a PTL.

The IMDA may modify the conditions of a telecoms licence granted under section 5 of the Telecoms Act. The procedure to be followed is set out in section 9 of the Telecoms Act, which prescribes that, in the case of a PTL, the IMDA first has to give notice to the PTL of the proposed modifications to the licence, including whether compensation is payable. Before finalising any direction to implement the licence modifications, the IMDA is also required to give PTLs at least 28 days to make a written representation of the proposed modifications. In the case of a licensee that is not a PTL, the Telecoms Act does not set out the procedure to be followed concerning the modification of the licence. Instead, the modification procedure of a non-PTL licence is typically set out in the relevant licence. Under the terms of their licences, telecoms licence holders may not assign, transfer, deal with or otherwise dispose of the whole or any part of the rights, privileges, duties or obligations under the licence without obtaining the prior written approval of the IMDA.

Provision of public Wi-Fi services

Operators providing public Wi-Fi services may require a telecom licence granted by the IMDA, as well as a broadcasting class licence. However, commercial establishments that are open to the public and that merely provide Wi-Fi to customers within their own premises for purposes incidental to their primary business may be exempted from telecom licensing requirements.

In 2006, the Singapore government launched the Wireless@SG programme, in partnership with private-sector operators, to deploy wireless hotspots in public areas in Singapore to provide high-speed wireless broadband. The Wireless@SG programme aims to promote a wireless broadband lifestyle among citizens. At present, the four licensed Wireless@SG operators are Singtel, StarHub, M1 and SIMBA. Businesses, venue owners or tenants wishing

to provide free Wi-Fi to their premises may enter into commercial agreements with the Wireless@SG operators for this purpose.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Flexibility in spectrum use

Do spectrum licences generally specify the permitted use or is permitted use (fully or partly) unrestricted? Is licensed spectrum tradable or assignable?

The IMDA manages the allocation and usage of spectrum for various services, including public mobile, private land mobile, terrestrial fixed and broadcasting services. As such, spectrum licences generally specify that licensees can only use the assigned spectrum for the specified purpose. Conditions requiring the network to be operated on a non-interference and unprotected basis, and limiting the operation to specific geographical locations, may also be imposed.

The IMDA may also permit the existing assigned spectrum to be used for new purposes if there are grounds to do so. For example, in August 2020, the IMDA allowed mobile network operators to ride on existing 4G networks to deploy 5G non-standalone networks as part of trials to allow consumers to enjoy partial 5G experiences in the short term, with faster mobile speeds on 5G-enabled devices as a key feature.

Licensed RF granted under a spectrum right may be traded and shared, subject to the IMDA's prior approval and any restrictions and conditions specified by the IMDA. At present, the IMDA has not issued any specific regulations on the trading and sharing of RF, aside from general conditions stated in the Radio-Communication Regulations. Conditions on trading and sharing of RF may also be imposed via the licences or relevant spectrum rights.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Ex-ante regulatory obligations

Which communications markets and segments are subject to ex-ante regulation? What remedies may be imposed?

Ex-ante regulations are primarily applied to licensees that are classified as 'dominant licensees' under the Converged Code. Under section 2.3 of the Converged Code, a licensee will be classified as 'dominant' if it is licensed to operate facilities that are sufficiently costly or difficult to replicate such that requiring new entrants to do so would create a significant barrier to rapid and successful entry into the telecommunication and (or) media market in Singapore by an efficient competitor; or if it has the ability to exercise significant market power in any market in Singapore in which it provides telecommunication or broadcasting services.

In this regard, dominant licensees are subject to a range of ex-ante obligations under the Converged Code, such as:

- accounting separation requirements;

- obligations to file tariffs with the IMDA for approval;
- to provide unbundled services; and
- to allow resale of end-user services by any licensee.

Dominant licensees may also be required to offer certain interconnection and access-related services on terms that are pre-approved by the IMDA, by way of a standardised reference interconnection offer (RIO).

Tariffing

Unless exempted by the IMDA, dominant licensees must file tariffs for any telecommunications service they intend to offer (including any offer on a trial basis) with the IMDA and obtain the IMDA's prior approval before offering the service. The proposed tariff filing must include, among others:

- certain specified information, including a description of the service;
- the relevant prices, terms and conditions;
- any discounts or special considerations that will be offered; and
- the minimum period for which the service will be available.

The IMDA will assess whether the proposed tariff is just and reasonable in accordance with the criteria under section 4.4.5.2 of the Converged Code.

Interconnection with dominant licensees

If required by the IMDA, dominant licensees must also publish RIOs, under which they have to offer interconnection and access-related services on prices, terms and conditions that are pre-approved by the IMDA. A downstream operator that meets the relevant criteria may then request services from the dominant licensee under the terms of its RIO.

Presently, Singtel (which is the incumbent fixed-line network operator and also operates several telecoms facilities such as submarine cable landing stations) and NetLink Trust (whose assets include central offices, ducts and manholes) have been required to offer RIOs pursuant to the Converged Code.

In the context of the next-generation nationwide broadband network (NGNBN), the IMDA has also imposed similar obligations on the appointed network and operating companies to make available certain mandated services to qualifying persons under the terms of standardised interconnection offers (ICOs).

Accounting separation

Dominant licensees are subject to the IMDA's Accounting Separation Guidelines, which provide for two levels of accounting separation: detailed segment reporting and simplified segment reporting. The accounting separation requirements are intended to provide the IMDA with information to monitor cross-subsidisation by dominant FBO licensees, as well as to ensure that services provided internally by dominant FBO licensees to their downstream

operators or affiliates are provided on similar terms to equivalent services provided to other unrelated licensees.

Briefly, detailed segment reporting involves separate reporting of key service segments and certain individual retail services. The requirements include a specified cost allocation process and prescribed allocation methodologies for certain cost and revenue items. Reports include both income statements and mean capital employed statements. In contrast, simplified segment reporting requires less disaggregation of operations and a less rigorous cost allocation process. Only income statement reporting is required.

Next-generation nationwide broadband network

To ensure effective open access to the NGNBN infrastructure for downstream operators, the IMDA has put in place structural separation and operational separation requirements on the network and operating companies.

Merger control

Under Part 5A of the Telecoms Act, all designated telecommunication licensees (DTLs), designated business trusts (DBTs) and designated trusts (DTs) are required to comply with merger control requirements. Where a transaction meets the specified pre-merger filing thresholds, generally, where the transaction would result in a party and its associates becoming either a 12 per cent controller (namely, holding 12 per cent or more) or a 30 per cent controller (namely, holding 30 per cent or more) of the ownership or voting power in a DTL, DBT or DT, the IMDA's prior approval must be sought for the transaction. Also, the IMDA must be notified if a transaction would result in a person holding 5 per cent or more but less than 12 per cent of the ownership or voting power in a DTL, DBT or DT.

Infrastructure sharing

Under certain circumstances, the IMDA may require an FBO licensee (which may not be a dominant licensee) to 'share' its infrastructure with other licensees. As provided under the Converged Code, the IMDA may require sharing of any infrastructure that it determines is 'critical support infrastructure' or 'essential resource', or where the IMDA concludes that sharing would be in the public interest, in accordance with the principles in the Converged Code.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Structural or functional separation

Is there a legal basis for requiring structural or functional separation between an operator's network and service activities? Has structural or functional separation been introduced or is it being contemplated?

Generally, the IMDA does not require structural or functional separation between an operator's network and service activities in Singapore. However, concerning the NGNBN, the IMDA has, with a view to ensuring effective open access for downstream operators, instituted a multi-layered industry structure consisting of:

- the network company (NetCo);
- several operating companies (OpCos) including the appointed OpCo; and
- numerous retail service providers.

In this regard, the IMDA issued the Guidelines for Service Provisioning over the NGNBN to provide guidance on the responsibilities of operators in each layer in the provisioning and day-to-day operations of Next Gen NBN services, so that the different layers can interact in a coordinated manner to provide Next Gen NBN services to end-users.

