

Minutes of VHFCC Meeting 7th December 2024

Attendees :

Andy Cook, G4PIQ (Chair),
Pete Lindsay G4CLA,
Richard Baker, GD8EXI,
John Quarmby, G3XDY,
Richard Staples, G4HGI,
Mike Goodey, G0GJV,
Martin Hall, GM8IEM,

Apologies:

Ian Pawson G0FCT,
Peter Bowyer, G4MJS (Board Liaison)

1. Review of Actions

Meeting was called with the sole agenda of reviewing feedback from the VHF Contest survey and agreeing the changes to the 2025 rules, so an action review was not undertaken.

G4PIQ's discussion with G4SWX over band-planning. Ongoing.

G4PIQ's action to discuss how to get contesting into Brickworks is on-going. G4MJS offered to help facilitate this. Ongoing

G4MJS to convene a working group to move this on. To include at least G4MJS, G3VYI, G8TIC, G0FCT, G6XSY and a representative from HFCC. Ongoing

2. Review of Survey Results and Decisions on Rule Changes

Full survey results are included at Appendix A. We will implement the following changes (the first eight points from the survey, the others from wider discussions) and will review the impact in a year to see if they are working and take any necessary action.

1. Fixed Station Contest to Run in Parallel with VHF NFD

The survey had a clear preference to instigate such a contest. There were some concern in the comments about whether this would adversely impact numbers portable entries but also significant support to try something different. We agreed that adding a bonus (perhaps 500 points – some modelling to be done to confirm) for working UK portable stations who enter either VHF NFD or the Backpackers events would help ensure that entrants to the fixed contest are incentivised to work UK portables. We will use Open, Restricted and Low Power sections. The already

agreed removal of General Rule 2j will allow operators to spend some time at their club VHF NFD entry and some time from home if they wish.

2. Run 70cm for 8 hours and 23cm for 8 hours in VHF NFD

The headline numbers in the survey support this change strongly, but there were also a significant number of negative comments. Analysis of who made these comments (where that information was provided) showed a high concentration from groups in the Open section. Therefore we will NOT change the arrangements in the Open section (so 70cm and 23cm will still be available as a 24 hour section option in the Open section), but Restricted, Low Power and Multi-Single with run 70cm from 1400 – 2200 on Saturday and 23cm for 0600-1400 on Sunday.

We considered whether this would further disadvantage stations away from the European activity in the Open section, but felt that 8 hours on each band gave more than sufficient time to work all available UK portables.

3. Multi-Single Section

The voting did not support the removal of the Multi-Single section and we also recognise that it is the section with the lowest barrier to entry. We will attempt to promote this section prior to VHF NFD this year. The availability of a trophy will be examined through the Trophy working party. However – if entries do not rise in the section, the MS section's future does remain under review.

4. Bonuses for Backpackers

There was clear support to move to bonuses for the Backpackers. We agreed to retain the existing split of squares and postcodes across the different events. M3 (postcode, DXCC, locator multiplier) will be mapped to B6 (200 point bonus for each new postcode, DXCC, locator) and M4 (locators and DXCC multiplier) will be mapped to B4 (500 point bonus for each new locator).

5. Normalisation in Backpackers Championship

This was clearly supported and we will implement.

6. 4 from 5 Backpackers Events to Count to Backpackers Championship

Although the raw numbers in the survey support this change there were lots of votes from those who don't enter the event. Looking at feedback from those who could be identified as entrants from last year showed a clear preference to remain at 3 from 5 to count. The points were also made that many entrants do VHF NFD with their clubs rather than enter the Backpackers and so this change would effectively force them to do every Backpackers event. Backpackers can also be subject to severe weather issues and occur during the summer holiday season, so for these reasons we have agreed to stay at 3 from 5 events to count.

7. Future of May 2m Contest

There was very clear support of the suggestion to move the May 2m contest to the 1st weekend in May. We will keep the use of postcodes to ensure that there is strong drive for entrants to look into the UK, but also ensure that the rules do not make it mandatory to send the postcode to overseas stations to avoid confusion. The few who need it will ask. We will take the opportunity to move from multipliers to B6

bonuses (200 point bonus for each new postcode, square and DXCC worked) to avoid the runaway score issue.

We discussed the need to identify a suitable microwave talkback frequency for the parallel microwave contest (probably in the all mode section of the band above 144.500 MHz) recognising that the traditional 144.175 MHz is no longer a good choice with FT8 on 144.174 MHz. **Action : G3XDY to liaise with microwave community and consider this.**

We also discussed the issue of IF breakthrough to those using 2m IFs for 10 GHz transverters co-sited with 2m stations but felt that this was soluble as it has been for many years for example with the use of 145 MHz as an IF and sufficient screening.

