

VHF Manager Report Nov-2014

The VHF Manager, John Regnault G4SWX is responsible for RSGB spectrum matters for the VHF and UHF amateur bands 50-432MHz.

Highlights

- 146-147MHz released to UK amateurs under NoV from 31st October 2014,
- Four new 432MHz beacons licensed and NoVs approved for frequency changes for two other established 432MHz beacons.
- Good progress made at the IARU R1 Meeting in Varna, Bulgaria on many VHF matters.

Lowlights

- Despite new initiatives the decline in 432MHz activity does not appear to have been reversed.

Actions Arising (from 2013 Forum Minutes)

Action: VHF manager to contact Contest Committee chairman on the need to enforce Band Plans in VHF contests as well as HF

Action Completed: Following an email exchange the Contest Committee chairman in the RSGB contests newsletter stressed the importance of adhering to the Band Plans in VHF activity contests.

Temporary Amateur Allocation: 146 – 147 MHz

Ofcom announced on 8th Oct that 146-147MHz will be released on a temporary basis to amateurs holding full licences under a NoV from 31st October 2014. Ofcom have been supported by the RSGB by providing a web hosting process for NoV applications.

At an early stage in the VHF spectrum release discussions it became obvious that the Ofcom view was that they were not keen on allocating additional VHF spectrum to amateur radio for 'more of the same'. Therefore the RSGB case was that we needed some additional spectra for amateurs to test and experiment with new digital communications schemes and systems. The 146 – 147MHz band gives us a unique opportunity to introduce new digital technologies whilst minimising the disruption to current users of analogue modes in the existing 144-146MHz amateur band.

Unfortunately many UK amateurs have seen this extra spectrum as an opportunity to spread out the same 'business as usual' analogue modulation activities currently between 144 and 146MHz. The strict location and ERP restrictions Ofcom have put in place to protect other services will limit the range well below that to which most amateurs are accustomed on 144 – 146MHz. As UK radio amateurs have been granted this new spectrum after making a case based upon innovation and experimentation with digital communications techniques the RSGB will not be recommending the use any analogue modulation modes; CW, SSB, FM or AFSK data in the bandplan for 146-147MHz.

The NoVs for the 146-147MHz band only last one year until 31st October 2015. When Ofcom reviews the temporary 146-147MHz allocation it is important that their usage monitoring supports the RSGB case that it is being used for experimental digital communications. Widespread use of analogue modes could undermine the RSGB case for UK radio amateurs keeping this spectrum in the longer term and further requests as Ofcom releases other currently 'unused' spectrum.

In order to communicate these messages to all UK amateurs the VHF Manager gave a presentation at the RSGB Convention which has been written-up as a short article to be included in the December 2014 edition of Radio Communications. A 146-147MHz FAQ has also been produced which together with an outline bandplan is available on the RSGB web site. The FAQ also includes recommendations on the data/symbol rates and spectral quality for data and DATV transmissions.

General Activity

- The VHF Manager wishes to thank the ETCC, in particular the chairman, John McCullagh for the work done by the ETCC in effectively dealing with the large number of VHF repeater and beacon issues.

- Following discussions concerning the 2014 trans-Atlantic 144MHz tests the PSC has decided to advertise for a new member to investigate extreme long range VHF propagation.
- Band plans and descriptions have been updated on RSGB website as part of an on-going review.

Review of the VHF-UHF Bands

50MHz:

- We are looking to site a prototype synchronised beacon as part of the IARU-R1 pilot scheme
- Concerns have been voiced from users and UKSMG about the use of DATV on the 50MHz band. Whilst the RSGB is keen to encourage experimentation, this must be balanced against potentially causing disruption to other band users.
- 50 MHz is also the topic of an IARU-R1 WRC18 future agenda item proposal in CEPT as the band is not an ITU allocation in Region-1. RSGBs input to the Ofcom WRC-15 consultation advocated support for the agenda item proposal, which would see both the amateur and amateur satellite service allocated across all of ITU Region 1.

70MHz:

- Progress has been achieved in CEPT WGFM for the IARU-R1 70MHz initiative. We hope this will lead to an improvement in the status of the band in the European Common Allocation table later in 2015. We are grateful to Ofcom support for this.

144MHz:

- A number of band-plan changes will occur as a result of IARU Region 1 meeting this year.
- Following to a request from Ofcom the RSGB agreed that four channels in the 144MHz band could be temporarily used by PMSE providers in the Glasgow area in support of the Commonwealth Games. The temporary usage went smoothly, RSGB receiving a note of thanks from Ofcom. There were no reports of interference although the RSGB has received negative comments from some members none of which were in the impacted area!
- Ofcom approved an increase in the licenced power of GB3WGI transatlantic beacon to 1KW EIRP – Please see PSC report for more details.

432MHz:

- In April Ofcom issued NoVs for 4 new 432MHz beacons; GB3FNY, GB3LEU, GB3NGI and GB3UHF and approved frequency changes for GB3AMG and GB3MCB to align with the IARU R1 bandplan. Please see PSC report for current status.
- Instigation of twice weekly 432MHz activity periods by the RadCom VHF columnist G4HGI is bringing more people onto the band on a regular basis. It is hoped that if these activity periods can be grown they might help stem the continuing decline in 432MHz activity.

IARU R1 Conference 2014

At the IARU R1 conference held in Varna, Bulgaria in September 2014 the RSGB presented five VHF/UHF papers. These papers, concerning modifications to the band plans were all approved. We will make appropriate changes to the RSGB band plans as part of the on-going review.

C5-08 144 MHz Satellite Band Plan

C5-09 VHF-UHF Fax Frequencies

C5-10 VHF-UHF RTTY Frequencies

C5-11 VHF Updates

C5-14 50 MHz Synchronised beacons

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