At the first layer, the NetCo appointed by the IMDA is responsible for building and operating the passive infrastructure, which includes the dark fibre network. OpenNet Pte Ltd was the initial NetCo appointed by the IMDA. The assets and operations of OpenNet have since been taken over by NetLink Trust (acting through its trustee, NetLink Management Pte Ltd), following NetLink Trust's acquisition of OpenNet effective from 1 October 2014. In July 2017, 100 per cent of the units in NetLink Trust were acquired by NetLink NBN Trust (acting through its trustee-manager, NetLink NBN Management Pte Ltd). Under the conditions of the FBO licence held jointly by NetLink NBN Management Pte Ltd (as trustee-manager of NetLink NBN Trust) and NetLink Management Pte Ltd (as trustee of NetLink Trust), the NetCo is required to ensure structural separation, which involves, among other things, ensuring that:

- it has no effective control over any other telecoms licensee or broadcasting licensee;
- it is not under the effective control of any other telecoms licensee or broadcasting licensee, whether acting alone or in concert with its associates; and
- it is not under the effective control of the same controlling entity as any other telecoms licensee or broadcasting licensee (the 'no effective control' requirements).

These requirements are intended to ensure that the NetCo and its downstream operators are separate entities with fully autonomous decision-making considerations and that they do not have control over each other's management and major operating decisions.

At the second layer, Nucleus Connect Pte Ltd (Nucleus Connect), the appointed OpCo, is responsible for building and operating the active infrastructure, comprising switches and transmission equipment, to provide wholesale network services. While Nucleus Connect may be owned by its downstream operating units, it is nevertheless subject to a range of detailed operational separation requirements under its FBO licence conditions. The operational separation requirements are intended to ensure, among other things, that:

- downstream operators are treated in a non-discriminatory manner;
- Nucleus Connect independently formulates and makes its own commercial decisions; and
- it operates at arm's length from affiliated operators.

Section 92 of the Telecoms Act also empowers the Minister for Digital Development and Information (the Minister), if certain conditions are met and in the public interest, to issue a separation order requiring the transfer of a telecom licensee's business or assets to a separate or independent entity.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Universal service obligations and financing

Outline any universal service obligations. How is provision of these services financed?

Generally, universal service obligations (USOs) are applied by the IMDA only to PTLs pursuant to the conditions of their licence. For example, Singtel, the incumbent telecoms operator, is required under its licence to provide basic telephone services to any person in Singapore who requests such service. In respect of the NGNBN, which is intended to deliver high-speed broadband access throughout Singapore, the IMDA has imposed USOs on both the appointed NetCo and OpCo following the creation of the NGNBN. The NetCo's USO took effect on 1 January 2013. The NetCo's USO obliges it to fulfil all requests to provide its fibre services to all locations in Singapore. Correspondingly, the OpCo must meet all reasonable requests by any operating company or downstream retail service providers for access to a basic set of wholesale services offered under its standard ICO.

Compliance with USOs is not financed by a statutorily created fund (eg, universal service funds in other jurisdictions) or contributions from industry.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Number allocation and portability

Describe the number allocation scheme and number portability regime in your jurisdiction.

The IMDA administers the number allocation scheme in Singapore under its National Numbering Plan. Among other things, the National Numbering Plan sets out rules and guidelines for the use and assignment of numbers to telecommunication services delivered over the public switched telephone network (PSTN), the radio network, user-centric data only (UCDO) and the internet or other IP-based networks; and describes the assignment of numbers to international services, trunk service, emergency services and special services such as voice mail and intelligent network (IN) services. There is only one numbering area in Singapore and area or trunk codes are not used. The PSTN, radio network, UCDO and IP telephony share the same numbering plan – a uniform eight-digit numbering plan.

Numbers are allocated to various service categories according to the first digit:

- '0' for international services;
- '1' for special services, including calls for operator assistance, service enquiry, machine-to-machine, internet dial-up, voice information, IN services and access code international direct dial type of services;
- '3' for IP telephony and UCDO services;
- '6' for PSTN and IP telephony services;
- '8' and '9' for eight-digit radio network numbers; and
- '99' for three-digit emergency services.

Number portability across mobile networks and fixed-line services is obligatory. Fixed-line and mobile telephony operators are required to allow consumers to retain full use of their

existing phone numbers when switching service providers. Also, IP telephony operators utilising series '6' numbers (namely, Singapore telephone numbers beginning with '6') are subject to the same number portability requirements as fixed-line operators. Syniverse Technologies is the centralised database administrator appointed to operate the centralised number portability database system, starting with the launch of full mobile number portability in June 2008. The IMDA has published a document titled the Fixed Number Portability Guidelines to set out the technical approach to fixed number portability by FBO licensees offering a fixed-line voice service.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Customer terms and conditions

Are customer terms and conditions in the communications sector subject to specific rules?

Retail tariffs filed by dominant licensees for approval with the IMDA must include information relating to the customer's terms and conditions.

The Converged Code also sets out several consumer protection-related provisions with which all FBO licensees and SBO licensees must comply. These include provisions relating to:

- minimum quality of service standards (and disclosure to end-users of any lower standards agreed to);
- disclosure of prices, terms and conditions (including for services provided on a free trial basis);
- restrictions on service termination; and
- prohibition against charging for unsolicited telecoms services.

The Converged Code also includes several mandatory contractual provisions that must be included in all FBO licensees' and SBO licensees' end-user service agreements (namely, service contracts with business or residential subscribers). These include provisions relating to:

- billing period;
- the prices, terms and conditions upon which service will be provided; procedures for disputing charges; and
- termination or suspension of service.

The IMDA also has the power under the FBO and SBO licences to require licensees to file their schemes of service, including non-price terms and conditions for the provision of services, with the IMDA before the launch or announcement of such services.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Net neutrality

Are there limits on an internet service provider's freedom to control or prioritise the type or source of data that it delivers? Are there any other specific regulations or guidelines on net neutrality?

The IMDA's policy framework on net neutrality is set out in a policy paper dated 16 June 2011, which sets out five principles representing its approach towards net neutrality that internet service providers (ISPs) and telecoms network operators are required to adhere to:

- they must not block legitimate internet content or impose discriminatory practices, restrictions, charges or other measures that would effectively render any legitimate internet content inaccessible or unusable;
- they must comply with competition and interconnection rules;
- they must comply with the IMDA's information transparency requirement and disclose to end-users their network management practices and typical internet broadband download speeds;
- ISPs must meet the minimum broadband quality of service standards prescribed by the IMDA. Reasonable network management practices are allowed, provided that minimum internet broadband quality of service standards are adhered to and that such practices will not render any legitimate internet content effectively inaccessible or unusable; and
- they are allowed to offer niche or differentiated services that meet the IMDA's information transparency, minimum quality of service and fair competition requirements.

In particular, the IMDA recognised that to promote the development of online services, ISPs and network operators must be given the flexibility to manage their networks or differentiate their service offerings to meet the needs of changing customer demands or niche user groups. At the same time, such flexibility cannot result in discriminatory practices that render legitimate internet content effectively inaccessible or unusable. In this respect, the IMDA has indicated in its decision that it intends to deal with any complaints on a case-by-case basis.

In connection with the above, the IMDA requires residential fixed broadband internet access service providers to publish, on their websites, information about their respective network management policies (including whether traffic shaping is implemented).

While there are no express laws or regulations that prevent zero-rating of data transmission by certain services or applications or bandwidth throttling per se, ISPs would nevertheless need to comply with the general principles set out under the IMDA's framework for net neutrality.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Platform regulation

Is there specific legislation or regulation in place, and have there been any enforcement initiatives relating to digital platforms?

