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What's all the fuss about the non-allocation of 5 MHz in Australia?

5 MHz – the truth

Dale Hughes VK1DSH, WIA's ITU Conference and Study Group leader ('our man in Geneva')



A “news release” posted online mid-February by an online radio amateur splinter group, titled **The enemy within**, made some concerning accusations about why Australian radio amateurs are denied access to the global 5 MHz band (also known as 60 metres). Promoted via amateur radio social media sites, the unattributed news release opened with the claim that:

“The WIA made a deal with the Defense (sic) and the ACMA which included denying all Australian amateurs access to the 5 MHz band.”

As was intended, this and other claims in the document occasioned widespread comment from radio amateurs on social media.

Normally, I would not respond to such unsubstantiated, erroneous claims that misrepresent the situation regarding the 60 metre

band. However, in this case I think it is necessary to respond.

This article corrects the errors and makes clear the facts.

The issue is that of *agenda item 1.4 (AI 1.4)* of the 2015 World Radiocommunications Conference (WRC-15) where a possible allocation to the amateur service in the 5 MHz band was considered.

Note: the opinions and comments following are mine alone.

Before WRC-15

Going into WRC-15, Australia supported a 10 kHz secondary allocation to the Amateur

Service somewhere in the 5 MHz band. This positive position had been arrived at through many discussions in the Australian WRC preparatory process. During this, the ACMA, relevant government departments, and other spectrum stakeholders discuss each WRC agenda item and develop Australian positions and negotiating negotiation points for all the issues on the table.

Arriving at Australian views through the preparatory process is a long, complex, and messy job that inevitably requires compromise by the various stakeholders, especially when trying to introduce a new radiocommunication service to an already congested band. At the time, the 5 MHz band had many current land-mobile users, including the Royal Flying Doctor Service, police, ambulance services, and defence.

Even to achieve the possibility of domestic support for a 10 kHz amateur allocation, all parties made significant compromises. Rarely does anyone get exactly what they want in this situation. None-the-less,

ACRONYMS - WHAT THEY MEAN

ACMA	Australian Communications and Media Authority. www.acma.gov.au
eirp	equivalent isotropic radiated power. tinyurl.com/eirpW1
IARU	International Amateur Radio Union. www.iaru.org
ITU	International Telecommunications Union, www.itu.org
RR	Radio Regulations – international regulations treaty for radio spectrum use
SK	Silent Key
SWG	sub-working group
WRC	World Radio Conference. –15 is the year; –19 is 2019, etc.

the process works and it is **the only** way any spectrum stakeholder can participate and influence decisions before a WRC.

The WIA was an active participant during those discussions. The Institute also took an active part in the subsequent WRC-19 and WRC-23 events and **the WIA remains the only recognised organisation representing Australia's amateur service in these complex processes.**

At WRC-15

To start with the most important issue: the news release commentary states:

"The WIA made a deal with the Defense and the ACMA which included denying *all* Australian amateurs access to the 5 MHz band."

This is completely false. There was not and is not any such agreement. The release further claims:

"Mr Dale Hughes chaired the IARU Drafting Committee for WRC15 with Australian Defence and ACMA representatives where the decision was made to indefinitely block Australian Amateur access to the 5 MHz band."

Again, a falsehood. There **never** was any such committee decision.

As an ITU sector member, the International Amateur Radio Union (IARU) is an observer at WRC and cannot participate in negotiations because a WRC is a treaty level meeting – only sovereign states can participate in discussions.

It is on public record that I was the Chair of the WRC-15 sub-working group (SWG) that dealt with AI 1.4. I was nominated Chair of this group because I had chaired the ITU working group meetings where the necessary preliminary work on compatibility and sharing studies between the existing services in the band and possible amateur usage of 60m took place.

These studies were essential in establishing whether or not a secondary allocation was even

possible. It was a complex task, and my records indicate that *we had 114 meeting over a period of about three years* to complete the work. The end result was an ITU report which showed that a 60m amateur allocation was possible, but it would be complicated. So it proved to be.

It is worth noting that: a WRC sub-working group Chair must be neutral, not advocate any national position, consider all contributions equally, allowing discussion on matters that any member state brings up, and achieve a consensus result.

The job of the WRC SWG is to decide on the issue and draft appropriate regulatory text for Radio Regulations (RR). At WRC-15, the AI 1.4 SWG met 15 times; it was a challenging job to reach consensus because of the opposing views of participating states.

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There were proposals from participating member states for allocations of 175 kHz wide down to no allocation. In the end, there was fragile consensus for a 15 kHz allocation with power limitations (15 W eirp for our part of the world).

The draft regulatory text developed by each group to address every agenda item is reviewed by higher-level WRC meetings before becoming part of the revised Radio Regulations (RR). The draft text can be challenged at any stage prior to its second reading at a WRC Plenary (decision level) meeting. At all stages, consensus is vital. It is a nerve-racking process.

