

Amateur Radio Has Its Say! – The RSGB Sums Up The Licensing Consultation Inputs

The 18th August 2005 saw the end of one of the longest and most comprehensive consultative periods in the history of the Amateur Radio.

Ofcom's consultation on a proposal to reform amateur radio licensing engaged the amateur community not just with Ofcom's own consultation but also the targeted MORI consultation on the same subject, which Ofcom also commissioned.

From the outset of the consultation, as the national organisation representing all UK radio amateurs, the RSGB's intention has been to ensure the maximum numbers of radio amateurs had their say in the future licensing debate.

The RSGB undertook a programme of public meetings right across the UK, some 15 in all starting in Northern Ireland on the 8 June and ending in Swansea on 28 July. From Aberdeen to Camborne, Manchester to Bristol, Exeter to Peterborough and many more locations across the nation, radio amateurs have had their say and the RSGB teams have had a chance to hear first hand what radio amateurs want from their licence now and in the future. Along side of the public meetings the RSGB's Regional Teams also carried out over 70 club visits. Amateurs themselves, both members and non-members have written and e-mailed the Society with their view for the future. So it is fair to say we now have a clearer view and understanding of what the amateur radio community would like to see if Ofcom do carry out any changes to the current licensing regime.

Generally radio amateurs are comfortable with the concept of an 'electronic' licence. If such a licence was introduced they would wish to see adequate security measures built in to ensure that fraudulent applications could not be made and that the integrity of the licence is maintained.

The majority of radio amateurs we believe are not in favour of a 'lifetime' licence. There is much concern about the degradation of the amateur radio database and they believe that an out of date listing of radio amateurs would lead to an increase in call sign piracy and more interference on the bands.

The message was loud and clear a 'free licence' would not receive widespread support. Amateurs feel strongly that a free licence would devalue the amateur radio service and weaken the position of amateur radio in any future consultations. There is also a strong fear that a free licence would enable Ofcom or any future administration to withdraw amateur radio spectrum without consultation.

A large number of inputs queried why there needed to be any change at all. Most radio amateurs in the UK do not see the current licensing arrangements burdensome,

however if there was to be change, then a licence for a longer period of time was the preferred option. The most popular proposal was for a 'five year' licence.

Any proposals to make amateur radio WT licence exempt, now or anytime in the future received a big 'NO' from the amateur radio community. This view was also supported by a number of interested outside agencies. A large number of amateurs voiced their concern over the lack of understanding within Ofcom of amateur radio and the part it has played and continues to play in the development of radio communication and the role of amateur radio in the community and as a National asset.

Payment for NoVs and any licence changes would not raise any opposition because amateurs understand that the hobby should be financially self supporting just like any other hobby or leisure interest.

Summing up, the message that the RSGB received from the 'grass roots' of amateur radio was:

Radio amateurs in general would welcome a 'five year' licence, retaining the fee. A move to make the delivery of the licence an electronic process would also be welcomed. However, for those amateurs who wish to continue to receive a paper licence, this type of licence should continue to be available without any financial penalties being incurred. At no time should any attempt be made to make amateur radio WT licence exempt.

The RSGB would like to take this opportunity to thank Ofcom for their commitment to the consultation. It has given all radio amateurs the opportunity to have a say in their future. The RSGB is confident that Ofcom will take note of the majority voice before coming to any decision regarding the future processing of the licence.

We now all eagerly await the official announcement from Ofcom on the results of the consultation and any proposals for change that Ofcom may make.

RSGB

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