This will be a 6 hour event 0800-1400 on the Sunday with SF, SO and O sections with power categories shown separately in the results as was done for last May's event.

As a co-ordinated contest, the use of SCCs will continue to be allowed.

We will consider the options to allow automated submission into the IARU sub-regional contest and will consider this in the broader context of all the sub-regional events. **Action : G4PIQ to discuss with G0FCT whether IARU are happy to support our unique arrangements for all sub-regional contests/**

8. Wider Use of SCCs in RSGB VHF Contests

This was rejected – and slightly more forcefully than last time, so we will not make any changes.

9. FMACs

The experiment of moving from power level sections to licence classes has not been effective. We propose to revert to the original format for 2025 of a 50W and a 10W section. We considered the suggestion of running the FMACs within the UKACs, but considered that any advantages were outweighed by the risk of reducing the pool of available stations to work since most of the UKAC stations would likely stay on SSB. Also – the earlier start of the FMACs works for some.

10. Low Power

Genuine multi-operator entries to the shortened Low Power events have dwindled to just 1 this year. We will combine the Open and Single Op Portable sections.

11. Out by One Serials

It is easy for operators to mis-read the correct serial to send by 1 in their loggers in some circumstances and we regularly see this sending error in VHF logs. At HF we already allow out-by-one serials and we agreed to allow this also in VHF logs to bring the two adjudication practices into line.

12. BST Times

We often see logs where operators logs the times accidentally in BST rather than GMT. We agreed just to correct these and not apply a penalty.

13. VHF NFD Band Choices

We need to correct out VHF NFD rules to remove the need to make band choices at registration (because registration is now optional)

14. Data Modes

We will remove ISCAT form the allowed modes list since it is largely unused.

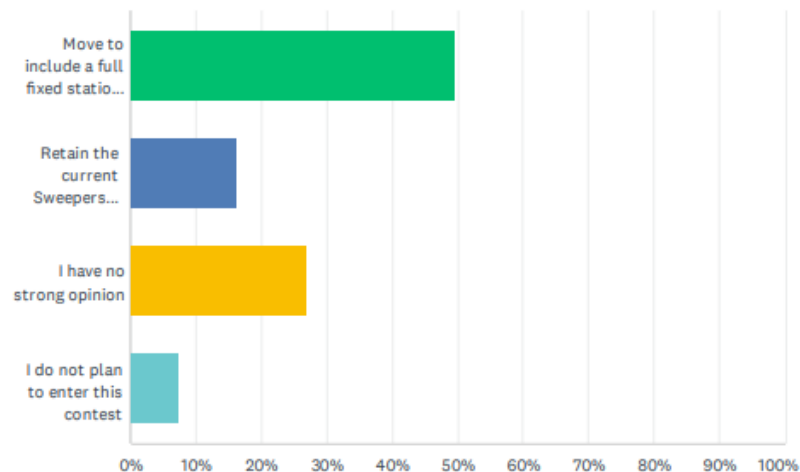
15. Allowing Operators to make more than one entry per contest

We will remove General rule 2j allowing entrants to take part in more than one entry for a contest (using different calls) if they wish to not cap activity.

Appendix A – Full Survey Results of VHFCC Consultation for 2025 Rules

Q1 QSO numbers in the VHF NFD are well down from their peak, largely due to decreased casual SSB activity on the VHF bands in the UK and nearer parts of Europe. To keep the contest as interesting as possible, increasing the total base of stations available to work is really important. Given the overall trend for Field Days in the UK and the demographics of the contesting population, we think the scope to vastly increase the number of portable stations is limited. But we do think there is scope to grow the fixed station section, and are considering changing the current sweepers section with a scoring system focussed on working UK portables, to a more standard fixed station contest running alongside VHF NFD. We hope this will increase overall fixed station activity for the portables to work, without diluting portable activity. Should we

