

**HF Band Planning Committee
ARRL Board of Directors
July 2014**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In accordance with Minute 47 of the January 2014 Board of Directors Meeting, the HF Band Planning Committee was directed to solicit membership input regarding concerns pertaining to the increasing popularity of data modes, and to suggest ways to use our spectrum efficiently so that these data modes may compatibly coexist with each other. The Committee has completed its initial task of soliciting member input, performed an initial review of the input, and will now analyze the input in greater detail by band to assess necessary band plan changes.

Input Phase

The Committee sought a way to enable amateurs to provide an easy manner in which to submit their input. With the help of IT personnel at HQ, a web-based link was established where amateurs could submit their email comments online. A similar method was used by the VHF/UHF Band Planning Committee and it worked exceptionally well.

An article about the work of the HF Band Planning Committee and to solicit member input regarding concerns pertaining to the increasing popularity of data modes, was posted on March 2 on the ARRL website. An article was also included in The ARRL Letter. In addition, on that same day, an email was sent to the Board suggesting that the information be passed along to your constituents through Division communications (ODV:22483). Comments were due by March 31, although the email link was kept open for several weeks afterwards to allow for any late submissions.

As a result of the solicitation for input, over 400 comments were received, a substantial number. In hard copy, the stack of comments was over 3 inches tall. It was a significant task to review all of the comments, some of which were quite lengthy, and especially the comments regarding RM-11708.

In order to categorize the data, each Committee member was assigned a group of comments. A reporting form was created to capture the data in a uniform manner which will help facilitate analysis.

Initial Review of Comments Received

The Committee has completed its initial review and sorting of data, and will now analyze the comments in greater detail for band planning purposes. At this stage of the project, it is premature to make specific recommendations on individual band plans. However, several prevailing points are worth noting:

1. There is substantial support for segmentation of HF bands in some manner such as bandwidth (narrow band and wide band), various modes, automated transmissions, etc. Numerous comments recommended that wide band digital signals be placed in a separate area of the bands in order to provide separation from interference to CW/RTTY signals (narrow band). Some commenters suggested that wide band digital be placed in the upper portion of the existing phone bands, which would place wide band digital transmissions in similar occupied bandwidth as phone.

The Committee will evaluate these comments as the study continues in assessing individual band plans.

2. Many comments were raised about what some believe is growing interference from automated unattended transmissions, such as used for mailbox type operations. Numerous comments stated that there is a proliferation of unmanned email “robots” and such transmissions often cause interference to narrow band mode users. Some feel that unattended digital stations should be placed in a separate defined sub-band.

The Committee will continue to evaluate this issue.

3. Several suggestions were made to make no changes to or expand current digital communications on 30, 17, and 12 meters due to the limited frequency span and frequency usage on those bands.

4. There is a desire to reallocate the lower portion of 80 meters phone band (3600-3650 kHz). Several commenters observed that the FCC’s action in 2006 to reduce the 80 meter RTTY/data band from 250 kHz to 100 kHz and to limit access to 3600-3700 kHz only to Amateur Extra Class licensees has created significant and unnecessary difficulties for CW, RTTY, and data operators and has left 3600-3700 kHz underutilized. Suggestions for restoring some of the lost RTTY/data band ranged from 25 to 100 kHz with 50 kHz being the most frequently mentioned. The Committee will recommend as part of its strawman proposals for members’ consideration that the boundary between the 80 meter RTTY/data band and the 75 meter phone/image band be changed from 3600 kHz to 3650 kHz. Of course, this would require FCC rulemaking.

5. A few commenters noted that W1AW CW transmissions and PSK31 activities just above 3580 kHz are in conflict. We have looked for another CW frequency for W1AW lower in the band, but have been unable to identify one that is not so close to a net frequency or other established use as to create the potential for a new conflict. With an additional 50 kHz for RTTY/data operation it should be possible to resolve this issue.

6. Creating an overlap between RTTY/data and phone/image was mentioned by some, who said that at times it is beneficial during emergency operations to be able to shift quickly between voice and data modes. That would be a significant philosophical departure from the existing HF regulatory regime, which separates RTTY/data and phone/image everywhere except on 160 and 60 meters, so the committee does not recommend it at this time. The proponents of this approach have the opportunity to demonstrate its merits in the 160 and 60 meter bands, if they wish to do so.

The Next Phase – Update Band Plans

The next phase is to develop updated band plans. Now that a preliminary analysis and cataloging of comments received has been done, the Committee will evaluate individual bands starting with 20 meters. We anticipate that part of this process will involve further communications with members to seek comments on strawman proposals for the band plans.

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Roderick - K5UR

Members of the Committee:

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