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FISH & RICHARDSON P.C. (TC)
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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

In re Patent No. 7,883,736 :
Issued: February 8, 2011 : DECISION ON PATENT TERM
Application No. 11/851,127 :
Filed: September 6, 2007 :
Atty. Dkt. No.: 10527-814001 :

This is a decision on the request for reconsideration of decision mailed May 18, 2011 with respect to the application for patent term adjustment under 37 CFR 1.704(d) filed April 8, 2011. This request, filed July 18, 2011, is deemed timely filed within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.181(f).

RELEVANT BACKGROUND

Patentees request that a decision on this request for reconsideration of patent term adjustment be deferred or delayed until after a final decision has been rendered in Abbott Biotherapeutics Corp v. Kappos, 1:2010cv01853 (D.D.C. 2010).

The request is hereby DENIED. This decision is a final agency action within the meaning of 5 USC §704 for purposes of seeking judicial review. See, MPEP 1002.02.

The above-identified application matured into U.S. Patent No. 7,883,736 on February 8, 2011 with a revised patent term adjustment of 104 days. On May 18, 2011, a decision on patentees' application for patent term adjustment under 37 CFR 1.705(d), filed April 8, 2011, was mailed. The decision under 37 CFR 1.705(d) mailed May 18, 2011 dismissed patentees' request for increase in patent term adjustment from 104 days to 229 days.

Patentees herein request that the patent term adjustment for the above-identified patent be increased from 104 days to 229 days (189 days pursuant to 37 CFR 1.703(a) plus 125 days pursuant to 37 CFR 1.703(b) less 85 days of applicant delay pursuant to 37 CFR 1.704(b)).

Patentees maintain that the Office incorrectly calculated Office delay pursuant to 37 CFR 1.702(b). Patentees contend that the Office erred in subtracting from the "B delay" a period of time that was not "consumed by continued examination of the application." Specifically, patentees argue that subsequent to the filing of the request for continued examination on August 13, 2010, examination of the application closed on October 7, 2010, the date upon which the Notice of Allowance was mailed. Thus, patentees argue that no continued examination took place during the 125 day period from October 7, 2010 (the mailing date of the Notice of

Allowance) until February 8, 2011 (the date the patent was issued). As such, patentees maintain that the "B delay" should include the 125 days and be increased from zero days to 125 days. Thus, patentees conclude that the correct patent term adjustment is thus 229 days (the sum of 189 days of "A delay" and 125 days of "B delay" minus 85 days of applicant delay").

RELEVANT STATUTES

The statutory basis for calculation of "B delay" is 35 U.S.C. 154(b)(1)(B) GUARANTEE OF NO MORE THAN 3-YEAR APPLICATION PENDENCY, which provides that:

> Subject to the limitations under paragraph (2), if the issue of an original patent is delayed due to the failure of the United States Patent and Trademark Office to issue a patent within 3 years after the actual filing date of the application in the United States, not including —
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> (i) any time consumed by continued examination of the application requested by the applicant under section 132(b);
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> (ii) any time consumed by a proceeding under section 135(a), any time consumed by the imposition of an order under section 181, or any time consumed by appellate review by the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences or by a Federal court; or
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> (iii) any delay in the processing of the application by the United States Patent and Trademark Office requested by the applicant except as permitted by paragraph (3)(C), the term of the patent shall be extended 1 day for each day after the end of that 3-year period until the patent is issued.

The implementing regulation, 37 CFR 1.702(b) provides that:

> Subject to the provisions of 35 U.S.C. 154(b) and this subpart, the term of an original patent shall be adjusted if the issuance of the patent was delayed due to the failure of the Office to issue a patent within three years after the date on which the application was filed under 35 U.S.C. 111(a) or the national stage commenced under 35 U.S.C. 371(b) or (f) in an international application, but not including:
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> (1) Any time consumed by continued examination of the application under 35 U.S.C. 132(b);
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> (2) Any time consumed by an interference proceeding under 35 U.S.C. 135(a);
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> (3) Any time consumed by the imposition of a secrecy order under 35 U.S.C. 181;

(4) Any time consumed by review by the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences or a Federal court; or

(5) Any delay in the processing of the application by the Office that was requested by the applicant.

DECISION

Patentees' arguments have been considered, but not found persuasive. The Office calculated the period of "B delay" pursuant to 35 U.S.C. 154(b)(1)(B)(i) and 37 CFR 1.702(b)(1) as zero days based on the application having been filed under 35 USC 111(a) on September 6, 2007 and the patent not having issued as of September 7, 2010, the day after the date that is three years after the date that the application was filed, and a request for continued examination under 132(b) having been filed on August 13, 2010. In other words, the 125-day period beginning on the date of mailing of the notice of allowance to the date of issuance of the patent was considered time consumed by continued examination of an application under 35 U.S.C. 132(b) and was not included in the "B delay."

