

DX Advisory Committee Report

July 2015

to the

**American Radio Relay League
Board of Directors
And Programs and Services Committee**

Submitted by:

**Dr. Gary E. Jones, W5FI
Chairman, DX Advisory Committee**

To the Members of the PSC:

From: DXAC – Prepared and submitted by Gary E. Jones, W5FI, Chairman

Date: July 11, 2015

Subject: Mid-Year DXAC Report

As a new chair of the DXAC appointed following the January 2015 Board of Directors (BOD) meeting, I was surprised to read in Arne GJerning's January 2015 report to the Program and Services Committee (PSC) that the DXAC had submitted its advice and recommendations on two issues (remote operation and credit for DXCC, and possible recommendation of "entity criteria") prior to the PSC and BOD July meetings. What was surprising was the notation that either the PSC or BOD found the DXAC report unsatisfactory and apparently then took both issues under their own advisement from July 2014 to January, 2015. In his report, Arne noted that the DXAC had nothing to do with further discussions during that period and DXAC was not involved in further analysis of those issues. What was surprising is that as a member of the DXAC, I was never advised that these issues were then removed from DXAC purview and DXAC was no longer part of the discussion. I don't believe that this was general knowledge among the members of the DXAC. Consequently, the decision of the PSC and BOD to not follow the DXAC recommendations on the issue of the use of remote stations to make contacts for credit for DXCC came as a complete surprise to DXAC members, and the members of the DXCC community.

Since the PSC and BOD position on remote station use was published following the January 2015 BOD meeting, the DXAC has not received any further formal taskings from the PSC. There was a general request from the chair of the PSC for the DXAC to suggest issues that might be the topic of formal taskings in the future. My recollection is that the request for such suggestions came from Arne in the latter half of 2014. However, almost no issue was raised by the members of the DXAC. One issue that was mentioned by one member was the possibility of a DXpedition participant to receive credit for the entity, and one person raised the issue of the continued place of Scarborough Reef on the official DXCC entity list. However, there was virtually no support on the part of the DXAC as a whole to suggest either of these issues be formally considered. Although this is simply my opinion, I believe that most of members of the DXAC believe that the stability of the DXCC program in recent history, is in large part a result of the at-times tumultuous disagreements on fundamental DXCC issues (such a definition of entity criteria) that was resolved many years ago, and that stability of the program should not be jeopardized by our suggested "tinkerings".

Since there has been no formal tasking, I felt that the primary contribution that DXAC could make at this point in time was to summarize the feedback that we have received from our DXCC constituents about the BOD decision on the two issues that we were tasked with last year: 1.) possible revisions of the entity criteria or definitions, and 2.) the use of contacts made through remote stations (and the newest aspect of remotes: remote station networks which are available "for hire").

Therefore, I asked the DXAC committee to summarize and describe **the feedback that they have received from their constituents** on both issues. The task was not to repeat their own personal views and positions, but summarize and describe the 1.) formal written and phone or on-air feedback, 2.) DX Club discussions/opinions/correspondence, 3.) hamfest discussion that the members may have been part

of, and finally, 4.) informal discussions with constituents. Summaries were received from 12 of the 16 DXAC representatives. Generally, all 12 of those DXAC members responding provided feedback from their constituents on the issue of remote station use for DXCC credit, and a subset (about half of those) further responded with summaries of constituent's attitude toward potential revision of the entity criteria, and indirectly, the issue of the status of Kosovo.

Let me deal with the easiest issue first: None of the DXAC members reported hearing much constituent feedback on the issue of possibly changing or expanding the entity criteria or definition. Several members reported constituents saying it was unfortunate that Kosovo was being caught up in international geo-political wrangling. However, the feedback was minor and weak. Conversely, there was not a lot of feedback in support of the BOD decision and DXAC recommendation, to leave the entity criteria unchanged. The primary issue that was raised both in the initial DXAC discussion and in the post-BOD decision feedback was a reluctance to change the entity criteria since most changes were likely to then trigger some anticipated and unanticipated consequences that would not be positive. The unanticipated consequences were clearly the greatest concern. DXers seems relatively comfortable with the current criteria. Although DXer constituents, particularly DXCC members who have worked most, or all, of the entities would be happy to have something new to work, the common theme was that changes would likely trigger a large number of similar situations world-wide which were better not addressed. The general lack of feedback indicated to us that our constituents were generally happy with this position.