The splinter group's unattributed news release asks the question:

". . . why did the ACMA vote in favour of 5 MHz when they were so clearly opposed to it?"

The answer is: **there was no vote.**



Dale VKIDSH at work during WRC-23.

All WRC decisions are made by consensus, and **the ACMA supported an allocation of 10 kHz.**

However, the AI 1.4 SWG draft regulatory text proposed a secondary global amateur allocation of 15 kHz that did not align with the Australian position of 10 kHz. Australia could have challenged the draft text in the next higher-level meeting.

In my capacity as the WRC-15 AI 1.4 Chair, I requested, through the Australian Head of Delegation, that Australia not act on the matter and instead rely on existing domestic consultative and spectrum allocation processes to resolve any problems.

These Australian processes are fair and open. A challenge to the draft regulatory text at that late stage could lead to only two possible outcomes:

1. A global allocation of 10 kHz instead of 15 kHz; or
2. No allocation at all.

My experience is that opening text, based on a fragile consensus, *can result in complete failure of the agenda item*, leading to a loss of years of work and money wasted. I did not want that to happen, and I am grateful for the wisdom shown by the relevant Australian WRC-15

5 MHz channels licensed for amateur purposes

Frequency/mode	Call Sign	Notes, usage
5425 kHz, USB	VKE580	Held by ARNSW for broadcasts.
5102 kHz, USB	AFX404	Held by WIA; mainly for WICEN use.
5355 kHz, USB	AFX405	Held by WIA; mainly for WICEN use.

delegates and the ACMA in this matter. (Ask yourself: what would you have done in this situation?).

The result of all of this was an entry in the revised RR table of frequency allocations for a global secondary allocation of 15 kHz to the amateur service, with power limitations to prevent possible interference to the primary services in the band.

This was a significant though not perfect achievement for the participants, and it certainly lived up to the ITU maxim that ‘everyone was equally unhappy.’

Note: Because a WRC is a treaty level conference, membership of the Australian delegation means you represent Australia and not the organisation you represent in Australia. Also, a high level of discretion and confidentiality is demanded, meaning that “*what happens in the delegation, stays in the delegation.*” I was in the even more complicated position of having an official WRC-15 role that limited my opportunity for advocacy, as well as having a global perspective.

Post WRC-15

What happened after that? The news release states:

“There are almost nine years of demonstrable inaction by the WIA on 5 MHz.”

This is completely false. The WIA has been active using every legitimate avenue. Since WRC-15, the WIA has undertaken the following:

- The WIA submitted a detailed contribution to the 2016 review of the Australian Radio Frequency Spectrum Plan (ARSP) asking for the inclusion of the proposed 60m amateur band in the revised ARSP.
- In response to the 2018 and 2020 ACMA Five Year Spectrum Outlook (FYSO) consultations, the WIA made submissions asking that work start on considering the proposed 60m amateur allocation.
- In response to the 2020 public consultation, the WIA made a detailed submission covering

unsubstantiated, erroneous claims that misrepresent the situation

the need for a 60m amateur allocation.

All those submissions strongly advocated for a 60m amateur allocation.

Following the 2020 consultation, the ACMA’s decision states:

“In considering spectrum use, the ACMA considers the objects of the Radiocommunications Act 1992. This includes maximising the overall public benefit derived from the use of the radio spectrum and, of particular importance in this matter given Defence usage, making adequate provision for use by agencies involved in the defence or national security of Australia.

In balancing the existing uses of the 5351.5–5366.5 kHz band against the impacts of introducing use by the amateur service, the ACMA has decided not to support amateur use in the band.”

This was definitely not what we wanted to hear, but our requests were heard and **all** amateur contributions (from individuals, the WIA, clubs, etc) were considered fairly.

Furthermore, the ACMA considered various options that might have allowed some amateur access, but all were found wanting in some way. **It seems that until the Defence spectrum requirements change and other existing (incumbent) services, like the ambulance service, leave the band, there is little possibility of a 60m amateur allocation.**

Despite all this, the WIA monitors the ongoing situation and will act when any opportunity arises using appropriate and due processes, which brings me to the next topic.

How it’s done

Unlike many countries in the ITU, Australia has a clearly defined process of WRC preparation that allows any person or group (stakeholders) in the radio frequency spectrum to

engage if they wish. Stakeholders like the WIA have the opportunity to participate in the development of the Australian WRC negotiating factors for a WRC. Decisions made during the Australian WRC preparatory process are generally based on consensus after extensive and rational discussion.

This is the only way the interests of the Australian radio amateur community are advanced before each WRC. Being part of the process is the only way to participate in setting Australian objectives and policies going into each WRC. Membership of the WRC preparatory process is open to **any** interested and competent organisation or individual.