At present, there is no overarching legislation or regulatory framework that specifically deals with digital platforms. In the case of online digital platforms such as search engines, social

media platforms and online digital media stores, they may instead be subject to a range of existing legislation and regulatory frameworks that govern specific sectors or subject matter. These may include, without limitation:

- to the extent that a digital platform constitutes a telecoms service, it may be subject to the telecoms licensing and regulatory framework;
- to the extent that a digital platform constitutes a broadcasting service, it may be subject to the broadcasting licensing and regulatory framework. In particular, where the platform operator may be considered to be an internet content provider, it may be deemed to be subject to a broadcasting class licence;
- to the extent that a digital platform constitutes an online communication service, it may be subject to the regulatory framework under the Broadcasting Act and must comply with directions issued by the IMDA and any applicable codes of practice;
- to the extent that the computer or computer system behind the digital platform has been designated as critical information infrastructure (CII) in Singapore, owners of such computers or computer systems are subject to cybersecurity obligations under the Cybersecurity Act 2018 (the Cybersecurity Act);
- to the extent that a digital platform collects, uses or discloses personal data relating to individuals, it may be subject to data protection obligations under the Personal Data Protection Act 2012 (PDPA);
- to the extent that a digital platform is regarded as an internet intermediary (eg, social network, search engine, content aggregator, internet-based messaging service and video-sharing service), it may be subject to directions and obligations under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act 2019 (POFMA);
- to the extent that a digital platform provides social media services, relevant electronic services or internet access services, it may be subject to directions issued by the Ministry for Home Affairs (MHA) under the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act 2021 (FICA);
- to the extent that a digital platform provides an online service through which criminal activities (namely, specified offences or malicious cyber activity offence under the First Schedule) could be conducted, it may be subject to directions issued by a designated officer under the Online Criminal Harms Act 2023 (which recently commenced on 1 February 2024); and
- competition issues involving a digital platform may be governed by the general competition law as established under the Competition Act 2004 that is administered by the Competition and Consumer Commission of Singapore (CCCS), or sector-specific regulatory frameworks as administered by the respective regulatory authorities. For example, competition issues that impact the telecoms and media sector may fall within the purview of the IMDA. The Competition Act 2004 provides that it does not apply insofar as another regulatory authority (other than the CCCS) has jurisdiction in a particular competition matter.

Enforcement

In respect of enforcement activity, the POFMA Office has issued directions and orders on several occasions to Facebook to publish correction notices on the Facebook posts of users

who had published false statements, as well as to disable access for Singapore users to Facebook pages that had repeatedly conveyed online falsehoods and did not comply with any of the POFMA Directions that had been served on the owners of such pages.

Under FICA, the MHA has directed five major social media platforms (X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok) to block 95 accounts from Singapore users.

In October 2024, the MHA identified an additional 10 inauthentic websites built by foreign actors that might be used to mount hostile information campaigns against Singapore. The IMDA reviewed the MHA's investigation results and issued directives under the Broadcasting Act, which required relevant internet access service providers to disable access to those 10 inauthentic websites for users in Singapore.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Next-Generation-Access (NGA) networks

Are there specific regulatory obligations applicable to NGA networks? Is there a government financial scheme to promote basic broadband or NGA broadband penetration?

At present, NGNBN entities are regulated under existing telecommunication and media legislation, and through contractual obligations between them and the IMDA. In particular, the respective ICOs of NetLink Trust and Nucleus Connect, in fulfilment of their contractual obligation under their request-for-proposal bid commitment to the IMDA, set out the prices, terms and conditions upon which they would provide certain mandated NGNBN services.

Also, the IMDA has released specific regulations providing for licensing and regulatory frameworks in 2009 – namely, the NetCo Interconnection Code (updated in April 2020) and the OpCo Interconnection Code (updated in April 2020) – to regulate the activities of the NetCo and OpCo respectively. The Interconnection Codes specify, inter alia, requirements related to the pricing, terms and conditions for the services offered by the NetCo and OpCo under their respective ICOs, as well as the obligations placed on both the NetCo and OpCo and persons requesting services from them. The obligations contained under the Interconnection Codes are in addition to those contained in the Telecoms Act, other statutes, regulations, directions, licences and codes of practice.

Government schemes promoting basic and NGA broadband

The Singapore government has been keenly promoting the development of basic broadband infrastructure, applications and services since the 1990s. Many initiatives have been put in place over the years to promote the establishment of nationwide broadband networks. The government has also devoted significant efforts to encourage the roll-out and take-up of NGA broadband services, in particular, service offerings over the NGNBN. In 2015, the Singapore government launched the 10-year Infocomm Media 2025 master plan, which seeks to be a key enabler of the Singapore government's vision to transform Singapore into the world's first Smart Nation, by harnessing the power of technology. In February 2024, the IMDA announced that it will invest up to S$100 million to upgrade the Nationwide Broadband Network to speeds up to 10Gbps by 2028.

In terms of government financial schemes for the promotion of an NGNBN, it was announced in December 2007 that the government would grant up to S$750 million for the development of this high-speed broadband network. This is part of the government's intention to adopt a public-private partnership approach concerning the building, ownership and operation of the network. In particular, the government hopes that more small firms will be able to offer online services without being burdened by the cost of building the network. In line with the promotion of NGNBN, the IMDA has also spearheaded other broadband initiatives, including the Singapore Internet Exchange (SGIX), which serves as a neutral internet exchange for local and international IP traffic. By establishing multiple nodes in different sites in Singapore as its core, the SGIX plays a significant role in the deployment of services over the NGNBN, allowing for the efficient exchange of traffic, reducing latency and ensuring sustainable, reliable transmission of bandwidth-intensive services to end-users.

To complement the NGNBN, a wireless broadband network has also been deployed in key catchment areas around Singapore: Wireless@SG allows end-users to enjoy indoor and outdoor wireless broadband access in public areas.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Data protection

Is there a specific data protection regime applicable to the communications sector?

The IMDA has prescribed specific rules for the telecommunication sector. Section 3.2.6 of the Converged Code contains provisions that govern the use of end-user service information by all FBO and SBO licensees. Different provisions may apply, depending on whether the licensee is dealing with a business end-user or a residential end-user. The IMDA's standard licence conditions also include provisions requiring licensees to ensure the confidentiality of customer information.

On a more general level, the PDPA established a baseline standard of data protection for all private sector organisations in Singapore. The PDPA also established a 'Do Not Call' registry that allows individuals to register their Singapore telephone numbers to opt out of receiving telemarketing calls and messages. The PDPA imposes data protection obligations on organisations that collect, use or disclose personal data in Singapore. Among other things, organisations are required to obtain an individual's consent before collecting, using or disclosing his or her personal data, unless an exception in the PDPA applies. Other obligations under the PDPA include requiring organisations to:

- make a reasonable effort to ensure that personal data they collect is accurate and complete if the personal data is likely to be used by the organisation to make a decision that affects the individual or is likely to be disclosed by the organisation to another organisation; and
- make reasonable security arrangements to prevent unauthorised access, collection, use, disclosure, copying, modification, disposal or similar risks, and to prevent the loss of any storage medium or device on which personal data is stored.

The Personal Data Protection Commission (PDPC), which is responsible for administering the PDPA, has also issued a set of advisory guidelines that specifically aim to address certain unique circumstances faced by the telecommunication sector in complying with the PDPA.

The PDPA is not intended to override sector-specific data protection frameworks. To the extent of any inconsistency between the provisions of the PDPA and the provisions of other written laws, the latter will prevail. Also, the PDPA's provisions on data protection do not affect any obligation imposed by or under the law (except for contractual obligations), which may include regulatory obligations imposed under other written laws. Hence, licensees will need to ensure that they comply with any sector-specific obligations such as the Converged Code, as well as the general framework under the PDPA.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Cybersecurity

Is there specific legislation or regulation in place concerning cybersecurity or network security in your jurisdiction?

The primary legislative framework governing cybersecurity in Singapore is the Cybersecurity Act.