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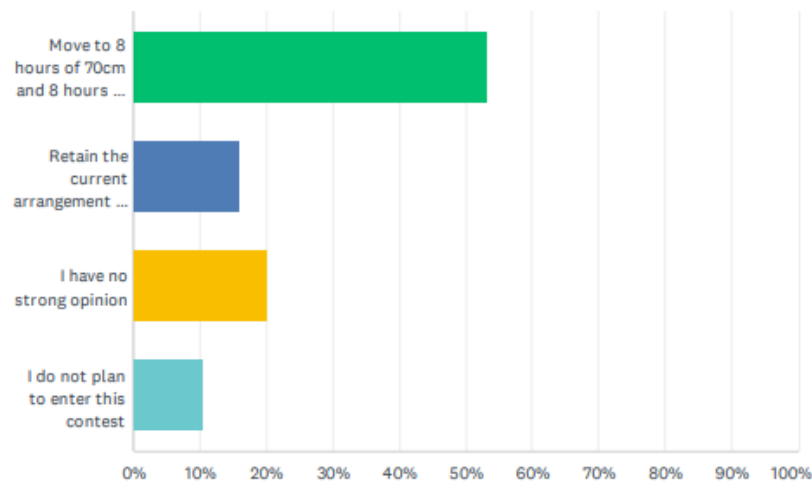


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Move to include a full fixed station contest alongside VHF NFD	49.59%	120
Retain the current Sweepers section as-is	16.12%	39
I have no strong opinion	26.86%	65
I do not plan to enter this contest	7.44%	18
TOTAL		242

Q2 We have had feedback that the amount of hardware required to be competitive across all bands in VHF NFD in conjunction with the aging / smaller active population makes it hard for groups to summon-up sufficient people and hardware.. To address this, and to try and keep the contest a more interesting, we are considering operating 70cm and 23cm in the same way as 6m and 4m with 8 hours of one band on the Saturday and 8 hours of the other on the Sunday. This will remove the need to operate through the often very quiet overnight period and allowing sharing of a mast between 70cm and 23cm. There would be no obligation to take part on 23cm - but it is hoped this structure might increase activity a little on this band for which commercial equipment is now commonly available.

Should we

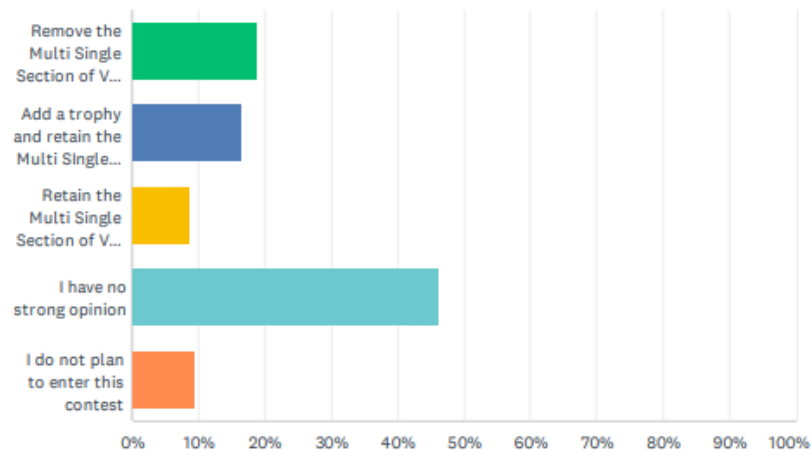
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Move to 8 hours of 70cm and 8 hours of 23cm	53.36%	127
Retain the current arrangement or 23cm and 70cm separate 24 hour bands	15.97%	38
I have no strong opinion	20.17%	48
I do not plan to enter this contest	10.50%	25
TOTAL		238

Q3 We also looked at the entries to the individual sections of VHF NFD and saw that the Multi Single section – although having the lowest barriers to entry – is very poorly supported and has been for some time. Consequently – we are considering removing this section. It has also been pointed out that this is the only section which does not have a trophy awarded for it. We can't commit to a new trophy here, but if one were to be available, would this encourage you to enter? Should we

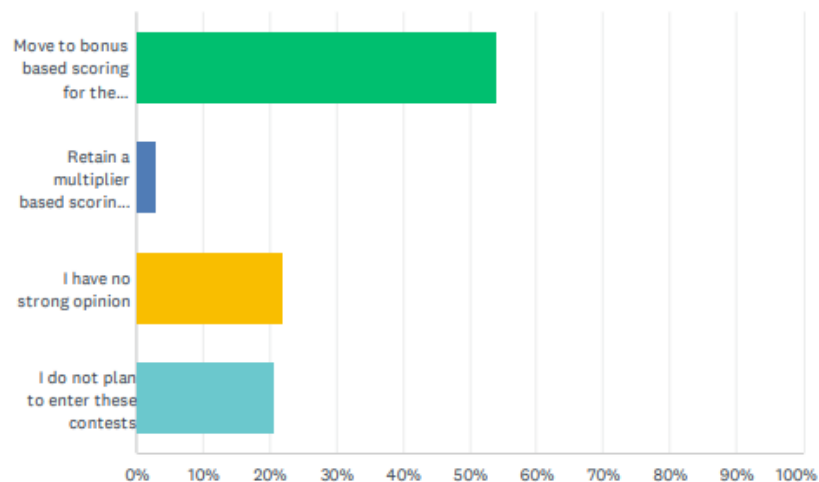
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Remove the Multi Single Section of VHF NFD	18.78%	43
Add a trophy and retain the Multi Single Section	16.59%	38
Retain the Multi Single Section of VHF NFD as-is	8.73%	20
I have no strong opinion	46.29%	106
I do not plan to enter this contest	9.61%	22
TOTAL		229

