

IARU WRC-03 Final Report from Geneva

The 2003 World Radiocommunication Conference concluded its discussions of the issues on its agenda on Thursday afternoon, 3 July, after marathon Plenary sessions that tested the patience and stamina of the conferees. The previous day's deliberations did not end until 3:30 AM; Thursday's business began at 9:00 AM and finally concluded at 3:30 PM without a break, 3-1/2 hours behind the original conference schedule.

Now that the final reading of texts submitted to the Plenary is finished, the Final Acts are being duplicated in print and on CD-ROM for distribution on Friday, 4 July. Delegations that wish to do so will be submitting declarations and reservations. The signing ceremony will take place on Friday afternoon, 4 July. Thus the four-week conference draws to a close. Please refer to IARU releases dated 11, 26 and 23 June for reports on the previous weeks' activities related to Amateur Radio. They are available on the IARU Web site at <http://www.iaru.org/rel030611.html>, <http://www.iaru.org/rel030616.html>, and <http://www.iaru.org/rel030623.html> respectively.

The big news for radio amateurs is that there will be a **dramatic improvement in the 40-meter band!** After weeks of debate and efforts to resolve great differences between numerous proposals, including strong positions for no change, the conference agreed to shift broadcasting stations in Regions 1 and 3 out of the 7100-7200 kHz band and to reallocate the band to the amateur service in those two regions. The allocation in Region 2 of 7000-7300 kHz remains exclusively amateur. The broadcasting band in Regions 1 and 3 will become 7200-7450 kHz and in Region 2, 7300-7400 kHz. The change will take effect on 29 March 2009, less than six years from now - a relatively short time by ITU standards.

In Regions 1 and 3 the 7100-7200 kHz band will become exclusively amateur on that date. A footnote containing the names of countries that are mainly in Region 3 and the Arab States makes the band also available to the fixed and mobile services in those countries on a primary basis.

It was not easy to achieve such a positive outcome on this issue. As late as Thursday evening, 26 June, it had not been possible for the delegates to reach agreement on a broad outline for 7-MHz realignment. While those favoring change had been able to merge their differing proposals to some extent, there were still three schools of thought: 200 kHz for amateurs in Regions 1 and 3 (to align with the amateur allocation in Region 2), 100 kHz (partial alignment), and no change. In the meetings addressing the issue, those advocating 200 kHz were the most numerous and active. Still, it was apparent that the no-change advocates were also numerous. The no-change administrations and those that wanted to do something for the amateur service, but could not support the full 200 kHz we were seeking, tended to be inflexible. Some of the latter envisioned very long transition periods - in one case, 30 years!

The time-honored way in which decisions are made in the ITU is by reaching consensus in a way that makes everyone equally unhappy. Since the discussions in drafting groups, Sub-Working Group 4C1, and Working Group 4C had not made progress toward a consensus, and since the same was true of several other issues, on Thursday evening the conference chairman, Dr. Veena Rawat of Canada, brought together a number of delegates and regional coordinators to solve these problems. In the case of 7 MHz, the outcome was a proposed compromise that was brought to Committee 4 the following day, Friday, 27 June. The key elements of the compromise were described in last week's report. It provided 100 kHz for amateurs in one stage, with the possibility of trying for the additional 100 kHz at the next

conference. Still, many differences remained as to the timetable, how to mitigate the impact on other services, how much (if any) broadcasting should be expanded in Region 2, and so on.

Unfortunately, the workload of Committee 4 was such that the proposed compromise could not be discussed in the committee. A last-ditch effort to bridge the differences was undertaken on Monday evening, 30 June, in an Ad Hoc Group of the Plenary chaired by Alan Ashman of Australia. The initial results were not very encouraging; there was some convergence, but a few administrations refused to go along. It was not until the following day that real progress was made toward a comprehensive agreement on a formula that all of the advocates of change, along with some of those favoring no change, could live with. This was accomplished by almost constant communication among the regional and national coordinators who were handling the issue, and as a result of their willingness to give ground in order to package an agreement.

The agreement was presented to the Plenary at 11:00 PM Tuesday. The discussion consumed an hour and ten minutes of precious meeting time and included expressions of great unhappiness from the Arab Group and Iran, who continued to advocate no change. Still, the conference chairman was able to guide the Plenary to a very tentative and fragile agreement, subject to the completion of a couple of details.

The coordinators worked hard on Wednesday morning to complete the details and a document was available to the delegates that evening. Finally, on Thursday morning it was presented to the Plenary and, with a few on-line edits and the addition of some country names to footnotes, it was approved. Even the Arab Group and Iran accepted the final package, which included footnotes giving them some flexibility with regard to their fixed services.

And so, at 10:27 AM Geneva time Thursday, 3 July, the compromise package was given final approval.

