



VINTAGE AND MILITARY AMATEUR RADIO SOCIETY

Report to the RSGB Spectrum Forum Meeting

6th November 2021

Activities

VMARS is an organisation of over 600 members. Our focus is the restoration and use of vintage equipment. To that end, we run AM, CW, USB and LSB nets on 80m (daily), 60m (regularly) and on 6m (occasionally); an online archive of manuals; two publications (a monthly news sheet and a quarterly technical journal), auctions of equipment (around 1,000 lots in 2020 despite the pandemic), a members-only online sales and wants forum and a separate general vintage equipment discussion forum. Portable working is a feature of the Society.

Most members are in the UK; about 10% are overseas, in NZ, Australia, Canada, the US and mainland Europe.

Spectrum Forum matters

(1) Interference

In common with many amateur radio operators, VMARS members suffer from numerous sources of RF noise. In few urban locations is the noise level now much below S9. We are extremely concerned that inadequate attention is being displayed by Authorities in addressing this and in preventing further proliferation of noise sources. We welcome the RSGB initiative in combatting VDSL noise, but it's hard not to feel as though Pandora's box has been opened, and we'll need to await replacement of that appalling technology. It has been good to observe the spread of fibre-to-the-property broadband, but VDSL noise is but the tip of the iceberg.

A specific irritation is the unwelcome appearance of Winlink type data signals across the amateur bands. Winlink is a free radio e-mail service operated by radio amateurs. Our members experience significant interference on or around 3,615 kHz when data signals begin automatically without notice and in any one of several data formats making identification of the signal source very difficult, if not impossible in most instances. It seems clear that these signals are transmitted without checking that the frequency is not already in use.

Our objections to the current uses of Winlink and other invasive data services are:

a) While sending e-mails by radio is a legitimate activity of amateur radio, setting up equipment to automatically jump onto a frequency that is already in use is an abuse of licence privileges in the view of our members.

b) We wholly object to the inclusion of unattended automatically controlled data stations being allocated to the 3,600Khz - 3,620Khz All Modes section of the IARU Region 1 Band Plan. Such stations should be confined to frequencies below 3,600Khz.

We note that the new IARU bandplan includes proposals to legitimise the data usage above 3.6 MHz. We need to emphasise that in keeping with amateur radio practice over the last 100 years, automatic data stations (ACDS in the IARU Proposal) should have to use an access protocol that is non-promiscuous, non pre-emptive and non predatory. This means the use of a 'Listen before talk' protocol, and where the band segment is shared with other modes, should include checking with an appropriate bandwidth e.g. 3kHz.

c) Our members question the legitimacy of operating any automatic and unattended data stations on the amateur bands due to the unwarranted and mostly unattributable interference that they cause. Furthermore, we question the argument put forward by Winlink operators that they are providing a safety service for sea going vessels when this service is adequately satisfied by commercial companies operating on non-amateur marine HF frequencies.

We would welcome and support the addressing of this increasing problem by the RSGB. In the case of the Winmore interference that our members are experiencing, research shows that the signals probably have an overseas origin. In particular, we would be keen to find out who the Sysop of the 3615 Winlink station is in order that we can complain to BNetzA.

(2) Band plans and frequency availability

We make good use of the 60m allocation and see that allocation in part as the result of the Forum's pressure.

There are other allocations that would be of great value to our members, for instance an extension to the upper end of 80m. Such an extension would relieve the severe congestion that occurs on the band.

Although outside the remit of the Forum, it would also be useful to see 60m and 4m allocations in all near mainland European countries.

(3) The recent Ofcom rules on emissions have caused a significant stir amongst members, some questioning whether they are warranted, particularly at low HF frequencies. Others are still seeking clarity on how the rules apply to their context. Still others wonder how effectively it will be policed.

Finally, we would like to thank the RSGB and the Spectrum Forum group in particular for their continued support for and defence of our hobby.

Tony Barron G3YYH

Chairman, VMARS