Broadly, the Cybersecurity Act:

- creates a framework for the protection of designated CII against cybersecurity threats;
- provides for the appointment of the Commissioner of Cybersecurity (Commissioner) and other officers for the administration of the Cybersecurity Act;
- authorises the taking of measures to prevent, manage and respond to cybersecurity threats and incidents in Singapore; and
- establishes a licensing framework for providers of licensable cybersecurity services in Singapore; specifically, managed security operations centre monitoring services and penetration testing services.

Under the Cybersecurity Act, the Commissioner is empowered to issue codes of practice and standards of performance to ensure the cybersecurity of CII. Pursuant to these powers, the Commissioner has issued the Cybersecurity Code of Practice for Critical Information Infrastructure.

The Cybersecurity Act provides for the regulation of CII in 11 critical sectors. CII is defined as a computer or computer system that is necessary for the continuous delivery of an essential service, the loss or compromise of which will lead to a debilitating effect on the availability of the essential service in Singapore. The 11 critical sectors containing essential services from which CII may be designated include the info-communications and media sectors.

The Cybersecurity Act operates alongside the patchwork of existing legislation and various self-regulatory or co-regulatory codes that promote cybersecurity, including but not limited to the following:

- the Computer Misuse Act 1993 (CMA), which criminalises certain cyber activities such as hacking, denial-of-service attacks, infection of computer systems with

malware, the possession or use of hardware, software or other tools to commit offences under the CMA, and other acts preparatory to or in furtherance of the commission of any offence under the CMA;

- the PDPA and the regulations issued thereunder, which impose certain obligations on organisations to make 'reasonable security arrangements' to prevent unauthorised access, collection, use, disclosure, copying, modification, disposal or similar risks concerning personal data held or processed by those organisations. The PDPC has issued general guides that, while not legally binding, provide greater clarity on, for instance, the types of reasonable security arrangements that can be adopted by organisations in the protection of personal data. These general guides include:
    - the Guide to Managing and Notifying Data Breaches Under the PDPA;
    - the Guide to Data Protection by Design for ICT Systems;
    - the Guide to Securing Personal Data in Electronic Medium; and
    - the Guide on Building Websites for SMEs; and
    - sector-specific codes of practice, such as the Telecommunication Cybersecurity Code of Practice formulated by the IMDA, which is imposed on major internet service providers in Singapore and includes security incident management requirements.

On 3 April 2024, the Cybersecurity (Amendment) Bill (Bill) was introduced in Parliament, following a public consultation by the Cybersecurity Agency of Singapore (CSA) from 15 December 2023 to 15 January 2024 on the proposed amendments. When the Cybersecurity Act 2018 was first enacted, providers of essential services tended to own and control the CII used for continuous delivery of the essential services they were responsible for. To keep up with the evolving business landscape, the amendments will expand the CSA's oversight beyond CII owners to:

- designated essential service providers who do not own the CII used for the essential services for which they are responsible;
- major foundational digital infrastructure service providers (namely, cloud computing service providers and data centre facility service providers);
- entities of special cybersecurity interest; and
- owners of systems of temporary cybersecurity concern.

The Bill was passed by the Singapore Parliament on 7 May 2024. At the time of writing, the Cybersecurity (Amendment) Act 2024 has yet to come into operation.

Apart from the CSA, other government agencies have issued guidelines for cybersecurity in specific industries. For example, the IMDA's Advisory Guidelines for resilience and security of Cloud Services and Data Centres recommended measures for cloud service providers and data centre operators to strengthen their service security and resilience. For cloud services, the guidelines outline seven key security categories, including testing protocols, access management controls, data governance frameworks, and disaster recovery planning. For data centres, the guidelines establish a comprehensive business continuity management framework aimed at minimising service disruptions and maintaining high availability. This includes implementing robust continuity policies, establishing effective controls and

processes, conducting ongoing reviews for continuous improvement, and addressing cybersecurity vulnerabilities.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Big data

Is there specific legislation or regulation in place, and have there been any enforcement initiatives in your jurisdiction, addressing the legal challenges raised by big data?

In Singapore, there is no legislation or regulation that specifically deals with big data per se. Rather, companies involved in big-data-related activities must ensure that they comply with existing data protection laws and regulatory frameworks as may be applicable, such as the PDPA and the Cybersecurity Act.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Data localisation

Are there any laws or regulations that require data to be stored locally in the jurisdiction?

There is no overarching law or regulation that requires data, in general, to be stored locally in Singapore. The PDPA does not require personal data to be stored locally in Singapore. Nonetheless, organisations that wish to transfer personal data outside of Singapore would need to ensure that they fulfil certain requirements under the PDPA and its accompanying regulations, before such personal data may be transferred outside Singapore. Furthermore, specific types of data may be the subject of regulatory obligations requiring that they be stored in Singapore. For example, licensed telecom operators may be required to store call detail records in Singapore pursuant to their licence conditions.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Key trends and expected changes

Summarise the key emerging trends and hot topics in communications regulation in your jurisdiction.

Amendments to the Cybersecurity Act

The Bill was passed by the Singapore Parliament on 7 May 2024.

The Bill is intended to expand the scope of the Cybersecurity Act to regulate four new classes of persons.

- Designated providers of essential services who do not own the CII used for the continuous delivery of the essential services for which they are responsible (namely, third-party owned CII): the provider of essential services is intended to be required

to obtain legally binding commitments from the third-party to provide the necessary information or adhere to prescribed standards relating to cybersecurity, etc, so that they can discharge their duties under the Cybersecurity Act. If they do not obtain the legally binding commitments, they may be ordered by the Commissioner to cease using the third-party owned CII.

- Owners of systems of temporary cybersecurity concern (STCC): STCC are computer or computer systems that are critical to Singapore for a time-limited period, and for that period, are at high risk of cyberattacks. Examples include systems that are set up specifically to support high-profile international events in Singapore (eg, the World Economic Forum), or systems set up to support the distribution of vaccines during the covid-19 pandemic.
- Entities of special cybersecurity interest (ESCI): ESCI are entities that are particularly attractive targets of malicious threat actors seeking to compromise a state because of the sensitive data that they possess or the function that they perform. ESCI include systems that if compromised could have a significant detrimental effect on the defence, foreign relations, economy, public health, public safety, or public order of Singapore.
- Providers of major foundational digital infrastructure services (FDI): FDI is digital infrastructure that provides infrastructural services of a foundational nature. Examples of FDI include cloud computing and data facility services that are integral to the functioning of Singapore's technological stacks.

Through these new classes, the CSA aims to fulfil the following policy objectives:

- enhance the CSA's situational awareness of the cybersecurity threats and incidents targeting these systems; and
- ensure that appropriate cybersecurity measures are taken to secure them.

These new classes of persons are generally required to comply with the same duties and obligations imposed on traditional CII providers. Such duties include duties to:

- provide the Commissioner with information on the system;
- comply with such codes of practice, standards of performance or written directions in relation to the system as may be issued by the Commissioner; and
- notify the Commissioner of prescribed cybersecurity incidents.

Furthermore, for existing provider-owned CII, the Bill seeks to widen requirements for incident reporting. The types of incidents to be reported include:

- prescribed cybersecurity incidents in respect of any other computer or computer system under the owner's control that does not fall within section 14(1)(b) of the Cybersecurity Act; and
- prescribed cybersecurity incidents in respect of any computers or computer systems under the control of a supplier to the owner that is interconnected or communicates with the provider-owned CII.

New Digital Infrastructure Act in consideration

The Ministry of Communications and Information announced that the inter-agency Taskforce on the Resilience and Security of Digital Infrastructure and Services (Taskforce) is studying the introduction of a Digital Infrastructure Act (DIA) to enhance the resilience and security of key digital infrastructure and services.

The DIA is intended to complement the government's other regulatory levers, such as the Cybersecurity Act which focuses on mitigating cyber-related risks. It will go beyond cybersecurity to address a broader set of resilience risks faced by digital infrastructure and service providers, ranging from misconfigurations in technical architecture, to physical hazards such as fires, water leaks and cooling system failures.