Perhaps the magnitude of what has been accomplished for radio amateurs can best be explained this way: Never before in the history of radiocommunication has an HF broadcasting band been shifted to accommodate the needs of another service. Of course, this is not simply an accomplishment of the IARU. It would not have been possible without the cooperation of a number of broadcasters and many, many others. The people who worked with us who are not radio amateurs -- including some who were strongly opposed at the start but who acceded to the compromise -- deserve much of the credit. For example, Australia came to the conference with a strong "no change" position and had to shift its position dramatically in order to embrace the compromise. The Russian Federation announced it was for no change at the beginning of the conference, but in the end fully accepted the formula for change. The Republic of Korea and Japan supported 100 kHz for amateurs in Regions 1 and 3, but on a shared basis with fixed and mobile and with an implementation date of 2015; accepting a much earlier date and with just a footnote for fixed and mobile represented major concessions for them.

Of course, it was our friends who had to compromise the most and it wasn't easy for them to do so, either. CITEL had opposed broadcasting expansion in Region 2 but in the end accepted 50 kHz more for broadcasting to reach agreement with CEPT. The proposal of the United States, which contained elements of the CEPT proposal, was a useful bridge that helped bring CITEL and CEPT together. One part of the U.S. proposal that the IARU did not particularly care for, sharing of 7200-7300 kHz between amateur, fixed, and mobile in Region 2, became moot when that band segment was not realigned.

Attached is what is believed to be an accurate, but unofficial, Table (with all footnotes that were changed or added) as adopted. The reason it is unofficial is because there were some edits of the footnotes made during the course of presentation of the document and are not yet reflected in the official conference documentation.

This result falls short of our goal of a 300-kHz worldwide, exclusive band for amateurs at 7 MHz. We knew that it would. ITU decisions are made by consensus. Building consensus requires give and take. The conference could easily have concluded that the cost to other services of even a partial realignment outweighed the benefits to amateurs. Yet when the dust settled, we had gained a significant improvement in the 7-MHz amateur allocation - and on a reasonable schedule. The incompatibility between amateur and broadcasting use of the 7-MHz band will be cut in half; the spectrum available to amateurs in Regions 1 and 3 will double; and the useful spectrum for Region 2 amateurs at night will double. Amateurs in the three regions will be able to harmonize their operating patterns to a greater extent than has been possible in the past, leading to greater efficiency in our use of the band.

Several members of the IARU team have been working on the 7-MHz issue since the 1970s. Twice, in 1979 and 1992, we were unable to get a Conference result that improved the lot of the radio amateur. Given how precious spectrum access has become, even a partial solution is a major achievement for Amateur Radio and the IARU.

While it would be impossible to name everyone who helped, we would be remiss if we did not credit the extraordinary efforts of the CEPT Coordinator for Agenda Item 1.23, Jan Verduijn of the Radiocommunications Agency, The Netherlands. Jan was totally committed to finding a solution, not only for radio amateurs but for broadcasters and the fixed and mobile services as well. The CITEL Coordinator for the agenda item, Barry Isherwood of Industry Canada, was equally dedicated and just as effective in protecting the interests of his "constituents." Neither Jan nor Barry is a radio amateur, but they certainly deserve all the honorary status we can offer.

Agenda item 1.7.1 (Article 25): A package of revisions to the international Radio Regulations that are specific to the amateur and amateur-satellite services has been adopted. The revised Article 25 takes effect on Saturday, 5 July 2003. The complete Article 25 will be in a following email, along with an explanation authored by Michael Owen, VK3KI, who has guided the work of the IARU on this issue since 1996.

Agenda item 1.7.2 (Article 19): The previously reported changes sailed through Plenary on second reading and are approved.

Agenda item 1.38 (70 cm SARs): The 432-438 MHz secondary allocation for satellite-borne synthetic aperture radars was approved in Plenary.

Agenda item 1.1 (footnotes): "Footnote fever" seized some administrations in the closing hours of the conference as they clamored to get their country names into footnotes that had previously cleared the committees in which the footnotes had been considered. This is a recurring problem at WRCs; not only do such footnotes dilute the consistency of the Table of Frequency Allocations, they also cause the conference to bog down in minutiae at precisely the point at which it should be completing its work. Fortunately, the amateur service escaped serious damage from "footnote fever" at this conference, although it may be a problem in the future if countries want to climb into the footnote for fixed and mobile at 7100-7200 kHz.

Future agenda items: There are two items of great significance to the amateur service on the WRC-07 agenda that is being recommended by the Conference to the ITU Council.

The first calls for a review of “the allocations to all services in the HF bands between 4 MHz and 10 MHz” with a number of exclusions, including the band 7000-7200 kHz that was just reviewed at WRC-03. The spectrum requirements for HF broadcasting are among the factors to be taken into account. This could present a threat to 7200-7300 kHz, or it could provide an opportunity for further realignment; for both reasons it merits our close attention.

Unfortunately, the agenda item does not include a clear “pointer” toward the desirability of trying to complete the realignment.

The second is “to consider a secondary allocation to the amateur service in the frequency band 135.7-137.8 kHz.” Note that this is kHz, not MHz or GHz. Such a low-frequency allocation is in the common table of frequency allocations used by European administrations, and Canada has been pressing for such an allocation in the international Table.

It’s Over! Well, the work is over; the ceremonial closing of the Conference will occur on Friday afternoon, 4 July. Then we will all be heading home, except for those who are staying for a two-day meeting to plan the preparatory work for WRC-07. Yes, it’s all beginning again....

73,

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For the IARU WRC-03 Team

3 July 2003