



International Amateur Radio Union Region 1

Europe, Middle East, Africa and Northern Asia

Founded 1950



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SUBJECT	A Foresight Project		
Society	IARU Region 1	Country:	Executive Committee
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1. Background

The environment in which the amateur enjoys radio communication has changed dramatically over the last 5 years. Technical, commercial and political changes taken against a background of an ageing amateur population present IARU R1 with major challenges if it is to play its part in leading amateur radio into the future.

So what have been some of the major changes, and what sort of challenges are they presenting?

Communication technology – Most of the major advances in communication services and technology are in fields like digital processing, system engineering, data analysis and in uses of the UHF and microwave spectrum. If this is set to continue, how relevant does that make our interests in HF? Can HF be regarded as a proper training ground for the sorts of techniques being used by industry and governments? How can we better exploit our spectrum? How can internet facilities be integrated? Why for example, have radio amateurs not developed a broadband network, when the existing packet network was in earlier times such an innovation? When negotiating our spectrum privileges what will be the key spectrum and what might be the tradeoffs? What can we do to secure and better exploit our microwave allocations?

Telecommunications Administration – Most national Administrations are looking for new ways to increase their effectiveness and reduce their costs.

This is already leading to

- the dropping of services such as spectrum monitoring,
- the selling off spectrum to the highest bidder,
- being unable to see the wider implications when new technologies are proposed such as UWB,
- fewer staff being employed,
- a falling off in the number of radio amateurs in key positions as the requirements for technical understanding falls.

This raises questions like, why save money and make amateur radio licence free, or deregulate it extensively? And why not have a licence for life and pass the responsibility for entry standards to the amateur population? And for us, is this going to lead to amateur radio becoming indistinguishable from CB? In such circumstances will there be any protection against invasive spectrum neighbours and who might be our best sharers?

Industry – The big growth areas such as cellular systems, wireless broadband etc have led to a major shortage of relevant skills in radio technology, video systems and real time software. Can amateur radio help industry meet its manpower and skills needs? Is the balance of interests in amateur radio matched to these needs? How can we formalise our relations with industry? Would industry ever help us to defend our spectrum and if so what might the tradeoffs be?

Education – Traditionally many radio amateurs became interested when they were young and at school. What should be our relationship with the educational systems? What new initiatives could be foreseen? How can we formalise radio communication in schools and universities?

Community radio services. Emergency communication is seen as one of the important aspects of amateur radio. But how can this be strengthened? Is the technology we are using as forward looking and is the systems engineering up to best practice? And in the area of local planning restrictions and concerns about the electromagnetic environment, how should we communicate our value to our communities?

The above are just a few of the areas where we have already seen major changes and the sort of questions they pose are very challenging indeed.

Amateur radio is an internationally regulated pastime with real value to the community, governments, international agencies and in the development of the skills and expectations of an individual.

Amateur radio is an assembly of many areas of specialist interest. This is as expected, since radio communications has been and will be a fertile ground for innovation.

At the national level it is quite clear that the serious issues facing us vary from country to country and relations with national administrations vary from friendly and encouraging, to hostile, and worst of all, 'couldn't care less'!

International regulations are continuously being negotiated as new communication services, technologies and opportunities emerge. Preparation is already starting for WRC-07.

For these reasons it is proposed that it is time that IARU R1 took a careful view of what a future amateur radio service might or could look like.

Although such views cannot predict the future, they do help individuals make decisions. Through involvement participants make better informed choices as they have a better view of the options.

2. A Foresight project

It is proposed that a project be undertaken to gain as good a view as possible of the future of amateur radio. From this a series of key messages will be identified. Rather than this project be highly centralised, it is recommended that each IARU R1 society be encouraged to ask themselves these questions and attempt to reach conclusions for their own national situation. The role of the IARU will be to pull these findings together and draw out the key messages. From this it should prove possible to develop policies and courses of action which can be used at each level, international, national and club.

3. Resources

Participation is the keyword in these types of project. Therefore the project teams should have representatives from the amateur community, national administrations, industry and international agencies. There will need to be an IARU Co-ordination Group which will have a similar composition and which will be responsible to the EC for the initial project briefing papers, material for any national workshops and for final reporting. It is likely that this group will need to meet about twice a year.

The composition of the Co-ordination Group will be:-

- Chair
- EC representative
- Industry representative (2?)
- National Telecommunications Administrator
- Leading Radio Amateurs (2?)

Ideally each member should be from a different country.

The whole project will take two years to complete. IARU R1 will need to make a budget to cover the expenses of the Co-ordination Group (two meetings a year plus communication costs) but it is suggested that the costs of the national workshops or meetings should be born locally. Wide spread publicity especially outside the amateur community will be needed.

This proposal has laid out the broad scope of the project. There will need to be some detailed planning before it can be initiated.

4. Recommendation

That the General Conference authorises the EC to set up a project along the above lines, to produce proposals for consideration and action.