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# COMMUNICATIONS DAY

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## **AMTA's Mobile Carriers Forum withdraws in-building "standard" following property sector blowback**

A new mobile sector specification for in-building distributed antenna systems has been withdrawn after just five months following criticisms of its cost by the property sector. CommsDay can also reveal that there is wide-spread industry confusion over the status of the specification and whether compliance is voluntary or mandatory. **EXCLUSIVE**

The so-called MCF2022 specification for Distributed Antenna Systems/In-Building Coverage was finalised and published last August by the Mobile Carriers Forum, a division of the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association comprised of the three national cellular operators. This followed a consultation period begun a year earlier in 2021.

The specification impacts the installed cost, design and performance of 4G/5G in-building coverage of new and refurbished high-rise buildings in Australia.

CommsDay understands that the Property Council of Australia contacted communications minister Michelle Rowland to raise a number of issues it had with the specification.

Not least of these issues is whether MCF2022 is a standard that must be adhered to, or simply guidance for the property industry. Even if the intention was to provide helpful guidance only, there is still some industry confusion – a number of installers are already mentioning MCF2022 compliance in their collateral for customers.

"The DAS Design Specifications are a set of informal guidance documents that were posted by AMTA on its website in August 2022. We understand the decision to suspend the use of the specification was made by AMTA to allow industry to consult with a wider audience who have been impacted by the changes," a spokesperson for the minister told CommsDay.

"These specifications are voluntary documents that are technical in nature and are not part of the formal regulatory regime. As such, the minister does not have powers to "block" these specifications, but is always supportive of ensuring proper consultation with major stakeholders."

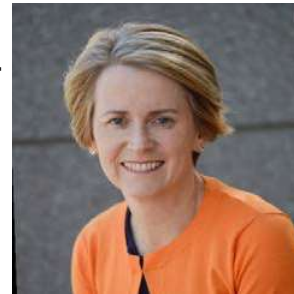
As a result, AMTA's MCF withdrew the specification and reopened consultations to a wider group of stakeholders.

"AMTA can confirm that in response to a request by the Property Council of Australia, a previously published DAS specification was removed from our website on 6 December 2022, to allow for further consultation with the Property Council and other stakeholders. The carriers have advised that during this further consultation and until a new version is finalised, the previously published 2022 DAS Specification will not

be used,” AMTA CEO Louise Hyland (pictured) told CommsDay.

It is unclear if or how the real estate industry and installers have been informed MCF2022 is no longer in force as a specification. One told CommsDay that they regarded the whole affair as a “mystery.”

The specification steering committee circulated a draft of the specification to a list of identified stakeholders in mid-2021 with a final version released in August last year. At the time, the Forum said it had “paid significant attention to market feedback received as part of the consultation process.”



Although the specification was published on the website between August and December, there is no notice there presently that it has been withdrawn or that there is a consultation process in train with stakeholders. No submissions have been published either. Instead, the website simply lists the three telco contacts for in-building solutions: Optus’s Elie Abouhanna, TPG’s Kellie Gerardis and Telstra’s Joanne Lyng.

The absence of online documentation and information as to the status of MCF2022 contrasts sharply with the practice of Communications Alliance, which provides extensive online documentation of amendments and industry guidance advice around codes and specifications, including those that have been withdrawn.

**WHAT’S IN THE SPEC:** The MCF specification detailed the design standards, performance and testing requirements for a DAS to which mobile carriers will agree to connect their radio communications equipment. DAS are used to provide enhanced mobile coverage and capacity management by using antennas strategically distributed within the proposed coverage area, typically indoors. The DAS consists of the cabling, splitting, distribution and radiating elements or antennas as well as active elements required for such coverage solutions.

MCF2022 allowed for a period of transition to migrate to the new specification, during which time DAS can still be deployed to legacy specification to facilitate the completion of projects “in flight.”

Designs that were lead carrier approved and had a lead carrier contractually signed on for connection prior to 30 June 2023 would be accepted under the existing MCF2018 specifications. MCF2022 made 3.5GHz compliance mandatory on all systems, which CommsDay understands is a point of controversy.

OneWiFi & Infrastructure MD Mevan Jayatilleke told CommsDay: “We recognise the importance of providing access to good quality in-building coverage but this needs to be tempered with the need for clients to be able to get right-size solutions and maximise affordability. Doing so does not preclude preserving quality but requires some level of inherent flexibility to be built into the specification.”

Wireless Coverage Solutions CTO Ryan Salway, who maintains a blog on Distributed Antenna Systems, wrote late last year “In summary, the new MCF2022 provides further clarity on the transition to 5G for new DAS deployments, albeit with a significant cost uplift for landlords. It should be noted that many existing deployments are capable of supporting the deployment of 5G on bands other than 3500MHz. This will typically be at the mobile operator’s discretion and is taking place today.”

Simon Dux