The Office's calculation of "B delay" is correct. The "B delay" is an adjustment entered if the issuance of the patent was delayed due to the failure of the Office to issue a patent within three years after the date on which the application was filed. However, the adjustment does not include, among other things, any time consumed by continued examination of the application at the request of the applicant under 35 U.S.C. 132(b)[1]. So, with respect to calculating the "B delay" where applicant has filed a request for continued examination, the period of adjustment is the number of days, if any, in the period beginning on the day after the date that is three years after the date on which the application was filed under 35 U.S.C. 111(a) or the national stage commenced under 35 U.S.C. 371(b) or (f) in an international application and ending on the date a patent was issued, but not including the number of days in the period beginning on the date on which a request for continued examination of the application under 35 U.S.C. 132(b) was filed and ending on the date the patent was issued.

Further, counting the period of time excluded from the "B delay" for the filing of a request for continued examination under 35 U.S.C. 132(b), from the date on which the request for continued

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[1] Pursuant to 35 U.S.C. 132(b), 37 CFR 1.114 provides for continued examination of an application, as follows:

(a) If prosecution in an application is closed, an applicant may request continued examination of the application by filing a submission and the fee set forth in § 1.17(e) prior to the earliest of:

(1) Payment of the issue fee, unless a petition under § 1.313 is granted;

(2) Abandonment of the application; or

(3) The filing of a notice of appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit under 35 U.S.C. 141, or the commencement of a civil action under 35 U.S.C. 145 or 146, unless the appeal or civil action is terminated.

(b) Prosecution in an application is closed as used in this section means that the application is under appeal, or that the last Office action is a final action (§ 1.113), a notice of allowance (§ 1.311), or an action that otherwise closes prosecution in the application.

examination is filed to the date the patent is issued is proper. Patentees do not dispute that time consumed by continued examination of an application under 35 U.S.C. 132(b) is properly excluded and that the calculation of the excluded period begins on the date of filing of the request for continued examination. At issue is what further processing or examination beyond the date of filing of the request for continued examination is not any time consumed by continued examination of the application under 35 U.S.C. 132(b). The USPTO indicated in September of 2000 in the final rule to implement the patent term adjustment provisions of the AIPA that once a request for continued examination under 35 U.S.C. 132(b) and 37 CFR 1.114 is filed in an application, any further processing or examination of the application, including granting of a patent, is by virtue of the continued examination given to the application under 35 U.S.C. 132(b) and CFR 1.114. See Changes to Implement Patent Term Adjustment under Twenty-Year Patent Term, 65 Fed. Reg. 56366, 56376 (Sept. 18, 2000) (response to comment 8). Thus, the excluded period begins with the filing of the request for continued examination and ends with the issuance of the patent.

Patentees' argument that the period of time after the issuance of a notice of allowance on a request for continued examination is not "any time consumed by continued examination requested by the applicant under section 132(b)" within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. 154(b)(1)(B)(i) is not availing. This limitation is not supported by the statutory language. Garcia v. United States, 469 U.S. 70, 75 (1984) ("only the most extraordinary showing of contrary intentions from [legislative history] would justify a limitation on the 'plain meaning' of the statutory language"). BP Am. Prod. Co. v. Burton, 549 U.S. 84, 91 (2006) ("Unless otherwise defined, statutory terms are generally interpreted in accordance with their ordinary meaning"). The statute provides for a guarantee of no more than 3-year application pendency, by providing for an adjustment in the patent term:

First, "Subject to the limitations of paragraph (2)," means that the limitations of paragraph 2 apply to this paragraph's adjustment of patent term. That is, the day-to-day extension of patent term for pendency beyond the 3 year period is restricted as follows: 1) "B delay" cannot accrue for days of "A delay" that overlap, 2) the patent term cannot be extended beyond disclaimed term, and 3) the period of adjustment, including accrued "B delay," will be reduced for applicant delay.

Second, "if the issue of an original patent is delayed due to the failure of the United States Patent and Trademark Office to issue a patent within 3 years after the actual filing date of the application in the United States," meaning that the condition must first occur that the issuance of an original patent (35 U.S.C. 153), not merely the issuance of a notice of allowance, is delayed due to the Office's failure to issue a patent (sign and record a patent grant in the name of the United States), not merely mail a notice of allowance, within 3 years after the actual filing date of the application in the United States. This provision gives the Office a three-year period to issue a patent (sign and record a patent grant in the name of the United States) after the application filing date before an adjustment will accrue for "B delay."