The Taskforce is studying the digital infrastructure ecosystem in Singapore to identify those which would have a systemic impact on Singapore's economy and society if disrupted. Examples include data centres and cloud services, and support the delivery of many widely used digital services (eg, banking and payments, ride-hailing, digital identities). The DIA will be tabled in Parliament later in 2025.

Measures to address rise in phishing scams

There has been a recent spate of SMS phishing scams, targeting, in particular, customers of local banks. In December 2021, S$13.7 million was reported to have been lost in phishing scams affecting customers of one of Singapore's largest banks, OCBC.

In response, the IMDA (through its subsidiary, the Singapore Network Information Centre) established a new Singapore SMS Sender ID Registry. With effect from 14 October 2022, that registration with the Singapore SMS Sender ID Registry became mandatory for all organisations that use SMS sender IDs, such that only bona fide organisations can use such sender IDs. From 31 January 2023 onwards, all non-registered sender IDs will be marked as 'Likely-SCAM' as a default for a transition period of around six months. Thereafter, messages with such non-registered sender IDs will be blocked and not delivered to end-users. Additionally, telecom operators will implement SMS anti-scam filtering solutions within their mobile networks to filter and block such messages before they reach the public.

On 16 December 2024, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) and the IMDA implemented a shared responsibility framework (SRF) for phishing scams. The SRF assigns financial institutions (FIs) and telecommunication companies (Telcos) relevant duties to mitigate phishing scams, and requires payouts to affected scam victims where these duties are breached. Examples of these duties include sending an outgoing transaction notification to consumers in the case of FIs, and implementing a scam filter in the case of Telcos.

New measures to strengthen consumer protection for telecommunication and media services

On 1 April 2022, the Telecommunications (Dispute Resolution Scheme) Regulations 2022 and the Info-communications Media Development Authority (Dispute Resolution Scheme) Regulations 2022 came into effect.

Both regulations were introduced by the IMDA to strengthen consumer protection in telecommunication and media services, as part of the IMDA's alternative dispute resolution (ADR) scheme. The ADR scheme is intended to provide an affordable and effective dispute resolution alternative for consumers facing contractual disputes with their service providers.

The ADR scheme covers disputes or issues related to all telecoms and media services with a maximum dispute value of S$10,000. The dispute must also have occurred within the past year and should be resolvable through service recovery efforts or compensated for in-kind or in monetary terms.

The ADR process, which consists of two stages comprising mediation, followed by a determination for disputes that are not resolved after mediation, is expected to take no more than two-and-a-half months. In the first stage, once a case is submitted, the service provider will be given a 14-day notice period (namely, a notice of intention period) whereby the service provider and consumer can negotiate and resolve the dispute. If that does not work out, the parties go into mediation. If mediation still does not work, the consumers may choose whether to proceed with determination.

On top of the ADR scheme, the IMDA will also make available data on consumer complaints received by telecom service providers and their performance in handling complaints.

New measures for data centre sustainability

Singapore has had a moratorium on new data centre projects since 2019 due to resource constraints. However, on 20 July 2022, the IMDA and the Economic Development Board launched a pilot Data Centre – Call for Application Exercise to facilitate the building of new data centre capacity and allow for the calibrated and environmentally sustainable growth of data centres in Singapore.

Applicants were required to provide proposals on how they intended to run the most resource-efficient data centre that is best in class. Some requirements included having to obtain platinum certification for the data centre under the Building Construction Academy and the IMDA's Green Mark for New Data Centre criteria, having a power usage effectiveness of 1.3 or better and providing proposals on how it will best achieve sustainability goals through renewable energy and plans to invest in innovative energy pathways to offset the carbon emissions footprint. The call for applications closed on 21 November 2022.

On 8 June 2023, the IMDA launched the world's first standard for optimising energy efficiency for data centres in tropical climate countries. The new standard aims to help data centres develop a roadmap to support the gradual increase in the data centre operating temperatures to 26 degrees centigrade and above. This could lead to data centres potentially benefiting from a 2 per cent to 5 per cent cooling energy savings, with every one-degree centigrade increase in the data centre operating temperature. Pilot trials are already underway with several data centre operators in Singapore to trial this new standard to reduce energy use.

On 30 May 2024, the IMDA launched its Green Data Centre Roadmap to support sustainable growth of Singapore's data centre industry while meeting increasing computing demands driven by AI, robotics, and virtual technologies. The roadmap aims to provide at least 300 megawatts of additional capacity in the near term, with future expansion through green energy deployments.

Amendments to the PDPA

On 2 November 2020, the Singapore Parliament passed the Personal Data Protection (Amendment) Bill 2020 following the first comprehensive review of the PDPA since its

enactment in 2012. The amendments to the PDPA, introduced several significant changes such as:

- a mandatory data breach notification regime for data breaches;
- new exceptions to the consent obligation (legitimate interests' exception and business improvement exception);
- an expansion of the concept of deemed consent (deemed consent by notification and deemed consent by contractual necessity);
- new offences for the:
    - mishandling of personal data;
    - knowing or reckless unauthorised use of personal data; and
    - knowing or reckless unauthorised re-identification of anonymised data;
- higher financial penalties (from a maximum of S$1 million previously, to up to a maximum of 10 per cent of the organisation's annual turnover in Singapore); and
- provisions on data portability (not yet in force).

Most of the changes under the Amendment Act came into effect on 1 February 2021. On 1 October 2022, the provisions relating to enhanced financial penalties came into effect. The provisions on data portability have yet to come into effect at the time of writing.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

MEDIA

Regulatory and institutional structure

Summarise the regulatory framework for the media sector in your jurisdiction.

The Info-communications Media Development Authority (IMDA) is the statutory body responsible for broadcasting and content regulation (irrespective of the transmission medium) and the primary applicable legislation is the Info-communications Media Development Authority Act 2016 (the IMDA Act) and the Broadcasting Act 1994 (the Broadcasting Act). The IMDA was formally established on 1 October 2016 as a converged regulator for the info-communications and media sectors. At present, the telecoms and media sectors continue to be governed by separate regulatory frameworks.

Under the existing framework, 'media' is defined in the IMDA Act as referring to any film, newspaper, broadcasting service or publication (as defined in the Films Act 1981, Newspaper and Printing Presses Act 1974, the Broadcasting Act and the Undesirable Publications Act 1967 respectively). The Minister for Communications and Information (the Minister) may further specify in the Gazette any other medium of communication of information, entertainment or other matter to the public to be included under 'media'.

In respect of policy formulation, the IMDA consults several committees in creating and developing its regulatory framework. These include various programme advisory

committees for broadcast programmes in different languages and several other consultative panels. Their members are drawn from a cross-section of society and the media industry.

Furthermore, under the existing framework at the time of writing, content and broadcasting regulation remain separate from infrastructure regulation. Therefore, firms should be mindful that they must comply with both the licensing and regulatory requirements imposed by the IMDA for content and broadcasting, as well as for the establishment and operation of any infrastructure.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Ownership restrictions

Do any foreign ownership restrictions apply to media services? Is the ownership or control of broadcasters otherwise restricted? Are there any regulations in relation to the cross-ownership of media companies, including radio, television and newspapers?

Foreign investors

There are provisions under the Broadcasting Act regulating foreign participation in a broadcasting company. Prior approval of the IMDA must be obtained if a person wishes to receive funds from a foreign source to finance any broadcasting service owned or operated by a broadcasting company (section 43(1) of the Broadcasting Act). Also, no company (unless the Minister approves otherwise) is to be granted or permitted to hold a relevant licence (as defined in the Broadcasting Act) if the Minister is satisfied that any foreign source, alone or together with one or more foreign sources:

- holds no less than 49 per cent of the shares in the company or its holding company;
- is in a position to control voting power of no less than 49 per cent in the company or its holding company; or
- all or a majority of the persons having the direction, control or management of the company or its holding company are appointed by, or accustomed to or under an obligation to act in accordance with the directions of, any foreign source.

