

Minutes of the 2nd RSGB Contests Committee Meeting of 2015

Held on Sunday 13th September 2015

Venue: The Arden Hotel, Coventry Road, Solihull, B92 0EH

Committee Members Present:

Ian Pawson, G0FCT (Chair)
Mike Goodey, G0GJV
Ed Taylor, GW3SQX
Steve Knowles, G3UFY (Minutes)
Mike Franklin, G3VYI (IOTA Contest Manager)
Quin Collier, G3WRR (Newsletter Editor)
Pete Lindsay, G4CLA (Deputy Chair & Webmaster)
John Cockrill, G4CZB
Nick Totterdell, G4FAL (HF Representative)
Dave Edwards, G7RAU
John Simkins, G8IYS
Simone Wilson, M0BOX (Also BARTG Contest Manager)

Ex Officio Persons Present:

Steve White, G3ZVW (RadCom Radiosport Column)

Apologies for Absence received from:

Stewart Bryant, G3YSX (Board Liaison)
Roger Dixon, G4BVY
Rob Thomson, G4LMW
Mark David, G4MEM
Andy Cook, G4PIQ (VHF Representative)
Richard Cooper, G4WFR
Jacqui Goodey, G6XSY (Trophy Manager)

The meeting came to order at 10:06 am.

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Apologies for Absence:

As recorded above.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes had been previously circulated and submitted to the Board for publication. There were no comments and the minutes were accepted unanimously as a true and accurate record of the proceedings.

3. Matters Arising, not on the agenda

(a) BERU/SARL

G0FCT reported that he and G3PJT had both written to the SARL Contest Manager. Additionally, G3WKL had written to the SARL President, as had G3BJ. Resolution has been achieved and SARL will be releasing the details in due course.

(b) CW AFS / FOC

This matter was discussed by those present.

(c) Hall of Fame

The data collected by GW3SQX was now all in Word and was being collated. Extra data from old RadComs was also being included. This is work in progress which it is hoped will be completed by the end of this year.

*****Action*** G6XSY ongoing.**

(d) Changes to Robot

G4CLA enquired as to the state of preparation of the spreadsheet of changes required to the Robot. He pointed out that this was now becoming urgent.

*****Action*** GW3SQX and G4CLA to prepare/action the spreadsheet of changes**

(e) RSGB Convention

G0FCT reported that the Winners Spreadsheet had gone to HQ and the Trophy Winners had all been notified.

For IOTA and BERU, sponsors have been sent all the information necessary to produce the trophies ... so far, only MM0BQI has not replied.

A new sponsor has come forward for the John Dunnington, G3LZQ, Trophy (Addiscombe ARC).

Trophy presentations will be on Sunday 11th October, HF from 09:30 to 10:15 and VHF from 10:45 to 11:30.

The Contest Forum has been scheduled for 13:30 to 15:15 on the 11th ... this will be an ideal time to reveal and discuss the details of the results of the 2015 White Papers.

4. 2015 White Paper Results

G0FCT reported that there had been 132 individual responses to the May 2015 White Paper and, additionally, two 'block' responses from clubs, one of 13 members and the other of 11 members. This was a 37.5% increase over the 2014 White Paper. Some of the proposals had come from the Committee direct, but also some had been submitted by active contesters and some had come about as a result of the 2014 White Paper. The Committee considered each proposal in turn and made recommendation as to future action.

Item 1.1 Open Logs:

(a) The RSGBCC should make available the log data of all contest entrants?

63% response, 95% agreement.

The Committee agreed that a single .csv file could be produced by AdjSQL from pre-adjudication log information.

(b) Should entry to a contest include permission to publish log data?

51% response, 82% agreement.

The Committee agreed that rules should be changed to make permission to publish raw log data a condition of entry to all RSGB contests.

(c) Should RST/SN information be removed?

40% response, 57% agreement.

(d) Should personal information be removed?

47% response, 96% agreement.

Items (c) and (d) were considered together. The Committee felt that the response indicated that ONLY personal data should be removed from logs. This decision is also consistent with the 'custom and practice' of other major contest sponsors who provide open logs.

(e) Data should be released only after the results have been published.

39% response, 97% agreement.

The Committee agreed that log information should be made available to contest entrants and that its release could be conveniently tied into the present UBN delivery mechanism. With release of log data being a condition of entry it would also be possible to release an entrant's Reverse-UBN information. This would be available only to the entrant concerned and would give a clear indication of the areas where their operating might be improved.

(f) Caveat on Release

38% response, 71% agreement.

The Committee agreed that, although it might prove difficult to enforce, there should be a condition attached to the release of the information that it was not to be republished in any form.

Item 1.2 Integrated Awards Programme

That contacts made in RSGB Contests should be valid for RSGB Awards without further confirmation. 44% response, 99% agreement

There was some discussion over whether a contact which was invalid for the purposes of the contest (for example, by virtue of an incorrect serial number or locator) might still be valid for the purposes of the award scheme. The Committee agreed that this was a can-do suggestion and that there should be liaison with the RSGB Awards Manager to progress the matter.

