

ISSUES REGARDING THE 70MHz BAND WITHIN IARU REGION-1

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BACKGROUND

As of March 2008 the 70MHz amateur radio band (70.000-70.500MHz in the UK) is allocated to 23 DXCC countries within IARU Region-1.

These countries include Crete (SV9), Croatia (9A), Cyprus (5B), Denmark (OZ), Dodecanese (SV5), Estonia (ES), Faroe Islands (OY), Gibraltar (ZB), Greece (SV), Greenland (OX), Ireland (EI), Luxembourg (LX), Monaco (3A), Slovenia (S5), South Africa (ZS), UK Sovereign Base areas on Cyprus (ZC4), England (G), Isle of Man (GD), Northern Ireland (GI), Jersey (GJ), Scotland (GM), Guernsey (GU) and Wales (GW).

In addition several other countries have offered temporary permits to facilitate experimentation that include Azores (CU), Czech Republic (OK), Germany (DI2AL & DI2PM on 69.995MHz), Hungary (HA), Italy (I), Madeira Is (CT3), Norway (LC0VHF), Portugal (CT), Sardinia (IS) and SMOM (1A).

A Regional allocation is sought throughout IARU Region-1 but there is a major problem because no mention of any 70MHz amateur radio service allocations is made in the CEPT European Common Allocation (ECA) table. It is this ECA table that national administrations look at when proposals are made for access to the 70MHz spectrum.

Although a number of administrations are sympathetic to amateur experimentation in this part of the spectrum they are reluctant to release frequencies on a temporary or permanent basis in the absence of a relevant entry in Article 5 of the Radio Regulations or in the ECA table.

DECEMBER 2007: IRISH 70MHz PROPOSAL to CEPT FMWG

In late December 2007 the Irish Regulator COMGEN presented a proposal to the CEPT Frequency Management Working Group (FMWG) entitled "Possible Revision of ECA concerning the band 69.9 - 70.5 MHz"

It was based on the Detailed Spectrum Investigation (DSI) Phase II that was presented to CEPT administrations over 10-years ago in March 1995.

In the report a specific recommendation was made as follows:

"The DSI Management Team recommend in the context of the European Table of Allocations and in accordance with the foregoing, that a minimum of 100 kHz in the band 70-70.45 MHz be allocated to the amateur service on a secondary basis according to national considerations, if feasible, centred on 70.2 MHz."

The COMGEN paper contained a proposal requesting that a Footnote be written into the ECA which read e.g. EU36 In [Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Greece,] Ireland, [Luxembourg, Monaco, Slovenia and the United Kingdom] all or parts of the band 69.90 – 70.50 MHz is additionally allocated to the amateur service on a secondary basis.

JANUARY 2008: INVOLVEMENT BY IARU

January 26: The IARU Region-1 Secretary sent an e-mail to the Presidents of National Amateur Radio Societies in Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Luxembourg, Monaco, Portugal, Slovenia, United Kingdom and also to a number of VHF Managers within Region-1.

This is the text of that message sent by the IARU Region-1 Secretary: "I am writing to the Presidents of Member Societies in IARU Region 1 who already have some sort of access to the 70MHz band, to ask for your help.

The regulator for amateur radio licensing in the Republic of Ireland has agreed with the Irish Amateur Radio Society (IRTS) that the Irish administration will submit a paper to the WGFM meeting in mid-February proposing that CEPT (ECC) adds an allocation to the amateur radio service in the 70MHz band to the ECA (European Common Allocation Table).

As your country already has the benefit of a 70 MHz allocation, it would be helpful in due course if your administration could support this proposal. It is likely that support will be most helpful at the following meeting (May) of WGFM, when the matter will probably be discussed in more detail. So please consider alerting your administration to the Irish initiative, and ask for their support. If the Irish proposal is accepted, it could open the door to more 70MHz allocations to the Amateur Service around Europe”.

January 30:

Briefing Notes written by Dave Court EI3IO were sent by myself (G4ASR) to the Chairman of the VHF Committee C5 (OE1MCU). The notes below were forwarded to the IARU Region-1 Delegate (LZ1US) attending the CEPT FMWG meeting in February.

BRIEFING NOTES SUPPLIED TO THE IARU REGION-1 CONFERENCE DELEGATE

(These notes were inserted in appropriate places within a copy of the COMREG proposal.)

The IARU welcomes this proposal however it does not recognise the difficulties across Europe in allocating a common 500 kHz to the amateur service. If this cannot be achieved the IARU should try and engineer a compromise position.

It is useful to recall that in 1997 CEPT's European Radiocommunications Committee came to the following conclusion with respect to this recommendation:

“The ERC accepts this recommendation in principle pending a possible harmonised secondary allocation to the amateur service for F2-layer ionospheric propagation experiments.”