Ownership controls

The Broadcasting Act contains ownership and control provisions that apply to broadcasting companies as defined therein. A 'broadcasting company' is a Singapore-incorporated company or Singapore branch office that holds a 'relevant licence'. A relevant licence refers to any free-to-air licence, or any broadcasting licence under which a subscription broadcasting service may be provided, that permits a broadcast capable of being received in 50,000 dwelling houses (which is defined to include hotels, inns, boarding houses and other similar establishments) or more. Also, the Minister may designate any other broadcasting licence as a relevant licence on public interest or national security grounds. A class licence will not be considered a relevant licence.

Under the Broadcasting Act, no person may, on or after 2 September 2002, become a substantial shareholder, a 12 per cent controller or an indirect controller of a broadcasting company without first obtaining the approval of the Minister. The term 'substantial shareholder' is defined under section 81 of the Companies Act 1967 and generally refers to a person who has an interest in not less than 5 per cent of the voting shares in a company. The terms '12 per cent controller' and 'indirect controller' are defined in section 36 of the Broadcasting Act.

Under section 33(2) of the Broadcasting Act, unless the IMDA approves otherwise, the chief executive officer of a broadcasting company and at least half of its directors must be citizens of Singapore. A broadcasting company may request to be exempt from this requirement, and exemptions have been made by the Minister.

Notably, the category of niche subscription television licensees has been exempted from all foreign ownership restrictions.

Broadcasting licensees that are regulated persons (within the meaning of section 2 of the IMDA Act) are subject to the provisions on consolidations and mergers in the IMDA Act and the Code of Practice for Competition in the Provision of Telecommunication and Media Services 2022 (the Converged Code).

Cross-ownership

No regulations specifically prohibit the cross-ownership of media companies, including radio, television and newspapers. Such mergers and acquisitions between media companies are regulated by the IMDA. The prior written approval of the IMDA is required for all consolidations or mergers between a regulated person (as defined in the IMDA Act) and another regulated person, or any other person (not being a regulated person) carrying on business in the media industry (section 65 of the IMDA Act). Section 10 of the Converged Code details the IMDA's regulation of such consolidation activities.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Licensing requirements

What are the licensing requirements for broadcasting, including the fees payable and the timescale for the necessary authorisations?

Under section 5 of the Broadcasting Act, the IMDA may grant two types of licences: broadcasting licences and broadcasting apparatus licences.

Broadcasting licences

To broadcast programmes in Singapore, a person must obtain a broadcasting licence from the IMDA. Broadcasting licences may be granted for the following categories of licensable broadcasting services:

- free-to-air nationwide, localised and international television services;
- subscription nationwide, localised and international television services;
- special interest television services;

- free-to-air nationwide, localised and international radio services;
- subscription nationwide, localised and international radio services;
- special interest radio services;
- audiotext, videotext and teletext services;
- video-on-demand services;
- broadcast data services; and
- computer online services.

Licence fees that have been published by the IMDA as payable for the following broadcasting services include:

- 2.5 per cent of total revenue or S$250,000 per annum, whichever is higher, and a performance bond of S$200,000 for a free-to-air nationwide television licence;
- 2.5 per cent of total revenue and a performance bond of S$200,000 for a free-to-air nationwide radio service licence;
- S$5,000 per annum for a subscription international television services licence (commonly known as a satellite broadcasting licence). A performance bond of S$50,000 must be given to the IMDA by broadcasters not based or registered in Singapore. The performance bond must be issued by a financial institution approved by the IMDA;
- 2.5 per cent of total revenue for a nationwide subscription television licence, subject to a minimum licence fee of S$50,000 per year throughout. Also, a performance bond of S$200,000 must be furnished; and
- S$1,000 per year for a television receive-only (TVRO) licence (per satellite dish). For a temporary TVRO licence, the licence fee is S$100 per dish for a period of up to 30 days.

Section 8(2) of the Broadcasting Act provides that a broadcasting licence must be in such a form and for such a period and may contain such terms and conditions as the IMDA may determine. The Broadcasting Act sets out certain conditions that licensees must comply with, such as compliance with the IMDA's codes of practice and certain public service broadcasting obligations. Templates of such licences are not publicly available. As a rough guide, new applications are generally processed within the following timeframes:

- for local broadcasting licences: approximately 35 working days;
- for a subscription international television service licence: approximately 20 working days; and
- for a TVRO licence: approximately 15 working days.

In addition to the individual broadcasting licences listed above, the IMDA has specified that the following licensable broadcasting services are subject to the class licence regime under the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification:

- audiotext, videotext and teletext services;
- broadcast data services;

- virtual area network computer online services; and
- computer online services that are provided by internet content providers and internet service providers (ISPs).

A company wishing to provide a licensable broadcasting service that is subject to the class licence regime above must register with the IMDA. In particular, audiotext service providers, and internet content providers determined to be a political party registered in Singapore providing any programme through the Internet, and ISPs must register with the IMDA within 14 days of commencing the service.

All class licensees must comply with the licence conditions contained in the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification. Also, internet content providers and ISPs must comply with the Internet Code of Practice. The yearly fees payable for the services listed below have been published in the Schedule of the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification:

- S$2,000 for the provision of teletext services;
- S$1,000 for the provision of computer online services by internet access service providers;
- S$1,000 for the provision of computer online services by non-localised internet service resellers (with 500 or more user accounts);
- S$100 for the provision of computer online services by non-localised internet service resellers (with less than 500 user accounts); and
- S$100 (per premise) for the provision of computer online services by a localised internet service reseller.

The fees payable for the services not mentioned in the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification are not publicly available. If broadcasting infrastructure is to be deployed, a separate licence from the IMDA may also be required.

Separately, digital display panels operating on a distribution network (Distribution Network DDPs) that are installed in public places and within public passenger transport vehicles are also subject to the class licence regime under the Broadcasting (Class Licence — Broadcasting to Digital Display Panels) Notification 2020. This class licence is automatic and there are no requirements on operators of Distribution Network DDPs to register, pay licence fees or put up a performance bond.

Broadcasting apparatus licences

To install, import, sell or operate any broadcasting apparatus in Singapore, a person must obtain a licence from the IMDA under section 20 of the Broadcasting Act. This requirement applies to apparatus currently listed under the First Schedule to the Broadcasting Act (namely, the TVRO system). The IMDA retains the discretion to exempt any person or broadcasting apparatus (or class thereof) from this licence requirement.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Foreign programmes and local content requirements

Are there any regulations concerning the broadcasting of foreign-produced programmes? Do the rules require a minimum amount of local content? What types of media fall outside this regime?

There are no express regulations concerning the broadcast of foreign programmes, irrespective of the media type. Such broadcasts are, however, subject to paragraph 16 of the Schedule to the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification, which states that an internet content provider licensee shall remove or prohibit the broadcast of the whole or any part of a programme included in its service if the IMDA informs the licensee that its broadcast is against the public interest, public order or national harmony, or offends good taste or decency.

Similarly, all ISPs and internet content providers licensed under the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification are required to comply with the Internet Code of Practice, which prohibits any broadcasting service from broadcasting content that is against public interest or order, national harmony or which offends against good taste or decency.

There are no explicit rules requiring a minimum amount of local content. However, under section 17 of the Broadcasting Act, the IMDA may require a broadcasting licensee to broadcast programmes provided by the IMDA or the Singapore government as a condition of its licence, including the following:

- programmes for schools or other educational programmes;
- news and information programmes produced in Singapore or elsewhere;
- arts and cultural programmes; and
- drama and sports programmes produced in Singapore.

