

FCC Announces Plan to Establish New Space Bureau and Office of International Affairs

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On January 9, 2023, the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) released an order eliminating the International Bureau and shifting its current activities to the newly established Space Bureau and an Office of International Affairs (the “IB Reorganization Order”).¹ This is a notable development as the FCC has not established a new licensing bureau for a specific industry sector since creating the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau in 1994, and the reorganization may impact how regulated entities in the space and international communications industries interact with the FCC.

Per the IB Reorganization Order, the International Bureau’s portfolio will be reallocated as follows: (i) the Space Bureau will take on satellite communications, in-space activity and related earth station licensing and policy matters subject to the FCC’s jurisdiction; and (ii) the Office of International Affairs will assume responsibility for non-space international communications licensing and regulation, including subsea cable system authorizations. The FCC will implement these changes once necessary approvals, including from Congress, are received, and the Order is published in the Federal Register.

We anticipate that the IB Reorganization Order will have the following impacts:

- i. Expedited processing timelines and streamlined application processes for earth station, satellite, and other communications license applications, which may be implemented through new forms and filing procedures.
- ii. Increased coordination with other U.S. government agencies with regulatory responsibilities involving communications and satellites, including the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.
- iii. Establishment of new public/private working groups to address novel and complex issues in the space and subsea cable industries.
- iv. Additional rulemaking proceedings to improve the FCC’s ability to accommodate the pace of technological development and growth in the satellite and space infrastructure industries, including emerging commercial activities such as mission extension/repositioning/repairing

¹ *In the Matter of Establishment of the Space Bureau and the Office of International Affairs and Reorganization of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau and the Office of the Managing Director*, Order, MD Docket No. 23-12 (Jan. 9, 2023), located at <https://www.fcc.gov/document/establishment-space-bureau-and-office-international-affairs>.

space vehicles, orbital debris mitigation missions, lunar landers and space antenna farms.

The FCC took these actions to better support continued technological advancements in, and to provide essential leadership for, the global and space communications marketplace. We encourage clients with existing applications or matters before the International Bureau to reach out to us to discuss how these changes may impact them.

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