

Submission to Spectrum Forum 5th November 2011

Implementation of IARU Recommendations – additional VHF repeater allocations

Following the recent IARU conference in Sun City, two new 2 metre repeater channels have been added to the Region 1 band plan. The decision as recorded in the plenary minutes was:

2 new repeater frequencies as follows (analogue and digital):

144.9750 MHz and 144.9875 MHz as inputs

145.5750 MHz and 145.5875 MHz as outputs

Proposed by SARL, seconded by HRS and approved with twenty seven in favour, fourteen against with seven abstentions.

It can be seen that the decision was less than wholeheartedly supported and in fact only got through earlier stages by a single vote.

CONSULTATION

In order to gauge opinion from our own 2 metre community, the following statement was subsequently posted on the ETCC website:

"Two new 2 Metre repeater channels have been added to the Region 1 band plan. It is intended to have a full discussion on this subject at the next Spectrum Forum meeting on 5th November. To assist in our decision making the ETCC would welcome comments from all on how, or indeed if, these frequencies could be allocated to ensure efficient and effective use of the spectrum . If it is decided to adopt these frequencies for repeater use in the UK they will be included in the new bandplan due for issue in early 2012."

The resulting response has been surprisingly muted, with just eight responses and an almost even split for and against introduction of the new channels.

Supporting responses included two that suggested the frequencies should be allocated exclusively for digital use. There were also a number of comments that we needed a 'tidy up' of under performing or off air repeaters, before we did anything else. This should also include a re-planning of the whole repeater network to make more efficient use of the spectrum together with better use of CTCSS to protect against co-channel interference.

Negative responses included a comment that there was still a large number of crystal controlled equipment 'out there' and that the frequencies to be used were two of the most popular simplex frequencies. The general feeling in the 'anti' lobby is that there are quite enough repeater channels. One responder was also quite vocal in his opposition to "proprietary technologies" such as D-Star.

From a Committee viewpoint we do indeed have a long standing desire to ensure that the existing repeater network is functioning properly and that those repeaters that have been long term off air or performing badly are either closed down, thus releasing spectrum, or alternatively brought back into full service within a defined time frame. We feel that this should be an immediate priority before any additional repeater channels are allocated but we do need the support of Ofcom in order to take it forward. To date they have been rather reluctant to withdraw NoVs although there have been precedents set for this in the past.

It is also recognised that even though the new channels are an IARU recommendation, we would need very good reasons not to implement them in due course.

PROPOSAL

The ETCC would therefore propose a staged approach:

Phase 1

Seek Repeater Keepers cooperation in:

1. Ensuring that all 2 metre repeaters comply fully with 12.5 kHz channel spacing to reduce current adjacent channel problems.
2. Introducing the full use of CTCSS, which is in any case an IARU recommendation for implementation from 2014.
3. Ensuring that their repeaters are in full working order, compliant with above requirements and failing that, to ask Ofcom to revoke NoVs.

Phase 2

4. In say one year's time we would then review the situation looking at gaps still present in coverage and if necessary invite proposals to introduce the new frequencies on a low power fill in basis. This would allow coverage to be improved in problem areas with very effective channel re-use. Digital use could also be accommodated on a similar basis.
5. To comply with the IARU recommendation the bandplan could be amended at that time but we should make it clear now that introduction of the new frequencies will be dependent on satisfactory progress with points 1 to 3 above.

Simplex use could continue in an area on the new repeater output frequencies until repeater coverage was needed in that area. Those with long memories will recall a similar phasing out of the use of 433.200 MHz (SU8) and 145.000 MHz from simplex use, so there is a historical precedent for such action.