Licence-Free UHF Radios

The following was prepared using publicly available information from the Australian Communications & Media Authority (ACMA). It is intended as a guide only and should not be relied on as a substitute for legal advice in individual cases.

There are many UHF radios now sold under the general term of "licence-free." Although these do not require the user to obtain an individual licence, they are far from being "licence-free."

CBRS Class Licence

ALL of the "licence-free" UHF radios sold in Australia operate on the UHF Citizen Band Radio Service (CB). This includes both hand-held and mobile UHF sets using 40 or 80 channels. This is one of two CB bands utilised in Australia.

Although you don't need to apply and pay for an individual licence to use these radios (on either band), they are governed by a "Class Licence." The Australian Communications & Media Authority (ACMA) define a Class Licence as:

"A class licence sets out the conditions under which any person is permitted to operate. It is not issued to an individual user, and does not involve licence fees."

The CBRS Class Licence governs the use of all CB equipment in Australia, including the many "licence-free" UHF radios. The Class Licence sets out many things about how these radios can be used, including certain channels reserved for specific uses.

Communicators / "Toy" Radios

There are a number of often cheap hand-held radios purchased by parents for their children to use to talk to friends or for the family to use as they travel on holiday. These are sold under various names, such as:

- UHF Communicator
- UHF Licence-Free Radio

These radios will usually have 80 channels and will sometimes also be advertised as having "38 sub-channels" or "privacy tones". Some will also have a "range extender" function. These are all CB equipment operating on the UHF CB band.

This also means that parents buying these sets for their children need to be careful that the children know not to talk to anyone they don't know, and not to discuss details of their plans over the radio, as anyone close by with a UHF CB can not only hear but can also talk to them.

Legally Designated Channels

Under the CBRS Class Licence, the following channels have been designated for the indicated use:

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- UHF Band (40 or 80 channels):
  - Channels **5 AND 35**: Emergency channels.
  - Channels **22** and **23**: Data only (no voice permitted).
  - Channels 1 to 8, 31 to 38, 41 to 48 & 71 to 78: used by Repeaters.
- 27MHz or HF Band (40 or 23 channels):
  - Channel **9**: Emergency channel.
  - Channel **11**: AM or FM Mode only (formerly AM call channel)
  - Channel **16**: LSB Mode only (formerly SSB call channel)

In addition, the following channels are used by general agreement:

- UHF channel 40 & 27MHz channel 8: Road channel.
- 27MHz channel 35 (LSB): long-distance call channel.

Federal Law

These channels are designated under Federal legislation (except for 'generally accepted' channels), so they apply throughout Australia. It also means that using these channels for other than the designated purpose can have serious consequences under federal law.

Under the *Radiocommunications Act,* operating equipment contrary to the conditions specified in a Class Licence means you are operating "unlicensed" and can, therefore, be charged with operating an unlicensed device under federal legislation. The penalty for this can be up to **2 years imprisonment** for an individual or a **$546,000** court fine for a corporation. For civil cases, a **$109,200** infringement notice.*

If the transmissions cause interference with an emergency call (especially on one of the legally designated emergency channels), the penalties increase to up to **$1,820,000** court fine or **5 years in prison**. There is no option for a penalty notice for these cases; a court must deal with it.*

If you wish to view the CB Class Licence, you can find it online – search for "**Radiocommunications (Citizen Band Radio Stations) Class Licence 2025**".

More Information

More information on the CBRS Class Licence and the legally designated channels can be found at:

- RREC Website: **https://www.radiorescue.org.au**
- RREC Phone: **0448 402 359**
- ACMA Phone: **1300 850 115**

* Penalty values correct as at 1 July 2026. Due to be reviewed with CPI.

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