

RSGB Contest Committee
Report to Spectrum Forum, November 2012

The committee has made efforts to consult contesters this year as part of its aim to meet their needs more closely. The "Litmus Test" system was used to ask for views on a proposed new set of General Rules. These rules apply to all contests, whereas specific rules cover elements such as time, date and contest exchange. Modifications and additions have been made to the General Rules as a result, and this will continue.

We have also tested a different consultation method, relating to changed rules in CW Field Day. Entries to all three Field Days have been falling slowly over the years - perhaps because of the rising age profile of amateurs in general. The committee wanted to ask clubs about the effect of this year's changes, and what future initiatives might increase participation. A questionnaire was prepared with opinions requested, along with a free-form response area, then sent to clubs and individuals who could have an interest, with announcements made on the UK contest news group. Initial submissions have been helpful, and the process is continuing.

There has been a positive reaction to both these methods of consultation, and the results will be discussed with a view to continuing similar exercises in the future. The committee is aware that the most forceful opinions expressed on contesting matters generally come from two sources, that is, from staunch contesters, and from those who are anti-contest. However, we would like to find out what useful input might be provided by those who are less-experienced (perhaps less dogmatic) - an important task is to identify them and seek their views.

Entries in most RSGB contests have grown steadily, with club loyalty helping to increase numbers in both weekday and weekend events. The committee intends to devise a programme which will encourage the best of these newer contesters to take part in longer and more challenging contests. This initiative will include making presentations to societies, mentoring by experienced contesters, and inviting participation with existing multi-operator stations.

There was praise from Ofcom this year for the cooperation of the UK amateurs in temporarily relinquishing spectrum to enable the Olympic Games to operate successfully. The contest committee was pleased that it was able to suggest work-arounds so that events such as VHF Field Day could proceed without interference either to or from Olympic hand-helds.

The committee is involved with Special Contest Calls, in that we approve (or otherwise) the issuing of these calls for Ofcom. This is not a comfortable situation for the committee, but there is nobody at Ofcom who knows enough about contests to make such a judgement. A suggestion has been made that the use of these calls might be extended to more contests throughout the year. The initial list of contests was created around 15 years ago, and is in need of updating and clarification, so we hope that this will be considered by Ofcom during 2013.

Next year, as part of the RSGB centenary, we will re-brand our two biggest HF and VHF events - the "RSGB Centenary IOTA Contest", and the "RSGB Centenary VHF Field Day". The rules will remain basically unchanged, but extra awards will be available within and outside the UK, based on levels of participation, and on contacts with celebration stations -- Gx100 calls, for example.

Additions were made this year to RSGB contest rules as necessary to take into account IARU recommendations on contest segments and centres of activity. These are generally well respected, with compliance usually being maintained by contesters themselves. We note that not all contest organisers are assiduous in enforcing these recommendations. In some cases there is a disregard of legal requirements, for example, operation in Region 1 below 1810kHz, which administrations do not always seem to realise or act upon.

For the first time in many years, the committee has disqualified a participant for cheating. This involved fabricating contacts in a weekday 80m data contest. It was discovered after the adjudication software routinely showed a larger than usual number of "uniques", that is contacts with stations that nobody else had worked. We make SDR recording of contests on a random basis, and had such a recording for this event. It became clear that the QSOs in question were claimed to have taken place between CQ calls, but where the gap between them left an impossibly short amount of time for even a contest exchange. The perpetrator was banned from RSGB contest participation for a year, but we have recently discovered that he entered a multi-operator contest with his club, without telling them he was no longer eligible. Discussions on further action are continuing.

There has been debate for some time regarding the RSGB 21/28MHz contest. This lasts 12 hours, but UK entries are at a similar level to RSGB contests lasting around two hours. A majority of the committee has voted for abolition, but there has been a reprieve on several occasions because of outcry from enthusiasts (some of them committee members). A controversial proposal has been aired from outside the committee to replace it with a new 24-hour RSGB contest focussing on the UK. This has not been endorsed by the committee, for several reasons, not least of which is the fact that we already have a very successful 24-hour RSGB contest - IOTA, and we are unlikely to attract support for another. Another major problem is the long-standing Oceania contest on the same weekend, which would not be compatible, with the proposal attracting adverse comment from that contest's organisers. There has been criticism of the committee's stance, and we can expect more in the near future.

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