



UK Six Metre Group Spectrum Forum Report 2022

The Band

More great multi-hop Es contacts happened over summer 2022, but the other remarkable development is that F2 propagation is in full swing at the lower latitudes. Most of the time it isn't yet reaching up to the UK, but occasionally we have had F2 plus sporadic-E extensions to this autumn, giving us quite a few openings to Africa and to South America and reaching as far north as Northern Ireland and Scotland. In the solar minimum years, the summer Es season would normally be hopping but then everything went very quiet. Autumn might then be a time to stop watching six metres, but for the next few years, there will be something interesting happening pretty much every month.

These are exciting times for everyone interested in six metres. We can only hope that Cycle 25 will continue its rapid rise rather than fizzling out, as happened with Cycle 24!

The Group

Founded in 1982, UKSMG is the leading dedicated group for six metre operators world-wide. The group takes a pro-active role in fostering the global six-metre community by promoting activity on the band and working to enhance the enjoyment of operators by publishing its quarterly journal Six News, providing a comprehensive website including the UKSMG DX Desktop, sponsoring beacons, and supporting activity from remote and rare locations.

UKSMG is healthy and funds are strong. The Group is continuing to prioritise sponsorship expenditure, providing financial and other assistance this year to current and potential six-metre operators in 9J, 8R, and 3B9. Our previous donations have resulted this year in new stations coming on the band including EL2BG and AP2AJM, giving a new country to some. We're also working to get the 50 MHz beacon on ZD8 back on the air and we've made our regular donation to the ON4KST chat website, which is so useful for the six-metre community.

The Group also organises three contests each year. The advent of FT8 has led to a continuing increase in activity and enthusiasm for the band, but we also want to promote non-digital activity. For that reason, our Summer Contest, held every year on the first full weekend in June, is and will remain 'legacy mode' only. In addition, we now split our popular Winter and Summer Marathon events into separate 'digital' and 'legacy' sections. Both sections of the Marathons attracted a good number of entries this year from all over the world, in both 'legacy' and 'digital' sections.

Our quarterly magazine 'Six News' looks even better nowadays, being in full colour throughout, but frankly it's getting hard to fill it every quarter. Most people get their six-metre news from the internet these days, with real time information coming via pskreporter, ON4KST and other sites. And most people use commercial equipment and antennas now too, a very different situation from when we first got access to the band in the 80's and therefore there are fewer construction articles. Possibly as a result of this difficulty with our flagship 'product', it is now clear that UKSMG membership numbers are in a slow decline; the trend is very slow, but it's definitely there. That's something we need to watch - in common with other niche groups, I suspect.



Awards

Our principal annual award, the Jersey Trophy, is awarded to an amateur who, in the opinion of the committee, has made the best recent and significant contribution to the Six Metre community. This year, the committee decided to award the Jersey Trophy to David Pommerenke, 7O/DL7ZM. Anyone familiar with David will be constantly amazed by his one-man expeditions to the most difficult places. This year, he put on what is believed to be the first 50 MHz operation from Yemeni territory, from Socotra Island. Yemen is a difficult place to get to and to get permission to operate from, and that's why David didn't announce his operation in advance. The effect of this was that, when he appeared on the band, there was a lot of scepticism amongst the six-metre community about whether it was genuine, and if it was genuine whether it was legal, and if it was legal whether it would be accepted for DXCC! The answer to all those questions turned out to be yes, and David gave quite a few people a unique new country on the Magic Band. An achievement worthy of recognition.

Regulatory priorities

It's a long-held desire among the 50MHz community is to have additional allocations in the low VHF region, specifically at 40MHz and 60MHz, for experimentation and the study of radio propagation. Appreciating RSGB's guidance that OFCOM will not currently countenance an expansion of amateur access in this part of the spectrum, we continue to have it on our 'wishlist' because that's what our members want. This year, without UKSMG involvement, a small number of UK amateurs have taken out OFCOM I&T licences for 40 MHz and they have had some success on the band. We realise that this hasn't always been helpful to RSGB interactions with OFCOM, but one can understand it because it seemed to be the only route open to them.

More important this year, though, has been the successful replication of the old GB3RAL multi-band beacon stack at GB3MCB in Cornwall, driven by the energy of UKSMG member Peter, G8BCG. 28 MHz, 40 MHz and 60 MHz beacons have been added to the existing array of beacons and repeaters on the site. Unfortunately, at this stage the 40/60 MHz extension has again had to be on the basis of an I&T licence, but hopefully this can be grandfathered at a later date. 24-hour operation from GB3MCB is very valuable from the point of view of propagation research, and should be fostered. Thanks to Murray for his help with this proposal.

Much more concerningly, the imminent WRC proposal to plan a new secondary allocation to the Earth exploration-satellite service (active) in the 40-50 MHz band could represent a real threat to amateur DX operation on 50 MHz. While the principle, and the value, of the proposed research is not in question, the current approach seems to be to recommend very lax standards for the protection of adjacent services and any kind of spill-over could have serious consequences for our weak-signal work, including EME. We will support any and all RSGB efforts in this area and we will also try to broaden understanding of the threat among the wider global 50 MHz community.

Chris Deacon, G4IFX (Chairman)

2 November 2022