Furthermore, free-to-air television and subscription television broadcasting licensees may be subject to programme codes issued by the IMDA containing programming and content guidelines, such as the Content Code for Nationwide Managed Transmission Linear Television Services and the Content Code for Over-the-Top, Video-on-Demand and Niche Services. Generally, programme codes will contain guidelines congruent with national objectives, uphold racial and religious harmony, observe societal and moral standards and promote positive family values.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Advertising

How is broadcast media advertising regulated? Is online advertising subject to the same regulation?

At present, stricter content standards are applied to advertisements in public places (given their unsolicited viewing) and in media that have a wider impact on the general public, such as advertisements on television. The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS) lays down broad industry codes and guidelines. The Singapore Code of Advertising Practice (SCAP) is reviewed periodically by ASAS and includes a chapter on the statutes and statutory instruments that have special relevance to advertising and related trading practices. The basic premise of the SCAP is that all advertisements should be legal, decent, honest and truthful. The SCAP applies to all advertisements for any goods, services and facilities

appearing in any form or any media, including online advertisements in information network services, electronic bulletin boards, online databases and internet services. The SCAP seeks to promote a high standard of ethics in advertising through self-regulation against the background of national and international laws and practices, including the International Code of Advertising Practice published by the International Chamber of Commerce. In August 2016, ASAS also issued Guidelines for Interactive Marketing Communication & Social Media (Interactive and Social Media Guidelines), which set out standards for advertising and marketing communication that appear on interactive and social media. The Interactive and Social Media Guidelines set the standard of ethical conduct that is to be adopted by all marketers, establish the levels of disclosure that are required of sponsored messages that appear on social media, prohibit false reviews and engagement, and dictate the clarity of the purchase process in e-commerce. Between November 2017 and January 2018, ASAS conducted a public consultation seeking post-implementation feedback on the Interactive and Social Media Guidelines. In particular, it sought feedback on the implementation of the guidelines, and areas where the guidelines might be fine-tuned or updated.

Alongside ASAS, the IMDA also plays a role in guiding the advertising industry when the need arises. For television broadcasts, the IMDA issues advertising codes to broadcasters, which are stricter than those for the print media, because of the wider reach of television broadcasts. The IMDA has issued the Television and Radio Advertising and Sponsorship Code (the Advertising Code), which aims to protect the interests of viewers as consumers and requires advertisements to be truthful, lawful and not contain any misleading claims. All claims and comparisons must be capable of substantiation. The Advertising Code requires advertisements to respect public taste and interests and uphold moral and social values. Among other things, the Advertising Code also stipulates that broadcasters should exercise discretion when scheduling advertisements and trailers to ensure that these are appropriate for the viewing audience.

Concerning holders of class licences, paragraph 16 of the Schedule to the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification states that a licensee shall remove or prohibit the broadcast of the whole or any part of a programme included in its service if the IMDA informs the licensee that its broadcast is against the public interest, public order or national harmony, or offends good taste or decency. In the case of online advertising, internet content providers and ISPs are considered class licensees and must also comply with paragraph 16 of the Schedule to the Broadcasting (Class Licence) Notification. Also, paragraph 13(a) of the same requires licensees to comply with the IMDA's codes of practice. In this respect, the IMDA-administered Internet Code of Practice requires class licensees to use their best efforts to ensure that prohibited material is not broadcast over the internet to users in Singapore. Examples of prohibited material include, without limitation, content that endorses ethnic, racial or religious hatred, strife or intolerance, and material that depicts extreme violence.

Separately, the Undesirable Publications Act 1967 prevents the importation, distribution or reproduction of undesirable publications. This may include advertisements that are accessible by computers or other electronic devices, such as online advertisements.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Must-carry obligations

Are there regulations specifying a basic package of programmes that must be carried by operators' broadcasting distribution networks? Is there a mechanism for financing the costs of such obligations?

The Broadcasting Act provides for a must-carry obligation. Under section 19 of the Broadcasting Act, the IMDA may, by a direction in writing, require a broadcasting licensee to provide for transmission and reception of any broadcasting service that is provided by any other person, and that is specified in its licence or is of a description so specified, notwithstanding any other provisions in the Broadcasting Act stating otherwise.

Currently, must-carry obligations are imposed on all nationwide subscription television licensees to allow their subscribers to access all local free-to-air channels on their network.

Sections 11.1.4 and 11.6 of the Converged Code establish a cross-carriage measure for the pay-television sector, under which a mandatory obligation is imposed upon all licensed subscription television service providers that acquire exclusive broadcasting rights to any channel or programming content (supplying licensees) to provide such channels or content for cross-carriage on the pay-television network of other subscription nationwide television service providers, that are in turn obliged to carry such channels and content on all 'relevant platforms' (as defined in section 11.3(h) of the Converged Code) in their entirety, with no alteration or degradation in quality. A relevant platform means a managed network over or using any (or any combination of) optical fibre or asymmetric digital subscriber line.

Under section 11.4 of the Converged Code, free-to-air television and radio licensees (and any other person as the IMDA may direct) must comply with the IMDA's requirements regarding the broadcast of events that are of national significance. The IMDA will provide written notification to free-to-air television and radio licensees regarding the events of national significance that they are to broadcast. The IMDA will generally designate only very select events as events of national significance that are to be broadcast live or delayed.

If it is not desirable for more than one entity to locate cameras and other equipment at the site of such an event, the IMDA may select a broadcaster to be the sole broadcaster for the event (the lead broadcaster) or conduct a competitive tender for the position. The lead broadcaster must make the feed from the event available to all free-to-air television and radio licensees and any other person that the IMDA specifies.

Any television or radio licensee that receives the feed from the lead broadcaster must compensate the lead broadcaster for reasonable costs that are not otherwise compensated (eg, through government subsidies) incurred by the lead broadcaster in providing the television or radio licensee with the feed.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Regulation of new media content

Is new media content and its delivery regulated differently from traditional broadcast media? How?

The IMDA adopts a two-tier licensing framework for the provision of internet protocol television (IPTV) services in Singapore: a nationwide subscription television licence and niche television service licence (niche licence).

The niche licence was introduced to facilitate the growth of IPTV and other novel services in Singapore by offering operators greater flexibility to roll out services for different market segments, with less onerous regulatory obligations. It is for service providers targeting specific niche market segments.

The nationwide subscription television licence applies to operators targeting the mass market. The first nationwide IPTV licence was awarded to SingNet Pte Ltd (SingNet) in January 2007 for the provision of its mio television service, which has since been renamed Singtel TV.

Licence applicants are free to decide which licence tier they wish to operate under.

Social media services

The Broadcasting Act was amended on 1 February 2023 to provide greater regulatory oversight on egregious content on social media services and to regulate providers of online communication services. There are two key parts to the regulatory approach:

- requiring online communication services with significant reach or impact to comply with applicable codes of practice; and
- dealing with egregious content on an online communication service.

In particular, the IMDA may designate an online communication service as a regulated online communication service. This imposes an obligation on the regulated online communication service provider to comply with any codes of practice issued by the IMDA and put in place measures on their services to mitigate the risks of danger to Singapore users from exposure to harmful content and provide accountability to their users on such measures.

On 18 July 2023, the IMDA published the Code of Practice for Online Safety, which sets out obligations that designated social media services (DSMSs) need to comply with. The code aims to mitigate the risks from harmful social media content to Singapore users, especially children, by requiring DSMSs to enhance online safety in Singapore and curb the spread of harmful content on their services. The key obligations that DSMSs need to comply with under the code include:

- minimising Singapore users' exposure to harmful content, with additional protection for children;
- empowering Singapore users with effective and easy-to-use reporting mechanisms to report harmful content or unwanted interactions; and
- being accountable to Singapore users by providing transparency on their measures and levels of safety in annual online safety reports.

The IMDA is also empowered to issue directions to any provider of a social media service to disable access to the egregious content by Singapore end-users or to stop delivery or communication of content to an account or accounts of all Singapore end-users or any particular group of end-users comprising one or more Singapore end-users. The IMDA may also direct the provider of an internet access service to block access by Singapore end-users to the social media service if an online communication service provider fails to comply with the IMDA's direction.