While our constituent response was muted and sparse on the entity issues, that was certainly not the experience of some DXAC members with their constituents on the remote station issue. The BOD decision to permit unrestricted use of personal and "commercial" (pay for use) remote stations immediately elicited some strong and highly negative reaction in some divisions. Interestingly, other divisions reportedly seemed to have virtually no reaction to the BOD policy on remotes. By this I mean, that virtually none of the divisions had a strong positive reaction to the BOD policy whereas some division's constituents had strong and negative reactions to the policy. Most members of the DXAC indicated that the communication supporting the BOD policy came largely from advocates outside of their division. The sense of the members was that the positive letters or communications received were largely the result of what appeared to be a letter writing campaign promoted by the Remote Ham Radio (RHR) group, and were often letters apparently written to all members of the DXAC.

What characterized the DXAC members who did not receive a lot of negative reaction was reportedly, no reaction at all from their constituents.

However, a group of DXAC members received quite a lot of negative feedback, and the tone of the feedback varied from disappointed and disillusioned to very angry. Examples are life members who have given up their ARRL membership (by their report), DXCC Honor Roll level DXers who stated they have "given up on the program". Two of the persistent themes that ran through the negative feedback was the feeling that the use of "pay for use" remote stations opened up the chance for wide scale cheating by stations using remotes in countries outside of their own entity or stations within the same entity with no propagation possibility from their own location to "shop remotes" to find one which has propagation, and this possibility devalued or diminished the meaning or effort of DXCC totals that DXers had accumulated from their own stations and equipment over 20 to 40 years, etc. A second theme was that the respect of the DXCC program and the DXCC award was being diminished. While

there was a grudging acceptance of the reality of remote station capability for individual amateurs who owned their own remote stations, the advent of “for hire” remote stations is the development that most DXers who were opposed to the BOD policy seemed to find least acceptable.

As examples, constituents noted the increasing incidence of stations which apparently had no propagation on 6 meters (suggested by web page chat groups of operators discussing 6 meter propagation and signal strength in real time) and reporting having no propagation to a DX station at all, yet another station in the same local area was able to make a QSO. This situation is also something seen on 160 meters during times when there is no propagation to certain parts of the world, yet stations from countries with no propagation are reportedly able to confirm valid contacts. Of course, while contacts on 6 and 160 meters are the easiest to find these concerns, there are constituents also reporting similar aberrations on most other bands (e.g. 20m, 15m, etc.).

So in summary, while the technology of remote station operation is clearly here to stay, the technology has caused a good deal of unhappiness (as well as some happiness) within the participants of the DXCC programs. The issue is fairly specific, but complex: It is an admixture of the use of remotes to negate propagation and equipment quality limitations, and the use of “for hire” remote station consortia. The BOD’s adopted position has been praised by those most directly involved (those who own or rent remotes), and roundly criticized by those opposed and not involved with remote operation. The level of negative feedback was greatest within the first month of the BOD policy announcement, but continues at a lower rate today. In fact, list serves and web-based chat groups have geared up for a letter writing campaign to their Division Directors just before the current BOD meeting. The listserves have been humming with intelligent and thoughtful discussion of this issue for the past week. As Arnie said in his last report, the BOD policy on remote station was likely to generate a lot of disagreement, and it has.

A fundamental distinction between a QSO from a traditional point of view versus a QSO via a remote station is that the former has always/usually been assumed to be a QSO from a privately owned and maintained station to another privately maintained station at a distant location entirely by rf means and pathways, versus a QSO from an operator through a private or “for hire” remote station via internet communication plus an rf communication (potentially much shorter) from the remote station to the distant station. Whether those two QSOs are equivalent is the issue that seems to be underneath this controversy, and whether they should apply equally for DXCC credit appears to be the central point of disagreement.

The DXAC remains available for any future task assignments from the PSC.

Respectfully submitted: 73

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