

May 26 2025

Response to Remaking the Radiocommunications Licence Conditions (Amateur Licence) Determination Paper

I thank the ACMA for the opportunity to respond to your remaking of the Radiocommunications Licence Conditions (Amateur Licence) Determination Consultation Paper.

I note that the WIA has already provided a detailed response, and as I strongly support all the issues raised therein, I will restrict myself to expanding on one major concern that has been left to fester for far too long, namely the matter of raising the permissible power output for Advanced licence holders from 400W pX to 1kW pX.

Some historical background

During 2012 and 2013 I was one of 297 participants in the Higher Power Trial conducted by the ACMA.

Correspondence dated 24 July 2013 from ACMA's Compliance Operations Section notified me that an audit of my self-assessment had been recorded as a pass. Up to this point, my station had successfully jumped two hurdles, namely that my modelling placed EMR at compliance level 1, and that no reports of interference had been attributed to my on air activities. Given that the potential for interference is real, and has historically been a barrier to running higher power in Australia, all seemed to be running smoothly. In particular, as only one instance – to my knowledge – of interference by a single participant was both notified and resolved, there was cause for optimism that the trial had been a success.

Monday 5 August 2013 was not a good day. That was when the WIA was informed by ACMA that the higher power arrangements would not be made permanent. What could have possibly gone so awry for ACMA to take this position?

90 desk audits were completed and evidently 17 amateurs, who for one reason or another, either did not supply requested information, or incorrectly assessed the compliance level of their station. The remaining 73 amateurs (81%) who correctly assessed their station had been hard done by. In all fairness, you cannot give every student a failing grade just because "some" have not achieved the class standard. Clearly there has been a real lack of natural justice imposed on Amateurs by the ACMA. Furthermore, I wonder if the outcome of a similar "random" assessment in other nations where high power is permitted would be very different to the ACMA's experience! I suspect not.

Contemporary Issues

The current position taken by the ACMA in respect to high power operation is to have Amateurs apply for a Scientific Licence. This is an approach unique to Australia and after extensive research, I can find no other jurisdiction which has gone down such a convoluted path. Indeed the only valid conclusion one can arrive at is that the ACMA has attempted to actively thwart higher power aspirations by Amateurs by constructing a financial barrier so high that very few applications would ever be made. Consequently, the ACMA could then point to the scarcity of applications for high power as proof that the general consensus is one of low interest within the Amateur cohort. The reality is quite different and I am sure the ACMA is very aware of that.

The unwillingness of the ACMA to follow international best practice with high power policy implemented in many countries has resulted in the general use of unauthorised high power by Amateurs in Australia. Clearly this is not the preferred way for Amateurs to operate, but given Australia is several thousand kilometres away from the bulk of the world's Amateur population, power output greater than the current 400W pX limit is often needed to establish viable two-way communication. Our near neighbour New Zealand implemented a 1kW pX power limit over 10 years ago. My discussions with their regulator Radio Spectrum Management (RSM) have revealed that maybe one case of harmful interference was notified and quickly resolved. This is hardly supportive of the ACMA's argument that the possibility of such interference could create an onerous administrative burden for the Regulator!

Workable Implementation Arrangements

The Scientific Licence approach is simply a financial barrier designed to choke off applications for high power Amateur operation. What is generally not stated is that the Scientific Licence is mostly incompatible with Amateur Licence provisions, i.e. it is really not "fit for purpose". The only logical solution is to amend Part 3 Schedule 2 Table C of the Radiocommunications (Amateur Stations) Class Licence 2023 to replace any reference to 400W pX with 1000W pX. In respect to the power classification pY, the preferred option is to simply delete that reference as is done in New Zealand and the UK - only pX is specified.

All Amateurs are required to conduct EMR/EMC assessments to calculate/estimate exposure levels of their stations. This will almost certainly limit power output in densely populated urban areas. The WIA has in good faith offered solutions to the implementation of high power operation and I strongly recommend the ACMA give serious consideration to that body's submission. A genuinely cooperative approach by the ACMA can result in raising the maximum power limit to 1kW pX for Australian Advanced Licence holders without detriment to other users of the RF spectrum.

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