On 31 March 2025, the IMDA's Code of Practice for Online Safety for App Distribution Services took effect. Under the code, designated app distribution service providers shall put in place system-level measures to curtail the risk of exposure to harmful content for users, especially children who are particularly vulnerable when exposed to inappropriate content online. Such service providers will also be required to put in place age- assurance measures to determine whether the users on their platforms are children and ensure better protection for them.

Online news sites

Since 1 June 2013, online news sites that report regularly on issues relating to Singapore and have significant reach among local readers are required by the IMDA to obtain an individual licence, placing them on a more consistent regulatory framework with traditional news platforms that are already individually licensed.

Under the licensing framework, online news sites will be individually licensed if they report an average of at least one article per week on Singapore news and current affairs over a period of two months, and are visited by at least 50,000 unique internet protocol addresses from Singapore each month over a period of two months.

These sites were previously automatically class-licensed under the Broadcasting Act. Presently, when the IMDA has assessed that a site has met the criteria to be individually licensed, the IMDA will issue a formal notification, and work with the site to move it to the new licensing framework.

The IMDA has stated that it does not expect any changes in content standards to result. Individually licensed news sites will be expected to comply within 24 hours with the IMDA's directions to remove content found in breach of content standards and will be required to put up a performance bond of S$50,000.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Digital switchover

When is the switchover from analogue to digital broadcasting required or when did it occur? How will radio frequencies freed up by the switchover be reallocated?

Singapore has completed its digital switchover and analogue television channels have been switched off since 1 January 2019.

In June 2012, the then Media Development Authority (now the IMDA) announced that all free-to-air channels would be transmitted digitally by the end of 2013 using the digital video broadcasting – second-generation terrestrial broadcasting standard. In this regard, the nationwide free-to-air broadcaster MediaCorp announced that it would transmit all free-to-air channels in digital format from December 2013. To ensure a smooth switchover, there was a simulcast period during which all free-to-air channels were broadcast in digital and analogue until the switchover was fully completed.

In January 2016, the Ministry of Communications and Information, which is the parent ministry overseeing the IMDA, announced that it aimed to complete the switchover and switch off analogue broadcasting by the end of 2017. Freed-up spectrum has been

reallocated to mobile broadband services in the 2016–2017 spectrum allocation exercise by the IMDA, which administers the allocation of radio-frequency spectrum.

In November 2017, the Singapore government announced a further one-year extension of the cessation of analogue broadcast from the end of 2017 to the end of 2018. The purpose of this extension was to give households more time to make the switch from analogue to digital broadcasting. On 1 January 2019, the switchover was completed and all broadcast free-to-air television programmes are now exclusively shown in digital format.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Digital formats

Does regulation restrict how broadcasters can use their spectrum?

The IMDA's Spectrum Management Handbook explains that planning and channelling of the broadcasting spectrum are carried out at the international level (International Telecommunication Union), regional level (Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union) and bilateral levels (namely, border coordination with neighbouring countries). As such, there are only a certain number of channels in each broadcasting band that can be used in Singapore. The usage plans for broadcasting services have already been established. With the advent of digital broadcasting, the IMDA has also planned spectrum allocations for both digital audio and digital video broadcasting. To provide broadcasting services, a broadcast service licence and a broadcasting station licence are required from the IMDA.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Media plurality

Is there any process for assessing or regulating media plurality (or a similar concept) in your jurisdiction? May the authorities require companies to take any steps as a result of such an assessment?

Singapore does not currently have a formal process or framework in place to assess media plurality.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Key trends and expected changes

Provide a summary of key emerging trends and hot topics in media regulation in your country.

New laws to address harmful online content

On 1 February 2023, the Broadcasting Act was amended to allow for the regulation of egregious content on social media services and providers of online communication services. This represents a paradigm shift in Singapore's content regulation landscape evincing

Singapore's adoption of a tougher stance against the rising prevalence of harmful online content.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

REGULATORY AGENCIES AND COMPETITION LAW

Regulatory agencies

Which body or bodies regulate the communications and media sectors? Is the communications regulator separate from the broadcasting or antitrust regulator? Are there mechanisms to avoid conflicting jurisdiction? Is there a specific mechanism to ensure the consistent application of competition and sectoral regulation?

The Info-communications Media Development Authority (IMDA) was officially formed on 1 October 2016 as a converged regulator for the info-communications and media sectors, following the restructuring of the Infocomm Development Authority and the Media Development Authority. At present, the telecoms and media sectors continue to be governed by separate regulatory frameworks.

Under the existing regulatory framework, competition issues in the telecoms and media sectors may be governed by sector-specific rules as administered by the IMDA.

The Competition Act 2004, which establishes the general competition law and is administered by the Competition and Consumer Commission of Singapore (CCCS), provides that it does not apply insofar as another regulatory authority (other than the CCCS) has jurisdiction in a particular competition matter. Accordingly, the CCCS does not have jurisdiction over competition issues that fall under the purview of the IMDA.

On 19 March 2021, the IMDA concluded its second public consultation on the draft converged competition code governing the telecoms and media sectors, which was published on 5 January 2021. On 18 April 2022, the IMDA issued a new converged competition code, the Code of Practice for Competition in the Provision of Telecommunication and Media Services 2022 (Converged Code), to govern competition and market-related matters in both the telecoms and media markets, which took effect on 2 May 2022.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Appeal procedure

How can decisions of the regulators be challenged and on what bases?

Under section 89 of the Telecommunications Act 1999, any telecoms licensee aggrieved by an IMDA decision or direction, or anything in any code of practice or standard of performance, and certain other aggrieved persons, may request the IMDA to reconsider the matter or appeal to the Minister for Communications and Information (the Minister), who may confirm, modify or reverse the same. Where a reconsideration request and an appeal have been simultaneously filed, the IMDA will reconsider the matter and the appeal to the Minister will be deemed withdrawn.

Under section 68 of the Info-communications Media Development Authority Act 2016 (the IMDA Act), any person aggrieved by any act, direction or decision of the IMDA under Part 7 of the IMDA Act or anything contained in a code of practice may appeal to the Minister, who may confirm, vary or reverse the same. Under section 59 of the Broadcasting Act 1994 (the Broadcasting Act), any licensee aggrieved by any decision of the IMDA in its discretion under the Broadcasting Act, or anything contained in any code of practice or direction issued by the IMDA, may appeal to the Minister, who may confirm, vary or reverse the decision or direction, or amend the code of practice.

An aggrieved person who has unsuccessfully appealed to the Minister may also be able to mount a further challenge by commencing an action for judicial review in the courts.

Law stated - 19 May 2025

Competition law developments

Describe the main competition law trends and key merger and antitrust decisions in the communications and media sectors in your jurisdiction over the past year.

Prior to 2 May 2022, competition and market-related matters in the telecoms and media sectors were governed separately by two different codes of practice, namely, the Code of Practice for Competition in the Provision of Telecommunication Services 2012 (TCC) and the Code of Practice for Market Conduct in the Provision of Media Services (MCC).

In line with the IMDA's role as a converged regulator, and against the backdrop of rapid convergence in the telecommunication and media landscapes, the IMDA undertook a comprehensive review of the separate codes of practice governing the telecommunication and media markets, with the aim of merging the two frameworks and develop a harmonised converged competition code for both markets, to ensure that the competition framework for both markets remains relevant.

On 18 April 2022, the IMDA issued the Converged Code, which took effect on 2 May 2022, to govern competition and market-related matters in both the telecoms and media markets, which has superseded the TCC and the MCC, respectively.

It is expected that there will be updates to existing guidelines such as the Telecom Consolidation and Tender Offer Guidelines and the Reclassification and Exemption Guidelines, as they are to be brought into alignment with the Converged Code.

Law stated - 19 May 2025