To date, the WIA is the only group that attends the meetings on behalf of Australian amateurs. Splinter groups are nowhere to be seen.

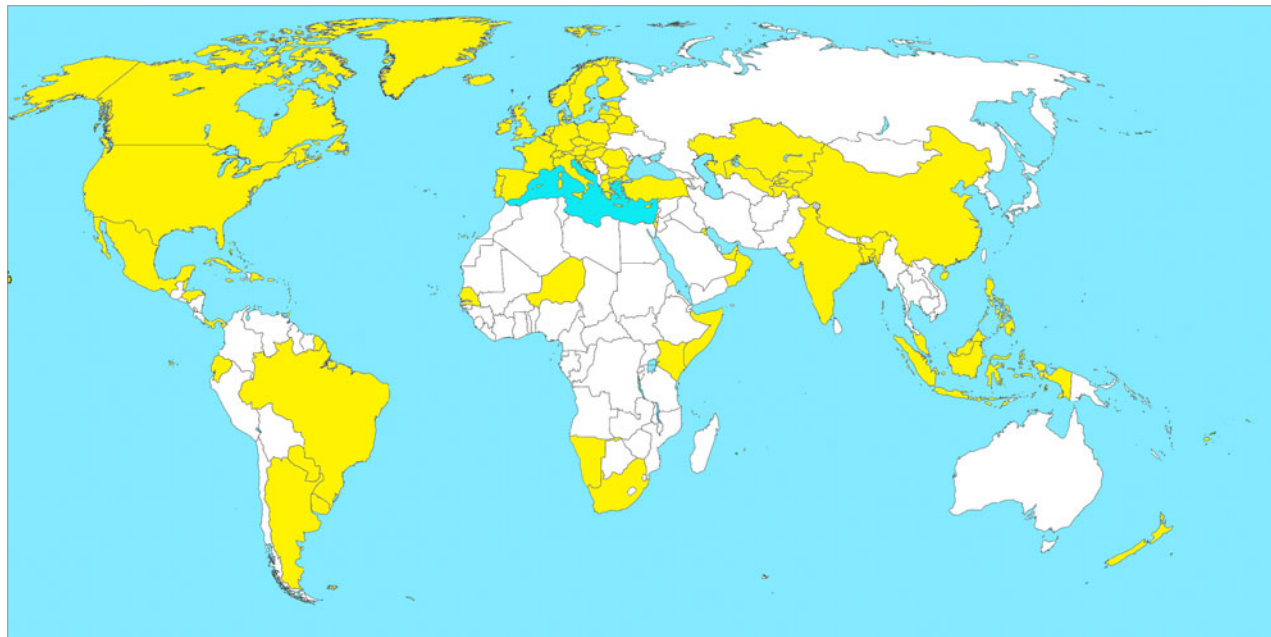
What we’ve achieved

The WIA has a long history of participation in the WRC preparatory process. Previous WIA members have volunteered their time: those I know about include Michael Owen VK3KI (SK), David Wardlaw VK3ADW, Keith Malcolm VK1KM (SK) and, since 2010 – myself, assisted by Peter Pokorny VK2EMR in recent years. It is worth noting that the participation of the WIA in the Australian lead-up to WRCs has helped achieve the following:

- Obtained the global 630m allocation at WRC-12
- Obtained the global 60m allocation at WRC-15
- Supported the allocation of a 6m (50 MHz) band in ITU region 1 at WRC-19
- Prevented the deletion of the 23cm amateur band at WRC-23.

If the WIA had not participated in the Australian WRC preparation process and attended each WRC, the results may well have been different. If you are not at the table or on the floor, then you have no say.

Indeed, if you are not part of the Australian WRC preparatory process, you cannot attend a WRC as a



Map of countries where regulatory authorities currently permit amateur access to the 5 MHz band. (Image - wikipedia)

member of the Australian delegation. Because the process is complicated parties don't always get everything they want, but we do pretty well, all things considered.

The price

The 'price' of participation is time, effort, and money. Certainly, before each WRC, at each one, and afterwards, the WIA has been very active in advocating on **all** amateur issues. But the WIA abides by the principle of following due process, which is at the core of what's been achieved.

Sadly, some people and groups would rather beat their chest, bang the table, write to ministers of government and MPs, or make false and misleading public statements. This approach, and similar means, only antagonise the people we have spent so much time and effort to build a positive and productive working relationship.

Yes, participation costs a lot of money, but it is an essential investment in the future of amateur radio. Every dollar spent is accounted for, receipts provided and detailed reports submitted to the WIA board covering the work undertaken. All

travel is economy class and there are limits on the amount of money that can be spent on accommodation. Attending a WRC and meetings in the lead-up are no junkets.

