

Email response received 5 August 2005 from Mr R S Atherton:

Consultation on a proposal to reform amateur radio licensing

Response to consultation questions.

Q1: Do you agree with the proposal to introduce a lighter, electronic licensing process?

I do not agree with the proposal. Amateur radio is an activity with many facets, each one of which requires a degree of scientific rigour from the aspiring amateur, who is ready to make this commitment in order to gain a qualification which represents a personal achievement and provides a gateway to what may well be a lifelong interest. This structured approach is combined with a logical, disciplined set of rules which are essential to good operating procedures, (including the knowledge that the station is operating within its chosen parameters without interference to other users) whether it be to communicate technical or social information, to conduct experiments or to assist in emergency communications with the public services. In my view these attitudes must be fostered and supported by the retention of rigid licensing procedures; failure to imbue the amateur radio enthusiast with the necessary gravitas would pander to the low quality, ill-informed and sometimes illegal activities to be found on the Citizens' Band frequencies. The esteem and integrity of the licensing process should rank in importance alongside aeronautical and marine licensing.

Q2: Do you agree with the proposal to issue licences which remain valid for the life of the licensee?

I do not agree with licences for life. Whilst I understand the reduction in cost which would accrue from a one-off issue of a licence after due qualification at the appropriate level of attainment, I would be concerned by the ability to maintain an accurate database of qualified amateurs over time. Just because the need to collect revenue might possibly have disappeared post de-regulation, this does not mean that the need to know where amateurs live and operate is not necessary. This would give reign to abuse of all kinds, causing 'piracy' on the bands and misuse outside of the ITU agreed band plans. Other users would almost certainly suffer and the reputation of the amateur community would suffer greatly. Using the current parallel with extremists being traced by their mobile 'phone details; the lack of knowledge of amateurs' whereabouts over time would be lost, should it ever be necessary to have to trace them.

Q3: Do you agree with the proposal to issue electronic amateur radio licences free of charge?

There is a feeling among many of my acquaintances that amateurs do not want 'something for nothing' – having worked to achieve their licence they wish to be able to retain some control over its terms and provisions. By accepting a free issue, no input would need to be considered by the issuing body in any future changes in terms and conditions. I subscribe to this view and therefore do not agree with the proposal.

Q4: Do you agree with the proposal to apply an administrative charge when processing postal applications for amateur radio licences?

Yes.

Q5: Do you agree that WT Act licence exemption for radio amateurs is not currently practical?

Yes.

Q6: What are your views regarding the possibility of WT Act licence exemption in the longer term?

It is extremely important that amateur radio licensing is retained. The diminution of skill levels has already reached a stage where the standard of operating has started to suffer, as can be discerned by any practised listener to the amateur bands. For amateur radio to retain its integrity in the wider world of communications its proponents must be educated to a degree whereby their operating skills at least match those in marine, aeronautical and service communications, and this must be measured and monitored into the future.

Q7: Is maintaining the existing licensing regime but with an extended renewal period your preferred option?

Yes, the present scheme should be retained but the renewal period may well be extended to 5 years. This would mean that the database could be maintained with reasonable currency and costs associated with issuing licences could be reduced.

Q8: Do you agree that the current licensing system is over-burdensome?

I do not think the present system is over-burdensome from the point of view of the recipient, who needs to be aware that a regulatory body is aware of his or her qualification to use the allotted spectrum.

Q9: Do you agree with the proposal to apply an administrative charge when processing applications for a Notice of Variation to an amateur radio licence?

Yes, this is acceptable. This will defray costs amongst those who are going to benefit without burdening the majority of amateurs who are not affected.

R.S.Atherton