



RSGB HF Manager's Report

Report for Spectrum Forum, November 2021

Summary

The continuing Covid pandemic has had mixed effects on HF operation. Lockdowns seem to have had a positive effect on activity and with sunspots numbers starting to increase, a welcome return to use of the higher bands is to be observed. On the other hand, DXpeditions have been severely curtailed with many travel restrictions still in place.

Growth in operating on digital modes continues, which seems to be at the expense of activity on the more traditional modes where operation outside of contests can be very low. A significant restructuring of the bandplans in the digital segments is proposed by the IARU and this will be reviewed in detail in the coming months.

ITU WRC-23

The ITU WRC-23 conference has no specific agenda items for the amateur service at HF, nor are any planned for future conferences so desired extensions of the 3.5 MHz, 7 MHz, and 10 MHz bands are extremely unlikely in the next few years. Coupled with this is a reduction in the amount of current spectrum occupied by amateurs due to the much more spectrum efficient nature of digital modes. It is important that activity is encouraged on all modes so as not to put pressure from other sources on our HF allocations.

IARU Digital Modes Band Plan Review

The IARU has undertaken a review of the band plans and activity and has created a proposal for redefining segments of the band plan to better fit with newer technologies and digital modes where the current segmentation by bandwidth is leading to misinterpretation and conflict.

Key objectives are to harmonise the band plans across all regions, reduce inter-mode conflict between dissimilar operating modes and facilitate the expansion of new technologies. Full details are outlined in the IARU Band Plan Review presentation.

In summary, the primary usage definitions are to be replaced with simplified descriptions of band activity:

- CW Mode – readable by a trained ear – can be hand sent – a non voice aural mode
- Voice / Image Modes – direct human to human spoken or complex visual communication (can include digital transmission of speech and SSTV)
- Data Modes – data streams generated by machines that require interpretation before they can be read as clear text on a screen.

The new plan proposes the Data segment be subdivided one layer further:

- Conversational Modes (PSK, RTTY, Olivia etc.)
- Time Synchronised Modes (FT8, JT9, JT65, WSPR, JS8 etc.)
- Unattended Modes (APRS, PacTOR, WinLink etc.)



There are specific proposals for each band; the first priority is to try and rearrange the activity within the existing band plan segments. Where that is not possible, changing the primary usage category may be required; the de facto effect of this will be to extend digital mode activity further into the current all modes segments, which is still in keeping with the current band plans.

5 MHz

The UK is still in the unfortunate position of being one of the very few countries without access to the full WRC-15 allocation at 5 MHz, although more spectrum and higher power levels are available for intra-UK contacts. CW and digital mode operators are particularly affected as the segments for these activities fall outside the UK allocation. It is hoped that this topic can be raised again with Ofcom.

Other Issues

The HF Manager regularly receives emails and questions on HF matters. Often these relate to cases of what is perceived as illegal operation, although usually only refer to a transgression of band plans. It is often necessary to point out that neither the RSGB nor the IARU has regulatory powers, and any legal action is the responsibility of Ofcom. It is also important to note that operation outside of agreed band plans is not in itself an illegal operation as band plans are only advisory.

HF Awards and DXpedition Fund

The HF Manager is a de facto trustee of the RSGB DXpedition Fund, which raises money for DXpeditions through sales of raffle tickets at the RSGB Convention and individual donations. A number of DXpeditions were funded throughout the year although many were cancelled or postponed due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic; full details are reported by the DXpedition fund. Due to the lack of a physical RSGB Convention in both 2020 and 2021, the sale of raffle tickets to raise funds could not take place.

The two awards for HF are presented at the RSGB Convention, held on-line this year. The nomination process and committees are managed by the HF Manager. For 2021, the following awards were made:

- ROTAB Trophy 2021: Chris Tran GM3WOJ
- G5RP Trophy 2021: Not awarded. This is unusual but not unprecedented and in the absence of suitable nominations the decision not to award the trophy rather than dilute the value of it was made.

Ian Greenshields G4FSU, RSGB HF Manager, November 2021