Q4 Looking at the Backpackers contests, we find that the scoring structure with multipliers and small numbers of QSOs tends to result in the leading station running away with a massive score. We are considering moving from a multiplier scoring system to a bonus scoring system as successfully used in the UKAC contests - with a bonus of 500 points for each new big locator worked. We don't believe that this will significantly change the overall result of the contest, or the need for stations to look in all directions for QSOs, but will create less discouraging small scores for entrants further down the table. Should we

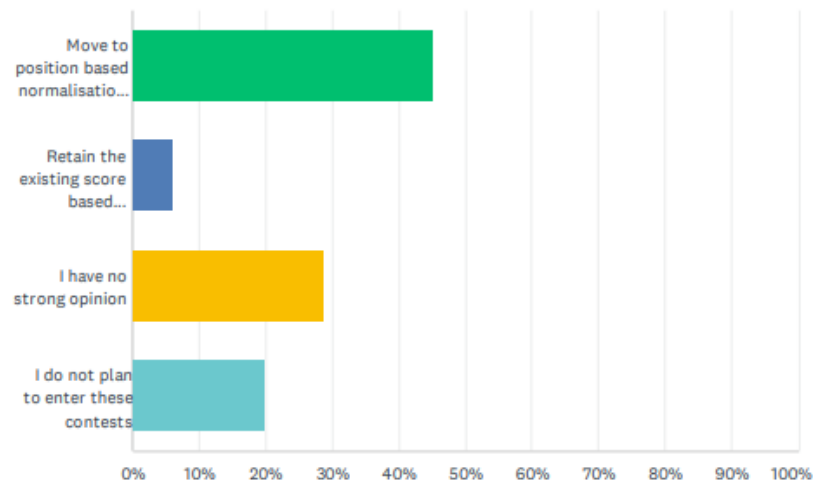
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Move to bonus based scoring for the Backpackers contests	54.19%	123
Retain a multiplier based scoring for the Backpackers contests	3.08%	7
I have no strong opinion	22.03%	50
I do not plan to enter these contests	20.70%	47
TOTAL		227

Q5 In the Backpackers contest we are also considering moving to position based normalisation for the championship (as is applied in the UKACs). So - for example - in a field of 20 entrants, the winner would get 1000 points, 2nd place 950 points, 3rd place 900 points etc.) We think this will make the championship a little more competitive. Should we

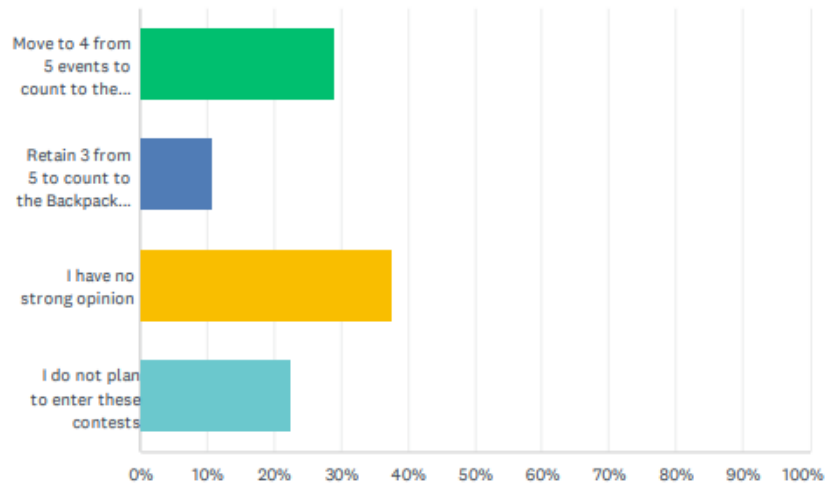
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Move to position based normalisation for the Backpackers Championship	45.13%	102
Retain the existing score based normalisation	6.19%	14
I have no strong opinion	28.76%	65
I do not plan to enter these contests	19.91%	45
TOTAL		226

Q6 In the Backpackers contests, activity is often high in the first 3 events, but drops off substantially thereafter. We are considering moving from 3 events from 5 to count to the overall backpackers Championship to 4 events from 5 to count. Should we

