Emerging Technology Coordination Committee (ETCC) Report
October 2016

Purpose

The ETCC functions to develop and enhance the UK Amateur Radio Repeater Network together with Data Communications systems and to promote the introduction and rollout of appropriate new technologies.

Our Main Activities

- To receive, scrutinise and advise on all proposals in respect of analogue and digital repeaters and data communications systems.
- To process finalised and agreed proposals onwards to Ofcom.
- To liaise with Ofcom and other bodies as required.

Current Issues

Repeater abuse continues to be an unfortunate fact of life in the repeater scene. The ETCC works closely with AROS who are the official point of contact with Ofcom to ensure that relevant advice is given to keepers with reports passed to Ofcom for investigation. It is unfortunate that as Amateur Radio is not a 'Safety of Life' service it seems to be very low down on the priorities for enforcement action. Even though we often provide full information on the problems being encountered, Ofcom have to evidence the interference for themselves and if it is not apparent when they monitor a particular complaint then it tends to get written off because of the costs being incurred.

Primary Users

Unfortunately progress with frequency clearances by the Primary Users of our bands remains as a continuing problem. We have particular difficulties in 23cms where it can take years to achieve approval. ATV probably suffers more than most even though Repeater Keepers & Groups have tried to be very accommodating and flexible in reducing bandwidth wherever possible. Although 70cms clearances had improved significantly last year they have also now fallen badly behind and have to be continually 'chased'. These issues continue to be addressed via Ofcom and are agenda items at our regular Ofcom-RSGB Forum meetings.

Datacommunications

This area of our work which encompasses Packet Radio, APRS and Internet Gateways of all kinds remains extremely busy. Because of some anomalies in the current NoV documents we had suggested some rewording to Ofcom but approval has not yet been forthcoming.

Emerging Technology

Although D-Star continues to develop there are other new kids on the block. Fusion has become popular with the availability of a reasonably priced dual mode analogue and digital base station which repeater keepers are using to replace ageing analogue kit while providing a path to digital voice. The emergence of DMR has also been a particular feature of our work over the past year or so. Even though this is a 'professional' rather than 'amateur' mode it's growth has been accelerated by the availability of relatively cheap but well-built portables from China. There is now quite extensive coverage in many areas and it continues to grow although the initial surge in applications has slowed down.

Apart from commercially available digital radio equipment it has been very rewarding to see considerable progress in Amateur digital technology. The development of a new open source multi-mode modem by G4KLX has resulted in quite a number of 'homebrew' repeaters coming on the scene providing access for users with D-Star, DMR and Fusion equipment.

Licensing

In recent months we have been permitted by Ofcom to directly issue renewal Notice of Variation (NoV) documents to Keepers for installations that have previously been authorised by them. They have also agreed to a rolling programme of renewals to avoid the inevitable backlog that could occur as all Repeater and Beacon NoVs will be expiring in March/April 2017.

As a consequence we are now inviting Keepers to renew their documentation early while confirming that the information on closedown operators is fully up to date. Our webmaster Colin GM8LBC has developed a workflow system to allow this programme to be as fully automated as possible.

John McCullagh GI4BWM
Chairman ETCC
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