To: Delegates and representatives, International Amateur Radio Union

From: Concerned amateur licensee
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Subject: REQUEST TO AMEND THE IARU Region 2 BAND PLAN
Tentatively Scheduled to Become Effective January, 2008

Please allow me first to provide a brief introduction to my qualifications. I am an Extra Class amateur, first licensed in 1960. I hold a PhD degree in Electrical Engineering (EE), and taught EE at the university level since 1980 before retiring this summer. I am a licensed Professional Engineer in three states, with my original licensure by examination in 1977. Further, I have been trustee for the past twenty years for the University of Alabama Amateur Radio Club (W4UAL), where we support virtually all amateur modes including an IRLP node associated with our 2-meter repeater.

The point of this communication is that the recently drafted IARU Region 2 Band Plan is unacceptable with respect to its treatment of Amplitude Modulation (AM) and proposed numerical bandwidth specifications. The document in its present form appears to seek change merely in the interest of manufacturing "progress," but it is my best advice to you that these proposals are truly ill-advised and counterproductive. Please carefully reconsider the present content of your plan and make the the necessary modifications that will enable you to gain the support of the extensive community of AM devotees.

It is not practical for the FCC or regulators in other countries to put in place an accurate and reliable enforcement structure for numerical bandwidth specifications, and their traditional approach is working well at this time so, in my opinion, their embracing such a scheme is doubtful. The alternative implementation for the amateur service via a network of volunteer Official Observer vigilantes is fatally flawed, as many such volunteers are power seekers, deficient in either technical expertise or objectivity.

Congestion and interference on the HF bands is not a serious issue at this time or for the foreseeable future, and AM operators have an outstanding record of consideration for their fellow amateurs using other modes. To me, the far greater need for better bandwidth management is on the VHF bands, where the continuing growth in demand for new repeater frequencies cannot be met because all available frequencies are already in use in many locations.

Apart from amateur radio communications for the pure sake of communicating, an important function of the service is to maintain a pool of technical talent. My experience has been that the AM community now has the highest numbers and concentration of technically proficient individuals in the hobby. Parts for construction of homebrew transmitters, amplifiers, receivers, and even tube test equipment remain readily available.

I have focused on AM for my hands-on Special Topics course instruction at the university. Students like the fact that the individual components are hand-sized and not miniaturized or encapsulated so that their internal operation has become a black box. Further, they find that acquiring a mastery of AM technical principles gives them a greater appreciation for, and ability to subsequently better master the more contemporary design and construction techniques. There are subtle benefits associated with AM for students – for example, the carrier presence in on-air transmissions enables them to study the analog variations in signal strength as they observe propagation phenomena. Finally, I cannot emphasize too greatly the new appreciation they acquire for all things analog. The recent drive to digitize everything from dc to daylight is far overdone, and many students are surprised to learn that Nature achieves some objectives digitally and many others by analog means – for good reason! Parenthetically, I note that my recent visits to some of the best universities in the land find they are, indeed, now in the process of integrating more analog content back into their curricula.

The photo below is from a class project, where the students designed and built a 350 Watt AM transmitter from scratch. Pictured is the RF deck and metering panel while the construction was underway, before being mounted along with the power supplies and modulator deck in a 19-inch equipment rack. This transmitter is now in regular operation on the 75 meter band.

Again, please consider revisions to the present content of your Band Plan which will give AM the proper status of equality, honor, and legality that it continues to merit. I look forward to seeing a final version from your working group that I can support. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration in this matter.