

Mr R Hooper
Deputy Chairman
Ofcom
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PK/SC

30th March 2005

Dear Richard,

I write to thank you for seeing the RSGB team last Thursday afternoon. I believe that all on the RSGB side felt that the meeting was useful, and that we were given a fair hearing.

It was reassuring to hear from yourself and Vic Brashko that our main concern, the deregulation of the amateur radio and amateur satellite service was not being considered by Ofcom and that it is unlikely that Ofcom would consider such a move in the future. However, we find it hard to reconcile this statement with fact. If Ofcom is not planning to deregulate, can you please answer the following:

- Which of the regulations that control Amateur Radio are to be removed?
- How will you meet the legal requirement under the Communications Act and the European Directive to reduce the regulatory burden?

Tinkering with the renewal date of the licence does not change any regulatory requirements, (amateurs will still require a licence) – only deregulation can achieve any reduction in ‘red tape’. If deregulation is not being considered, we look forward to seeing the option being removed from the published consultation document as was suggested by yourself and Steve Roper.

Our concerns over Ofcom’s preferred option ‘A licence for life’ are real. Since September 2001 (9/11), the world has changed considerably. Everyone, from the government down to the man in the street is much more aware of the terrorist threat. There are of course many ways for terrorists to attack. Here in the UK it has already been recognised by both the military and the Northern Ireland Police Service that radio controlled explosive devices pose a real threat, and for this reason have now employed electronic counter measures against such moves. The amateur 2meter band is one such target for these measures.

The RSGB believes that should a ‘Licence for Life’ be introduced the authorities would lose sight of many radio amateurs and that the current self discipline and

control that the hobby enjoys will break down. It will be easier for untrained and unlicensed operators to work the amateur bands than it is now. In our opinion a 'Licence for life' equals a 'Licensed free for all'. Organisations such as the Ministry of Defence who as the 'primary' user share bands and frequency allocations with amateur radio will be exposed; close down procedures will be hampered because the UK list of radio amateurs will be flawed.

Vic Brashko emphasised that in general amateur radio provided very few problems with regards to interference and other related issues. We would argue that this is because of the training that entrants into the hobby have to undertake to obtain their amateur radio licence. Amateur radio is self policing and in this respect operating conduct and discipline on the amateur bands is of a very high standard. This, coupled with having an annual renewable licence cements together the amateur radio community.

Vic Brashko also made reference to Ofcom's Direction Finding capability. It is our understanding that the Interference and Policy Enforcement Unit is being cut back so much that despite having forty DF capable motor vehicles, there will not be sufficient numbers of field officers to man them. The cutbacks in this area are of concern to all spectrum users not just radio amateurs. For example, we understand that to cover the whole of East Anglia, Ofcom will shortly only have one field officer deployed on the ground. Hardly a deterrent in the combat against interference and it means that resources will have to be moved from other areas of the UK to assist in tracking down unwanted interference be it from radio amateurs or any other source. This will delay finding and closing down any interference source. In view of this we believe that Vic Brashko's argument, that it is not necessary to maintain an up to date list of amateur radio stations, or other spectrum users for that matter, to combat interference efficiently is flawed. Fixed site Direction Finding units are not the answer to an interference free radio spectrum; they are a useful tool to back up a flexible field force with good records to hand.

The Society strongly supports the need to maintain a trained core of licensed radio amateurs. We believe that this position is shared by other government departments and organisations. In other countries and in particular in the USA radio amateurs are seen as a 'national resource'. In 1999 President Bill Clinton spoke of Radio Amateurs in such terms after the Californian Forest Fires disaster and President Bush confirmed Radio Amateurs standing for their work in providing essential communications in New York and Washington following the attacks on the 11 September 2001. In the UK, thankfully, we do not get natural disasters on the scale seen around the world. Radio amateurs are not seen so openly supporting their local communities. However, radio amateurs do play a role in national and local life in supporting user services and other organisations and teams of British radio amateurs can usually be found at the forefront of disaster relief operations, as they were during the recent Tsunami in South East Asia. British radio hams were some of the first relief workers on the ground and many are still involved in providing communications as the recovery work continues.

These amateurs were contactable at short notice because people knew where they were and how to contact them. A 'Licence for life' or a licence for a period of over 10 years degrades the amateur radio database as, has been proven in the US and

Canada where such licence regimes exist. The '5 year' option, as discussed with you and your team is, we believe, the most effective way to reduce the administrative burden on both Ofcom and the individual amateur and is a viable solution to counter some of the problems that we have highlighted. It will be less damaging to the hobby as a whole.

The RSGB welcomes a 'truly' open consultation on the issue of licensing, but does not believe that giving amateurs the vote on Ofcom's preferred option with reference to other options that you have considered, is in the spirit of 'open consultation' and we would like to see all the options laid out with arguments for and against so that radio amateurs can make up their own minds as to which is the best option to adopt.

Further, we do sincerely hope that deregulation is indeed, not an issue that the amateur radio community in the UK should be worried about. The European Directive on which the 2003 Telecommunications Act is based clearly states, as I am sure you and your colleagues are aware, that the non-profit sector of spectrum users are exempt from deregulation and spectrum trading initiatives.

The RSGB continues to look forward to working with Ofcom to ensure the wellbeing of amateur radio and the status of radio amateurs in the United Kingdom.

Thank you again for seeing the RSGB team at such short notice.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Kirby, G0TWW
General Manager