

Modernization and Red Tape Reduction in the Radio World: CRTC Updates Regulation of Canadian Radio Broadcasters to Adjust to the Growing Presence of Streaming Services

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On October 10, 2025, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) released Broadcasting Regulatory Policy CRTC [2025-265](#) (the Policy) in a continuation of its efforts to modernize Canada's radio broadcasting framework. This policy is part of the CRTC's broader strategy to implement the modernized *Broadcasting Act* (the Act) and reflects a shift toward reducing regulatory burdens and offering radio broadcasters greater flexibility while also increasing support for Canadian and Indigenous creators.

Background

This new Policy is a direct result of responses from stakeholders and the public to [Broadcasting Notice of Consultation CRTC 2024-290](#) (the Consultation), launched by the CRTC to review Canada's radio broadcasting processes and implement reform to an incumbent and traditional broadcasting sector in which online streaming services are a growing presence and challenge. In response to the Consultation, the CRTC received 39 interventions from a variety of stakeholders and the public, including numerous radio station owners and radio-focused funds and associations. The Consultation explored ways to reduce regulatory red tape, streamline licensing processes, improve the CRTC's compliance oversight, and enhance accessibility for equity-deserving groups across Canada. The comments also addressed how the CRTC might promote the sustainability of audio broadcasters in underserved markets and lessen the barriers to entry for new or developing radio stations, possibly through the broadening of exemption orders.

The initiative to modernize Canada's broadcasting framework is both a response to the ever-evolving media landscape, particularly the growing influence of online streaming services, and an attempt to recognize that traditional radio service (including local market radio service) remains a vital way in which Canadians access their local news, discover new artists, and connect with their communities. The Consultation's overall objective was to reduce the regulatory burden on radio stations, promote flexibility, and support Canadian and Indigenous creators. The resulting Policy reflects the CRTC's commitment to regulating in a flexible and responsive manner by balancing reduced administrative demands with continued public interest oversight.

Changes to Canada's Radio Broadcasting Regulatory Framework

The cornerstone of the new Policy is the introduction of indefinite radio broadcasting licences for all types of radio stations to simplify and equalize the burden of managing those broadcast licences. This represents a significant change to Canada's radio broadcasting regulatory framework, as licences were previously capped at seven years and required renewal through a lengthy and resource-intensive process. The CRTC's new approach intends to eliminate the need for periodic renewals, allowing audio broadcasters to focus more on their operations and programming content. To ensure accountability, the CRTC will conduct regular audits and compliance reviews, replacing the traditional renewal-based oversight model. Notably, the CRTC will continue to simplify the radio license renewal process by creating baselines for existing radio licensees, requiring them to renew their audio broadcast licenses to receive an indefinite license.

With the CRTC's expanded order and regulation making powers, which are applicable to all broadcast undertakings and were introduced through the enactment of the *Online Streaming Act* in April 2023, the Policy also contains changes to the CRTC's audio broadcasting compliance framework. The new system will use a graduated approach to enforcement, addressing minor infractions through warning letters and guidance, while applying monetary penalties, mandatory on-air announcements, or even licence suspension to licensees with repeated or serious violations. While the CRTC's previous compliance framework relied on licence renewal as a touchpoint for compliance, under the new expanded framework, the CRTC will conduct regular audits on both a random and complaints-driven basis. The goal of this new framework is to ensure proportionate and timely responses to non-compliance, while ensuring that smaller broadcasters or equity-seeking broadcasters are supported.

In addition to licensing and compliance reforms, the Policy includes a wide range of other updates to the existing Canadian radio broadcasting regulatory system, including the following:

- Streamlining the licensing and reporting requirements for developmental and low power radio stations. The power wattage to which development stations are limited has been significantly increased, making it easier for community, campus, and commercial broadcasters, specifically those that serve equity-deserving groups and official language minority communities, to enter the market. These stations will also benefit from reduced reporting and programming requirements and receive support from CRTC staff during their five-year licence term, after which they will have the opportunity to transition to a full licence with an indefinite term. The CRTC also simplified the process for low-power stations seeking to upgrade to full-power status.
- Recognizing the decline in both AM radio stations and listenership, the CRTC is allowing AM stations to simulcast on FM frequencies within the same market for a one-year trial period. The motivation driving this initiative is to help AM radio stations reach broader audiences without immediately requiring them to change their formatting.

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- While the CRTC confirms that it will not be introducing new categories of radio broadcasters that are exempt from formal licensing requirements at this time, the CRTC will be updating existing exemption orders to allow for better monitoring and accountability. For example, tourist information stations must now keep audio recordings and program logs, and stations operated by houses of worship are now required to register with the CRTC.
- Licensees will be required to notify the CRTC if their radio station ceases broadcasting for more than ten days. If the radio station remains inactive for six months and is not sold or reactivated, the CRTC may initiate a licence revocation process. This measure ensures that valuable spectrum resources are not left unused and encourages timely resolution of operational issues.

Finally, the CRTC notes that it will invest in internal improvements to support the implementation of the changes outlined in the Policy, such as improving its data collection system. In addition, the CRTC is committing to the continued exploration of methods to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its processes.

Key Takeaways & Next Steps

The Policy marks a pivotal shift in how radio broadcasting is regulated in Canada. The introduction of indefinite broadcasting licences is a major step toward reducing red tape and administrative burdens and allows broadcasters to focus on content and programming operations. The new compliance framework, which replaces renewal-based oversight with regular audits and a graduated enforcement model, ensures more timely and proportionate responses to non-compliance while supporting smaller and equity-deserving broadcasters. The Policy also simplifies licensing for developmental stations, expands flexibility for AM and FM programming formats, and updates exemption orders to improve accountability.

More broadly, the Policy is yet another example in the last few years of the CRTC's focus on modernizing Canada's broadcasting policies and regulatory processes ever since the *Online Streaming Act* came into force in April 2023. The CRTC currently shows no signs of slowing down in its modernization efforts: the same day that it released this Policy, it announced Broadcasting Notice of Consultation [2025-267](#), through which it will be accepting comments on proposed amendments to existing exemption orders for various types of radio programming undertakings and conditions to be imposed on exempt services.

The Cassels [Entertainment & Sports Law](#) Group has been closely monitoring developments related to the *Broadcasting Act* and the CRTC's latest policies. If you have any questions about the content of this article or how the CRTC's latest changes may impact your business, please reach out to any member of our team.

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