Third, "not including- (i) any time consumed by continued examination of the application requested by the applicant under section 132(b); (ii) any time consumed by a proceeding under section 135(a), any time consumed by the imposition of an order under section 181, or any time consumed by appellate review by the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences or by a Federal court; or (iii) any delay in the processing of the application by the United States Patent and Trademark Office requested by the applicant except as permitted by paragraph (3)(C), meaning that the three-year period does not include "any time consumed by" or "any delay in processing," as specified in clauses (i)-(iii). This language correlates to 35 U.S.C. 154(b)(1)(A) which likewise provides the basis for determining the period given the Office to take the specified actions before an adjustment will accrue for "A delay" (e.g., extended for 1 day after the day after the period specified in clauses (i)-(iv)).

Furthermore, these clauses are interpreted using their ordinary meanings. Nonetheless, the context of the legislation should be considered. As stated in Wyeth v. Dudas, 580 F. Supp. 2d 138, 88 U.S.P.Q. 2d 1538 (D.D.C. 2008), because the clock for calculating the 20-year patent term begins to run on the filing date, and not on the day the patent is actually granted, some of the effective term of a patent is consumed by the time it takes to prosecute the application. To mitigate this effect, the statute, *inter alia*, grants adjustments of patent term whenever the patent prosecution takes more than three years, regardless of the reason. The time consumed by prosecution of the application includes every day the application is pending before the Office from the actual filing date of the application in the United States until the date of issuance of the patent. The time it takes to prosecute the application ends not with the mailing of the notice of allowance, but with the issuance of the patent.

Thus, not including "any time consumed by" means not including any days used to prosecute the application as specified in clauses (i)-(ii)[2]. Clause (i) specifies "any time consumed by continued examination of the application requested by the applicant under section 132(b)." Clause (ii) specifies "any time consumed by a proceeding under section 135(a), any time consumed by the imposition of an order under section 181, or any time consumed by appellate review by the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences or by a Federal court." "Time" in the context of this legislation throughout refers to days. "Consumed by" means used by or used in the course of. Websters Collegiate Dictionary, (11th ed.). The "any" signifies that the days consumed by are "any" of the days in the pendency of the application, and not just days that occur after the application has been pending for 3 years. As such, "any time consumed by" refers to any days used in the course of 1) continued examination of the application under section 132(b)(the filing of a request for continued examination), 2) interference proceedings, 3) secrecy orders, and 4) appellate review. Thus, that 3-year period given to the Office to issue a patent before an

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[2] Clause (iii) provides for not including (iii) any delay in the processing of the application by the United States Patent and Trademark Office requested by the applicant except as permitted by paragraph (3)(C), the term of the patent shall be extended 1 day for each day after the end of that 3-year period until the patent is issued. It is noted that paragraph (3)(C) allows with an adequate showing by applicant for reinstatement of no more than 3 months of the patent term reduced for applicant delay in taking in excess of three months to respond.

adjustment will accrue for "B delay" does not include any days used in the course of or any time consumed by clauses (i)-(ii), including any time consumed by the filing of a request for continued examination.

Fourth, "the term of the patent shall be extended 1 day for each day after the end of that 3-year period until the patent is issued" meaning that the consequence of this failure is that after "the end of that 3-year period" an additional 1 day of patent term will accrue for each day that the application is pending until the day the patent is issued.

The "time consumed by" or used in the course of the continued examination of the application requested by the applicant under section 132(b) does not end until issuance of the patent. 35 U.S.C. 132(b) was enacted under the same title, the "American Inventors Protection Act of 1999," as 35 U.S.C. 154(b). Section 4403 of the AIPA amended 35 U.S.C. § 132 to provide, at the request of the applicant, for continued examination of an application for a fee (request for continued examination or RCE practice), without requiring the applicant to file a continuing application under 37 CFR 1.53(b) or a continued prosecution application (CPA) under 37 CFR 1.53(d). Thus, clause (i) is different from clause (ii) in that clause (i) refers to an examination process whereas clause (ii) refers to time consumed by proceedings (interferences, secrecy orders and appeals) in an application.

