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12 – 16 October 2015 Bali, Indonesia

**Document No. 15/XVI/017**

Agenda Item: 10.1.15

**Report from the Wireless Institute of Australia**

**1**. **Introduction**

We are pleased to be able to report to this Sixteenth Regional Conference that Amateur Radio in Australia continues to thrive.

Since our last meeting in Ho Chi Min, the WIA has made some changes to its President and Directors who follow on from the legacy of Michael Owen, VK3KI, SK who was a driving force to progress representation of AR in Australia.

This year one of the major challengers for AR has been a review by the Department of Communications on the future spectrum management arrangements in Australia. The WIA, as a stakeholder has been involved in discussions and workshops to ensure the continued access to spectrum and appropriate operating conditions.

We have prepared papers on Spectrum Reforms in Australia, which are included separately to this report.

Following the WRC12, Advanced Class licensees, gained the secondary MF allocation between 472 and 479kHz for the amateur service in Australia. This new band has proved popular with experimenters using low power digital communications technologies.

**2. WIA Membership**

Following the restructure of the WIA in 2010 we have noted a small but steady decline in membership of the WIA and show the detail in the following table. The slow decline is primarily the number of silent keys.

31 December 2011 4649

31 December 2012 4562

31 December 2013 4463

31 December 2014 4465

30 June 2015 4466

From records maintained by the Australian Communications & Media Authority, on 30th June 2015, we note a figure of 14,671 licensees, consisting of 9717 Advanced, 2038 Standard and 2418 Foundation Licences. There are 498 repeater and beacon licences. The major change has been the decline in Advanced licences where the Standard, Foundation licences remain steady.

We are seeing a flatten out of membership numbers due to a number of factors, including changed economic circumstances, competing recreational activities and an aging population and ask the question, are other member societies seeing a similar trend? We believe all national societies need to promote amateur radio to our communities more than ever, in the face of so many other new technologies and forums.

The WIA is about to introduce a program of actively contacting lapsed members by telephone.

**3. Clubs**

Our clubs are a vital interface for the radio amateurs and the general community. The WIA has around 150 affiliated clubs that are provided with some support services by the WIA. These services include, a Public Insurance scheme at no cost to the Club, promotional posters and handouts, a dedicated newsletter on the latest WIA activities at the National level, and a Club Grants Scheme to assist with payments for special projects that benefit AR .

The clubs provide meeting places for radio amateurs with guest speakers, technical forums, hamfests and practical skills training as well as field day activities, contesting etc.

Clubs are a vital part of the network and many are centres of learning for interested people to train and study for amateur radio exams.

**4. ITU**

The WIA has a representative at WRC15 where the amateur and amateur-satellite service are represented by working group 5A -1 which deals with World Radio Communications Conference agenda items that affect the amateur service as well as the ongoing revision and review of ITU reports and recommendations that are relevant to the amateur service.

WG5A-1 is chaired by Dale Hughes VK1DSH and the working group considered a number of WRC-15 agenda items as well as completing work on the ITU Amateur Service Handbook.   
  
The main item of discussion was agenda item 1.4 which is considering a possible secondary allocation to the amateur service around 5300 kHz and much time was spent discussing reports from various ITU members which covered sharing and compatibility studies used to assess whether a new secondary amateur allocation around 5300 kHz is possible or not.

Other issues discussed included WRC-15 agenda item 1.18 which deals with sharing the primary amateur service allocation between 77.5 and 78 GHz with short range vehicle radar systems. Given the very different nature of the radiolocation service and the amateur service it is thought that the services are compatible in this band and that sharing is possible.

Whilst the amount of preparatory work involved and the financial costs are a large imposition on all Amateur Societies, it is vital that as many societies as possible, become involved in their contribution to WRC in the future, to ensure the interests of Amateurs are continually tabled. Spectrum allocation is constantly under pressure from new and evolving technologies, and the Amateur allocations, even though many are secondary use, they are being viewed as possible sources of bandwidth. We need to protect and strengthen our bands, whilst considering future amateur needs too.

**5. WIA**

The WIA continues to administer aspects of administrative functions on behalf of the Australian Communications and Media Authority covering the provision of amateur examinations, issuing of certificates of proficiency and callsign recommendations. The number on new applicants for examinations, particularly for the “Foundation Licence” (the entry level licence) remains steady around 880 last year.

Our monthly magazine *Amateur Radio* received a facelift with an upgrade of paperstock, many more colour images and extra pages. The WIA has also implemented a digital version available on line in parallel with the existing paper version. The WIA is monitoring the download rate of the digital version.

The WIA has continued to represent the interests of amateurs to the appropriate authorities and maintains a very professional and workable relationship with these departments.

**6. Emergency**

We have submitted a separate paper on the topic of emergency communications and amateur involvement.

The WIA has continued to provide training in Emergency Communications through the WIA Register Training Organisation (RTO).

Training covers emcomm duties including health, mobility and availability.

**7. Foundation Licence**

As we have previously reported the introduction of the Foundation Licence has provided an entry level opportunity for interested people to join the ranks of the amateur fraternity.

The Foundation Licence was introduced in 2005, to encourage people to qualify for an amateur radio licence, even with restrictions applied because of a lower technical level of training. The Foundation licence has turned out to be of great encouragement to new amateurs as a means to improve their qualifications to a standard level and subsequently the Advanced licence with full privileges and rights to operate on all bands. In 2014, of the 401 assessments undertaken, 382 were successful in obtaining the Foundation Licence.

Many Clubs have provided teaching classes to provide the necessary training to assist new comers to qualify and pass the exams successfully.

The Clubs and the WIA benefit from these new amateurs joining their organizations.

**8. Maker Space Movement**

Australia is experiencing a revival in hobby electronics through the Maker Space movement. Markers are a predominantly on-line and unstructured community of people who are interested in electronics, robotics, mechanics, rocketry and other technological pursuits.

Maker fairs have been held at various locations in Australia including the “Powerhouse” technology museum in Sydney, and Maker groups often meet and maintain facilities in commercial premises where the business owner is also a Maker.

There are good synergies between Amateur Radio and Makers, and many Makers are already using homemade radio technologies to track and control their various projects. At this time most Makers use class-licensed equipment in the ISM bands, but some are starting to use Amateur Radio.

Makers probably have little interest in the traditional aspects of amateur radio such as DX and contesting etc. The WIA is looking at ways to make amateur radio more accessible and attractive to the Maker community but an impediment exists within our licensing system which prevents the use of digital technologies by a Foundation licensee.

**9. Greater use of Amateur Radio for Education**

Very recently, Maker groups have started to form in high schools, largely based around the Raspberry-Pi computer. In all cases the catalyst appears to be a teacher who has a personal interest in technology, particularly hobbyist electronics.

Again the WIA believes there is good synergy between Maker groups in schools and amateur radio, but again our licensing system prevents the use of digital technologies by a Foundation licensee, and it is unlikely a Maker will see the benefit of obtaining a higher grade licence.

The WIA is exploring ways amateur radio can be used to a greater extent in education, and has had early discussions with several groups, but much depends on regulatory reform.

In summary, we believe the WIA continues to best represent members of the amateur radio fraternity in Australia and provides a focal point for interested community.

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