RSGB Emerging Technology Coordination Committee (ETCC) Report
October 2017

Purpose
The ETCC functions to develop and enhance the UK Amateur Radio repeater and data communications networks and to promote the introduction and rollout of appropriate new technologies.

We receive, vet and advise on all proposals in respect of analogue and digital voice and TV repeaters together with data communications systems. Finalised and agreed proposals are then forwarded on to Ofcom for their approval and issue. We also liaise with Ofcom and other bodies as required.

Spectrum Issues
Pressure on spectrum in the 144 MHz band restricts development of the network in some areas. Even though activity levels can be quite low we still must keep to planning guidelines, something which is not easily explained to someone wishing to set up a repeater and when listening around thinks that their selected channel is clear. One of the main problems is that even though 12.5 kHz channelling was adopted over 20 years ago many receivers, even relatively modern ones, do not comply with the 12.5 kHz specification. This means that when allocating frequencies, we still have to take into account these 'wideband' receivers to avoid overspill thus sterilising adjacent channels. Sometimes depending on the modes in use we can shoehorn in adjacent channels but this has to be very carefully done.

Emerging Technology
Probably the most striking trend this year has been the number of multi-mode repeaters coming on stream using the MMVDM board created by Jonathan G4KLX. This multi-mode modem allows repeaters to run D-Star, DMR, Fusion and no doubt other emergent modes in the future.

Repeater Abuse
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 should be emphasised that there is now an agreed protocol which Repeater Keepers should follow in cases of abuse. If this protocol is not adhered to then Ofcom are unlikely to assist.

Primary Users

We have continuing difficulties in 23cms where it can take years to achieve approval. On a slightly brighter note however we have had some success with frequencies being cleared in the 3.4GHz band. Ofcom are looking at the whole Primary User liaison process and we hope that this will bear fruit fairly soon.

Data Communications

This area of our work which encompasses Packet Radio, APRS and Internet Gateways of all kinds remains extremely busy.

The growth in the use of personal digital voice 'hotspots' continues and we would remind anyone using these units to ensure that they are using frequencies that comply with the 70cms Bandplan for digital voice and not to use the default channels many are supplied on. Hotspots are for personal use only and must be secured so that they cannot be used by others; remember that for 3rd party use you do require a Notice of Variation.

Licensing

This year saw the three-year renewal of all Repeater Notices of Variation. Even though our processes are all electronic/online there was still a huge amount of work done by the committee in issuing invitations to renew, vetting the responses for accuracy and then generating more than 600 documents for issue by Ofcom.

The task was not made any easier by having quite a few Keepers who were uncontactable in having changed their email addresses or who simply did not respond despite repeated reminders.

John McCullagh GI4BWM
Chairman ETCC
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