By nature, the time used in the course of the examination process continues to issuance of the patent. The examination process involves examining the application to ascertain whether it appears that the applicant is entitled to a patent under the law. See 35 U.S.C. 131 ("[t]he Director shall cause an examination to be made of the application and the alleged new invention; and if on such examination it appears that the applicant is entitled to a patent under the law, the Director shall issue a patent therefor"). If on examination it appears that the applicant is entitled to a patent, the USPTO issues a notice of allowance. See, 35 U.S.C. 151 ("[i]f it appears that applicant is entitled to a patent under the law, a written notice of allowance of the application shall be given or mailed to the applicant"). If on examination it appears that the applicant is not entitled to a patent, the USPTO issues a notice (an Office action) stating the applicable rejection, objection, or other requirement, with the reasons therefor. See, 35 U.S.C. 132 ("[w]henever, on examination, any claim for a patent is rejected, or any objection or requirement made, the Director shall notify the applicant thereof, stating the reasons for such rejection, or objection or requirement, together with such information and references as may be useful in judging of the propriety of continuing the prosecution of his application"). Neither the issuance of a notice of allowance nor the insurance of an Office action terminates the examination process. If after the issuance of an Office action under 35 U.S.C. 132 it subsequently appears that the applicant is entitled to a patent (e.g., in response to an argument or amendment by the applicant), the USPTO will issue a notice of allowance. Conversely, if after the issuance of a notice of allowance under 35 U.S.C. 151 it subsequently appears that the applicant is not entitled to a patent (e.g., in response to information provided by the applicant or uncovered by the USPTO), the USPTO will withdraw the application from issuance and issue an Office action under 35 U.S.C. 132 stating the applicable rejection, objection, or other requirement, with the reasons therefor.

As held in BlackLight Power, the USPTO's responsibility to issue a patent containing only patentable claims does not end with the issuance of a notice of allowance under 35 U.S.C. 151. See, BlackLight Power, Inc. v. Rogan, 295 F.3d 1269, 1273 (Fed. Cir. 2002). Rather, if there is any substantial, reasonable ground within the knowledge or cognizance of the Director as to why an application should not issue, it is the USPTO's duty to refuse to issue the patent even if a notice of allowance has previously been issued for the application. See, In re Drawbaugh, 9 App. D.C. 219, 240 (D.C. Cir 1896).

Moreover, the applicant continues to be engaged in the examination process after the mailing of the notice of allowance. 37 CFR 1.56 makes clear that the applicant has a duty to disclose information material to patentability as long as the application is pending before the USPTO (i.e., until a patent is granted or the application is abandoned). See, 37 CFR 1.56(a) ("[t]he duty to disclose information exists with respect to each pending claim until the claim is cancelled or withdrawn from consideration, or the application becomes abandoned"). 37

CFR 1.97 and 1.98 provide for the consideration of information submitted by the applicant after a notice of allowance has been mailed. See, 37 CFR 1.97(d). In addition, 37 CFR 1.312 provides for the amendment of an application after a notice of allowance has been mailed. In fact, the request for examination procedures[3] permit the filing of a request for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114 even after the issuance of a notice of allowance under 35 U.S.C. 151. See, 37 CFR 1.114(a)(1).

As the examination process does not terminate with the mailing of the notice of allowance, the time consumed by continued examination requested by the applicant under section 132(b) does not terminate with the mailing of the notice of allowance. All the time the application is pending from the date of filing of the request for continued examination to the mailing of the notice of allowance through issuance of the patent is a consequence of the filing of the request for continued examination. Further action by the Office is pursuant to that request. Applicant has gotten further prosecution of the application without having to file a continuing application under 37 CFR 1.53(b).

All of the continued examination pursuant to the filing of the request by the applicant is properly excluded from the delay attributed to the Office. 35 U.S.C. 154(b)(1)(B)'s guarantee of a total application pendency of no more than three years provides for adjustment of the patent term for delay due to the Office's failure to issue the patent within three years, but does not include "any time consumed by continued examination requested by the applicant under 35 U.S.C. 132(b)." It is not necessary to mitigate the effect on the 20-year term to the extent that applicant has requested that the Office continue to examine the application via a request for continued examination, in lieu of, the filing of a continuing application under 37 CFR 1.53(b).

CONCLUSION

[3] Note, on occasion, even where a request for continued examination has already been filed and a notice of allowance issued pursuant to that request, applicant may file a further request for continued examination.

For the above-stated reasons, a review of the petition and file wrapper of the above-identified patent reveals that the above-identified patent is not entitled to a patent term extension or adjustment of 229 days. Therefore, the petition to change the patent term adjustment indicated on the above-identified patent to 229 days is **DENIED**.

This decision may be viewed as final agency action. See, MPEP 1002.02(b).

Telephone inquiries specific to this matter should be directed to Attorney Advisor Alesia M. Brown at (571) 272-3205.

Anthony Knight
Director
Office of Petitions