

I write in response to this consultation as the co-ordinator for Kent County Raynet, a member organisation of Raynet-UK. In summary, while we fully support the need to be aware of the risks of EMF and concomitant precautions, the current proposals will cause additional burdens and delays to our operations and training for little apparent benefit to operators or the public.

The three questions are answered at the end of this document.

We comprise about 60 licensed radio amateurs who provide communications support for Category 1 and Category 2 organisations under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, for other voluntary emergency groups, and for community events across Kent and Medway. We use radio equipment in the amateur radio service, the business radio service and mobile satellite terminals providing internet access for local area networks and VoIP telephony.

The support services we provide, many of which are authorised and encouraged under Clause 1 of the amateur radio licence, depend on rapid and flexible deployment, often in adverse conditions. They may involve mobile operation, the fitting-out of vehicles with mobile radio equipment, and the ad hoc use of mast-borne antennae and satellite terminals at emergency sites and control centres.

Raynet's speed of deployment can be critical because (apart for exercises and planned community events) we are called out when essential public or dedicated private communication infrastructure has failed.

We agree with the need to be aware of the risks related to EMF, the need to take appropriate precautions to protect the public and our operators, and to hold licencees to account if issues are identified. But the licence training for all our members already includes awareness and good practice in respect of EMF hazards likely to arise in the amateur radio and business radio services. Those trained to use the satellite equipment receive training in respect of its specific hazards.

Below, I address specific questions raised in the consultation.

Question 1: Do you agree with our proposal to take steps to mitigate risks related to EMF and be in a position to hold licensees, installers and users to account if issues are identified? Please explain the reasons for your response.

We support the principle that Radio Amateurs must be aware of the risks relating to EMF exposure, and how to minimise them. We point out that RF safety is covered in the amateur radio licence and built in to the Ofcom approved exam syllabus, and that the licence condition that safety precautions

should be taken against “radio frequency radiation” is accepted by Public Health England as proportionate to the low levels of risk arising from amateur radio.

We have read both the Ofcom proposal and the RSGB response, and agree with the RSGB that the proposal poses significant problems for licensed amateurs, and will create an oppressive regulatory regime.

It is evident that the requirement as described will be disproportionate, unlikely to be justifiable, and unlikely to be targeted only at cases in which action is needed; and therefore in breach of statutory duties under The Communications Act 2003 and the Wireless Telegraphy Act 2006.

It would also impose new burdens which would be unnecessary, and it is notable that the proposal contains no impact assessment of any kind.

We agree with the RSGB that the impacts of this proposal on amateur radio will be disproportionate to the related risks of harm because they will be extremely disruptive to the amateur radio services, and they will bear most heavily upon the very large numbers of non-commercial licensed spectrum users. We believe most of these users, including our operators lack the resources to make the assessments which would be demanded.

Question 2: Do you agree with our proposal a) to include a condition in spectrum authorisations requiring compliance with the basic restrictions for general public exposure identified in the ICNIRP Guidelines. b) that this condition should apply to equipment operating at powers greater than 10 Watts EIRP?

2a). Kent County Raynet supports appropriate and proper application of ICNIRP 2020 Guidelines. However, we do not agree with proposed application through the amateur radio licence. The proposal does not mention mobile use - key to our operations - , and the requirements as proposed will make the rapid emergency deployment of talk through and mobile units with an output of more than 10 Watts onerous and impractical.

2b). We note that the RSGB has found “many serious technical and drafting errors” in the proposal, and we agree with them that it is impossible to support the present proposal.

We note, in particular:

- the proposed approach does not make it clear that for ICNIRP compliance, “power” must be clearly defined as average power during a defined period of several minutes.

- Using “EIRP”, which is normally used in referring to the far field, to calculate short distance EMF exposures from an antenna can frequently lead to over- or under-estimates of field strengths. This will obviously cast great doubt on the veracity of consequent advice or action

- As mentioned above, mobile and temporary operation (except mobile phones) are not mentioned in the proposed regulations.

Question 3: Do you agree with our proposed guidance on EMF compliance and enforcement? Please explain the reasons for your response.

We find it impossible to agree.

First, the heavy handed emphasis on enforcing regulations and penalties overwhelms the compliance advice.

Secondly, the evidence leads us to believe that Ofcom would not be able to enforce the proposed new licence conditions. A multi-band amateur radio station is much more complex than many single user PMR sites or mobile phone sites. Imposing effectively unenforceable licence conditions is very poor practice and calls the credibility of regulation into doubt.

Thirdly, we support the RSGB’s alternative approach of enhancing its training and guidance material. It will have the merit of complementing the light touch regulatory approach of the amateur radio licence. We also support enhancement of Ofcom’s Amateur Licence Guidance, which is currently does not mention EMF exposure. We note that the RSGB guidance promises to be much more specific to amateur radio stations – and much more valuable to amateur radio licencees, including Raynet operators.

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