

Thank you for the opportunity of responding to your consultation on the Spectrum Review. I respond to you as a radio amateur of over fifty years standing, as a (now retired) Director of AMSAT, the Amateur Radio Satellite Corporation, as a (now retired) tutor of over three hundred now qualified radio amateurs, and as a member of RAYNET, the Amateur Radio Emergency Network.

A number of points of issue concern me, these mainly relating to the possibility of the deregulation of our hobby and the potential consequences of doing so. Most changes proposed so far seem to have been exclusively based upon fiscal considerations rather than technical, social and public service aspect needs.

We have seen the denigrating impact of privatisation and self regulation in other fields, in education, health, social services, railways, industry, communications and the public supply industries. This has resulted in a loss to the needs of the public and benefit to the few. It is apparent that a similar attitude as this is now in vogue to the use of the radio spectrum, and that radio amateurs who make no apparent monetarist 'profit' may become the victims.

I would first wish to point out that virtually all the benefits now available by way of communications have evolved in the past by the work of radio amateurs. As well as developing antennas, transmitters and receivers, indeed much unique circuitry such as AVC, impedance matching, low noise stages, modes of transmission and reception, radio amateurs 'discovered' and then developed the benefits of HF, VHF and UHF propagation, tropospheric, auroral and Sporadic-E use, and more recently satellite communication.

Despite the restrictions earlier placed upon them, they have been instrumental in providing emergency communications when all other means have failed, e.g. initially the 1953 East Coast Flood Disaster, many earthquakes, fires and floods, ongoing until more recently the Twin Towers event. Even more recently they have provided the only possible means of communications in the many south-east Asia countries impacted by the recent tsunami. With many potential disasters now facing the world due to the effects of Global Warming, sea rise, pollution, international and social unrest, the continuing ability for radio amateurs to provide communications when all others fail is a prime essential.

These abilities of radio amateurs are made possible by their flexibility, by technical adaptation of equipment, their knowledge and understanding of propagation, antennas and site preference, their procedures and abilities under demanding conditions, and not least due to their ability to employ exclusive frequency bands free from intrusion for the purpose.

Although the technical qualifications and Morse Code abilities required in order to obtain an amateur radio licence have declined over the past fifteen years, and that commercial equipment is now mainly employed, most radio amateurs have the ability and enthusiasm to continue in this form. Whilst it is welcomed that a simpler and easier access to the hobby is now possible, due to the dropping of the Morse Code requirement and multi-choice answer examinations, progress can still be made toward a full licence by further study.

It is felt that an incentive licencing system such as employed in the USA and Russia is preferable, where novice access to part of the bands is easily achieved and a full advanced licence requires a far more profound knowledge. Yet even the modern system is held to be superior to that suggested where radio amateurs would no longer need to be licenced.

It is felt that such deregulation would result in a situation as is frequently evidenced on the CB bands today, where intrusion, jamming and foul language can be rife, often perpetrated by anonymous users of high power amplifiers and high gain antennas. Whilst your review states that you have concern that people must be protected and treated fairly, this could not possibly be the case were you to cease to manage the radio spectrum. The radio amateur seeks long distance contacts. Such would be made almost impossible if management of the allocated bands ceased.

In their contacts overseas, radio amateurs do much to maintain, indeed improve, relations with other nationalities, races, creeds, religions and colours. Free and uninhibited use of our bands would preclude this, and could even be the cause of much friction. Further, the need of self improvement and the development toward ideal communications would be negated.

Thus, I would implore you to recognise that amateur radio is indeed amateur, and cannot maintain its status easily if the commercial aspects and intents are chosen to be paramount. Deregulation and the cessation of management could seriously impair the value of this productive hobby.

To list that which would suffer: -

1. Public Service, free and voluntary.
2. The provision of cost free on-the-spot emergency communications.
3. Technical advancement, adaptability and expertise.
4. Continuing propagational research.
5. International relations.
6. Recruitment of meaningful qualified operators.

If the cost of licensing is a concern, then allow me to propose a measure that would alleviate the problem. I would propose that licences are maintained for all levels of amateur radio, but that they should be free for those under the age of fifteen and over the age of sixty-five. A fee proportional to the value of the licence and it's coverage of allocated bands, modes and frequencies should be considered. This should be very low, or even free of charge, for the novice or entry level, rising to a maximum fee for a full licence. Waivers or discounts should be considered for the unemployed, pensioners, those in full time education and those disabled.

I hope and trust that this consultation exercise is one in which the view of those likely to be impacted will be fully considered and acted upon, and not merely an appearance of the provision of consultation as prior experienced in other issues such as environmental concerns. I submit my thoughts and concerns to you in the hope of due consideration.

Pat Gowen, Amateur Radio G3IOR