Several administrations have authorized their amateurs to use the 70 MHz band. These include Croatia, Denmark, Estonia (from 1 January 2008), Greece, Luxembourg, Monaco and Slovenia.

However there is a another group of countries including Germany, Hungary, Italy and Portugal which have or are in the process of agreeing very short term access to the band for experiments but are reluctant to agree permanent access until the situation is more certain at the international level.

With the exception of Portugal (70.60 – 70.65 MHz) all amateur activities to date have occurred in the band 69.9 – 70.5 MHz. Importantly, when developing a proposal for general access to this band it is necessary to recognise that for many countries only small segments within the overall band can be authorised. Further, Germany and other countries may not be in a position to authorise spectrum above 70 MHz but may be able to agree a sub-band if the overall lower band limit can be extended below 70 MHz.

The IARU position should be to support this proposal as long as there is an overall positive reaction in WGFM to the proposal. It is after all recognising the de-facto situation and the views of both the DSI Management Team and the ERC. However because of the diverse nature of the 70 MHz sub-bands offered to the amateur service across Europe, the Irish proposal may not be supported and may run into problems.

If this happens the IARU should attempt a compromise proposal as follows:
Accept the Irish proposal for a secondary allocation in the body of the table but with a lower limit below 70 MHz e.g. 69.8 or 69.9 MHz.

However this could be supported by a footnote which provides information on the band limits in individual CEPT Member States
e.g. EU36 - In Ireland the band 70.125 – 70.450 MHz and in the United Kingdom the band 70.000 – 70.500 MHz is allocated to the amateur service on a secondary basis

OR

An alternative approach might be not to have an entry in the body of the table but to include a footnote to the ECA which reads e.g. EU36 - In [Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Monaco, Slovenia and the United Kingdom] all or parts of the band [69.90] – 70.50 MHz is additionally allocated to the amateur service on a secondary basis.

FEBRUARY 2008: MEETING of the CEPT FMWG

A total of 10 supporting Administrations were needed to automatically write a new allocation into the ECA table.

Unfortunately the proposal was supported by only 6 Administrations:

Czech Republic (OK), Estonia (ES), Hungary (HA), Portugal (CT), Switzerland (HB9) and the UK.

It will be obvious to all that some countries whose amateurs have permanent authorisation to use the 70MHz band did not support the Irish proposal for one reason or another. These included Croatia (9A), Denmark (OZ), Greece (SV), Luxembourg (LX) and Slovenia (S5).

This was despite strenuous efforts by the IRTS, the RSGB VHF Manager G4ASR and IARU to contact all member societies, in order that they would be in a position to discuss the Irish proposal with their national delegates prior to the CEPT meeting.

A total of 6 countries actively opposed the proposal, two of those opposing have already provided some access to the 70MHz band, either during one weekend from a specific location or on an assigned frequency just below the lower band limit proposed by Ireland. These countries included Belgium (ON), France (F), Germany (DL), Netherlands (PA), Norway (LA) and Russia (UA).

There is some good news though! As there was some limited support, Ireland can propose a 'note' to be included in the ECA which reports that a number of CEPT countries are now allocating this band on a national basis to the amateur service. It is understood that the Irish administration will shortly be submitting an appropriate note for inclusion in the ECA. It is therefore hoped that this will be sufficient for those amateur radio Societies that need additional help in obtaining a 70MHz allocation. Furthermore, the 'note' may also provide an opening for another proposal or request from the IARU to CEPT for a 70 MHz allocation at some point in the future, hopefully at that time, with considerably more support from countries that already have a 70MHz allocation.

More good news is that Switzerland supported the proposal so we might also see HB9, HB0 and 4U1ITU on the band before too long. So USKA, please approach your administration now!

LESSONS TO BE LEARNT!

Obviously some lessons need to be learnt for the future. And it doesn't necessarily mean the 70MHz band. It could be 500kHz or 5MHz or 3.4GHz or anywhere in the radio spectrum. We need to have good communication links amongst ourselves, making more use of the C5 mailing list. I'm not at all certain that key VHF Managers (I, LX, OZ, SV, S5, 9A etc) found out about this proposal in a timely way. Indeed they may only have found out by reading this newsletter! All members of IARU Region-1 Committee C5 need to establish good communications links with your national Society and your Society needs to establish regular communication or meetings with your national PTT administration so that effective and timely lobbying can be carried out.

I'm sure everyone would like to give recognition and appreciation to Samuel Ritchie of COMREG, the Irish regulator, for his excellent efforts in respect of amateur access to the 70 MHz band.

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