

INFORMATION PAPER

THE WORLD RADIOCOMMUNICATIONS CONFERENCE 2007 (WRC-2007)

The World Radiocommunication Conference is the principal entity that is responsible for the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Radio Regulations. Although the Radio Regulations are intended to govern radiocommunications at the international level, they are used by most administrations (including Australia) as the basis for domestic radio regulation. The WRC is a formal treaty-level conference at government-to-government level so follows highly structured and formalised working methods.

The WRC-07 started work on Monday 22 October and will complete its work on Friday 16 November.

The Conference works through an hierarchical structure with the top level being the Plenary Assembly – this is the highest level meeting of all participants. The next level down is that of Committees which each handle a group of related issues or conference management matters. The work of the conference is structured as a range of specific agenda items, each of which addresses a specific topic. Agenda items of interest to the amateur community are Agenda Item 1.13 and Agenda Item 1.15. There are other agenda items of peripheral interest as decisions made against these items may have minor consequential impacts on existing amateur service allocations. The agenda items of interest are being handled by Conference Committee 4 and its subsidiary groups.

The lower levels of the conference structure include working groups, sub-working groups and drafting groups with the exact arrangements depending on the detail of each agenda item and the extent of work needed to address each item. Because of the large number of agenda items that need to be considered, there are many working and sub-working groups and only a limited number of meeting rooms, so not all items are considered each day.

Agenda Item 1.13 consists primarily of a review of all frequency allocations between 4 and 10 MHz. This is something of a “carry-over” item from the previous WRC and is the agenda item that covers the possible allocation of spectrum around 5 MHz to the amateur service. A large number of administrations have made contributions (that is, submissions setting out their positions on each agenda item) to the conference and the working group dealing with agenda item 1.13 has only just (Tuesday 29th) finished the initial presentation and discussion of proposals dealing with this topic. The great majority of contributions are proposing “no change” to allocations across the 4-10 MHz band. This includes no additional spectrum for short-wave broadcasting services and no allocation to the amateur service at 5 MHz. The European countries have proposed amateur access by means of a footnote to the Table of Frequency Allocations in the Radio Regulations that would allow administrations to authorise amateur usage if they so chose, but without establishing any status for such usage. A small number of administrations have proposed a secondary allocation to the amateur service in the 5 MHz band. The chairman of the working group is seeking to establish possible compromise positions to allow the development of a position that is

acceptable to all participants. It is too early to try to guess the outcome with regard to a possible amateur 5 MHz band allocation.

Agenda Item 1.15 covers the establishment of an amateur LF allocation in the band 135.7-137.8 kHz on a secondary basis. The majority of contributions on this topic are supporting the proposed allocation and only one contribution (from the Group of Arab States) is opposed. Most of the supportive contributions are proposing a footnote to limit the maximum permitted transmitted power level to 1 watt eirp. Taking account of the achievable performance of practical amateur antennas at this frequency, achievement of this eirp would require a transmitter output power well in excess of the power levels permitted to advanced-class amateur licensees, so the proposed power limit has no practical adverse impact. The chairman of the working group is negotiating with the Group of Arab States to see what is required for them to remove their objection to an allocation, so progress on this item is stalled at present. Part of the problem appears to be that there is something of a split with the Arab States ranks, but the expectation is that the agenda item will be resolved in favour of an allocation to the amateur service.

Agenda Item 1.4 is dealing with the identification of bands to be used for future IMT (wideband public communications) services. This activity is looking at a broad range of bands across UHF and microwave frequencies and has the potential to result in consequential impacts on amateur UHF and microwave bands. The band 410-430 MHz has already been excluded from consideration and the band 430-450 MHz is not even on the table so there is unlikely to be any impact on the amateur 70cm band use. The band 2300-2400 MHz is a prime candidate to be “identified” for IMT services given the extensive current use for wireless LAN systems. The amateur service in Australia currently has access only to the 2300-2302 MHz band, so the impact of this activity is yet to be seen. At this stage of proceedings, there does not appear to be any threats to any of the other amateur microwave band allocations.

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30 October 2007