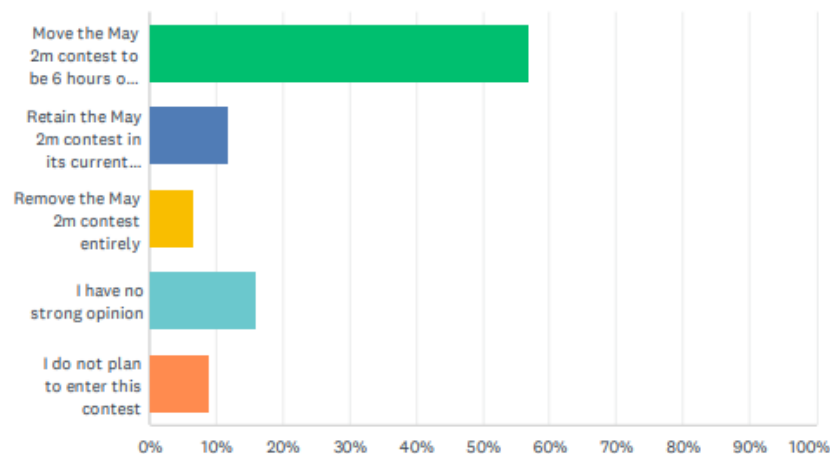
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Move to 4 from 5 events to count to the Backpackers Championship	28.96%	64
Retain 3 from 5 to count to the Backpackers Championship	10.86%	24
I have no strong opinion	37.56%	83
I do not plan to enter these contests	22.62%	50
TOTAL		221

Q7 The May 2m contest is not co-ordinated with any European events and while that worked when there were reasonable levels of casual activity on 2m SSB, that level of casual activity no longer exists. Consequently this contest delivers low numbers of QSOs and is tough going. The rest of Europe includes 2m within its contest on the 1st weekend of May and we have received a number of requests to move the May 2m event to that 1st weekend. This would make it clash with the 70cm Trophy and the 10 GHz Trophy. The largest issue here is the 70cm Trophy. There is not an obvious alternative great slot to move the 70cm Trophy to (must be co-ordinated with Europe). 1st weekend in March often has miserable weather and conditions, 1st weekend in July is VHF NFD, 1st Weekend in October clashes with 23cm and 13cm Trophies. One option that could work would be to make the 2m event short (say 6 hours only) and run it on the Sunday of the 1st weekend in May. This lines up with the request we have for more short contests, We would also move the 1st Backpackers to that slot. This would leave the 2m event clashing with the 10 GHz Trophy but there is limited overlap in the single operator entry base between the two events and the new flexibility in the Championship to count 7 score from 11 allows single op entrants to make a choice of which to enter. Should we

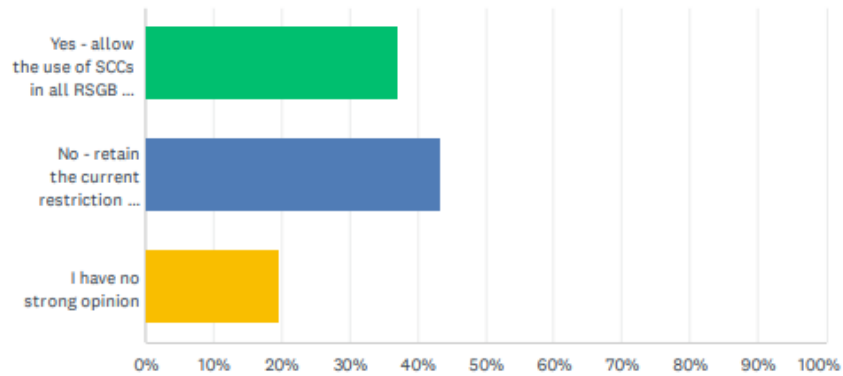
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Move the May 2m contest to be 6 hours on the Sunday of the 1st weekend in May	57.01%	122
Retain the May 2m contest in its current un-coordinated slot in 3rd weekend of May	11.68%	25
Remove the May 2m contest entirely	6.54%	14
I have no strong opinion	15.89%	34
I do not plan to enter this contest	8.88%	19
TOTAL		214

Q8 Currently there are only a limited number of VHF Contests where we allow the use of short contest calls (SCCs) like M6T. At HF they can be used in any RSGB contest. Should we allow the use of SCCs in all RSGB VHF Contests?

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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes - allow the use of SCCs in all RSGB VHF contests	37.09%	79
No - retain the current restriction of international VHF events only	43.19%	92
I have no strong opinion	19.72%	42
TOTAL		213