All work is undertaken on a voluntary basis, so there is no personal gain. In any case, while ever I hold an official position at ITU or a WRC, e.g. a group chair, there is a cost-splitting arrangement between the WIA and the IARU International Secretariate that covers a fraction of my expenses so the outlay by the WIA is reduced and thus relatively modest.

the WIA abides by the principle of following due process

Conclusion

I make the following comments as an active, committed, and long-term amateur radio operator.

The issue of the proposed 60m band has been part of my life since 2012, progressing through the ITU-R studies, the Australian and regional WRC preparatory processes, WRC-15 and the post WRC-15 processes, all attempting to get access to the 60m band for Australian amateurs.

So far, we have not achieved our aims, not from the lack of effort – no one ever gets everything they want all the time. **The WIA will keep trying** using appropriate and due process when opportunities arise. That time will come.

But it is sad to see the uniformed and completely erroneous views of people and groups who misinterpret or ignore the facts, do not understand the business, and seek to advance their own agendas rather than really advancing the cause of amateur radio in Australia. Authorities cannot be worn down by chest-beating rants fired off time after time by individuals and splinter groups with ill-considered agendas.

It seems they take no time to understand the complexities and nuances of all the spectrum issues and regulatory processes, neither do they participate in the available processes where change can be initiated. Nor do they seem willing to comprehend that the Amateur Service is just one part of an overall ecosystem of radiocommunication services that exist to provide productive facilities and services to the entire Australian population. After all, even amateurs may need the services of police and

ambulances, or of the defence forces at some future time.

It is always easier to be critical and not engage in the processes (yes, time-consuming and tedious they may be) that lead to positive change. Some individuals and groups take the easy path and do not want to do the necessary hard work required. It leads to what Shakespeare knew: *"Nothing will come of nothing."*

One final correction to the errant news release. The unnamed author

WIA . . submissions [over 2016-18-20] strongly advocated for . . 60m

states: *"Since WRC-15 over 250 countries have been granted access to 5 MHz."* That is a curious comment given that ITU membership is only 193 sovereign states and there are 195 recognised countries in the world, according to the United Nations. Who are the other countries?

No doubt my comments may generate more outrage. That is fine, it's a free country after all and anyone can express their views as they like. If people want to make me out as the villain, that is fine too. As Oscar Wilde said, *"There is only one thing in life worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about."*

So that is it, dear reader. To paraphrase a prominent and positive amateur heard often: *"I report, you decide"*.



Notice of Annual General Meeting

WIRELESS INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA

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Notice is hereby given to members that the Annual General Meeting of The Wireless Institute of Australia will be held on Saturday 3rd May 2025 at 3.00pm Australian Eastern Standard Time. The Annual General Meeting will be a hybrid event which can be attended either in person or by video conference. The Annual General Meeting will be held at Hotel Shamrock Cnr Pall Mall and Williamson Street Bendigo Victoria.

+ The Bendigo Amateur Radio and Electronics Club is holding a technology expo over the same weekend.

The Annual General Meeting may also be viewed on an internet streaming platform.

Notice of BUSINESS

1. To receive and consider the Annual Financial Statements, Directors Report and Independent Auditors report for the year ended 31 December 2024.
2. To confirm the results of the election of Directors
3. To transact any other business that may be brought before the meeting in accordance with the Institute's Constitution

By Order of the Board

Peter Clee VK8ZZ

Secretary of the Wireless Institute of Australia

28th March 2024

NOTES:

A member is entitled to appoint one proxy only who must be another Member of the Wireless Institute of Australia, and that proxy is entitled to vote on a show of hands or on a poll. The Instrument of Proxy is downloadable from the WIA web site (Information about the WIA), or upon written request to the National Office. Members must be financial to register to join the meeting either in person or by video conferencing facilities.

Members must register in order to participate either in person or online at the Annual General Meeting. Registrations to participate are now open and will close at midnight on 30th April 2025.

In order to watch the internet streaming of the event on the internet streaming platform it will not be necessary to register. Details and a link to the internet streaming of the meeting will be published on the WIA news web site on the morning of the AGM.

OPEN FORUM:

Immediately following the Annual General Meeting an Open Forum will be conducted. Additional detailed reports will be submitted on behalf of the Board, by the Institute's co-ordinators, committees, groups and those responsible for particular aspects of the Institutes activities. Any major issues affecting each area of responsibility will be identified.

Members are encouraged to discuss any matter arising from any of the reports, and to raise any other matter affecting Amateur Radio or the Institute. This format will avoid any restriction arising from the requirement to give notice of business to be formally raised at the AGM.

The open Forum will also be a hybrid event and members online for the AGM can participate in the Open Forum. The Open forum may also be streamed live.