Item 1.3 16-hour Restricted Section in Field Days

44% response, 99% agreement

This matter to be considered by the forthcoming Rules Review.

Item 1.4 7-day Submission Period for all Contest Logs

68% response, 72% agreement

The Committee were happy to agree a 7-day entry deadline for all RSGB contests EXCEPT for IOTA and the Commonwealth Contest where numbers of important logs are still received on paper ... these logs should continue to be accepted for 14 days. Additionally, the Committee felt that any entrant should be able to secure an extension to the deadline by contacting the adjudicator or Chairman in advance where circumstances (such as travelling, lack of computer facilities, lack of internet access, etc.) made it impossible to submit an entry in time.

NB – there were two Club 'block responses' to this question which were diametrically opposed and so essentially cancel each other out.

Item 2.1 Introduction of a 6-hour IOTA Island section.

40% response, 75% agreement.

This suggestion was received as part of a proposal for a Backpackers Island category. The response was not overwhelmingly in favour and the Committee felt that there was no real demand for such a section as it would probably only further split domestic participation, rather than encourage new participants. Accordingly this proposal was rejected.

Item 2.2 Introduction of a 'Rookie' Category into IOTA

39% response, 85% agreement

Despite the comparatively low response, this matter has been deferred for consideration by the forthcoming Rules Review.

Item 2.3 Introduction of a Multi-2 Category into IOTA

25% response, 72% agreements

Despite the very low response, this matter has been deferred for consideration by the forthcoming Rules Review.

Item 2.4 Move RoPoCo2 to Sunday afternoon

36% response, 51% agreement

Despite the low response, a move to a later slot was agreed to be promising and this matter has been deferred for consideration by the forthcoming Rules Review.

Item 2.5 Extend the 80mCC Contest Series until November

44% response, 37% agreement.

This proposal was related to the possible unviability of the 80m Club Sprints.

The Committee felt that the pressure on club supporters was already approaching its limit and this appears to have been confirmed by the responses to this proposal. Proposal not adopted.

Item 2.6 Discontinue the 80m Club Sprints

41% response, 76% agreement

The Committee was agreed that, unless something remarkable should happen in the very near future (e.g. massive increase in participation and entries), the 80m Club Sprints should be discontinued.

Item 2.7 Add the EU Sprints to the RSGB Contest Calendar

38% response, 71% agreement

Although this was a low response, the Committee were in agreement that contact with G4BUO should be maintained with a view to acquiring the series.

Item 2.8 Add 40m to 80m AFS CW

41% response, 48% agreement

It was noted that the block response from two clubs was very influential with agreement being 59% if the club input was excluded.

The Committee agreed that the inclusion of 40m had been a great success in the SSB event, not just because it reduced the pressure on bandwidth but also because it introduced an element of tactics. It was decided to accept this proposal, at least for a trial period. A suggestion to remove the ten-minute rule was discussed but it was argued that this would permit alternate CQ-ing which could detract from the bandwidth advantage from having the extra band. The possibility of increased Windle problems due to the extra band was also noted.

Item 2.9 Align the Rules for HF CW and SSB Field Days

36% response, 96% agreement

The Committee agreed that this was desirable – to be considered during the forthcoming Rules Review.

Item 2.10 Alter the CC (BERU) format to ‘world works the Commonwealth’

50% response, 35% agreement

Most comments were vehemently against – as was the feeling of the Committee. Proposal not adopted.

Item 3.1 Add MGM sections to VHF/UHF contests

48% response, 84% agreement

Overtaken by recommendations from the Presidential Review – see agenda item 6, Supplemental White Paper results so far.

Item 3.2 Define a minimum 2-hour rest period in 6-hour contest sections

48% response, 92% agreement

This proposal aligned RSGB events with IARU events and the Committee agreed it should be adopted. It was noted that participants do not have to take a rest period and can operate for six hours continuously if desired.

Item 3.3 Recommend activity slots for 6-hour section

45% response, 64% agreement

Agreed – deferred for Rules Review to consider timing,

Item 3.4 Require full log to be submitted if activity extended beyond 6-hour section

44% response, 91% agreement

Agreed – potential penalty if not complied with: disqualification of 6-hour entry. This penalty was suggested because of the serious effect on other entrants if the full log is not supplied. If activity is extended and the resulting contacts are not included in the submitted log, all of the contacts will result in 'not in log' errors and hence loss of points to other entrants. This is not in the 'spirit of the contest'.

Item 3.5 Add VHF Remote Station rule

48% response, 98% agreement.

Agreed – deferred to Rules Review as rule will need rewording.

Item 4.1 Introduce a Team distance rule to UKAC

64% response, 41% agreement.

A good response, but low support. The Committee also agreed that this proposal should not be implemented.

Item 4.2 Introduce a 10W FM-only section to UKAC

52% response, 57% agreement.

There was much discussion around this proposal. The Committee was concerned about the limited number of channels available and the possibility of blocking them all during the contest period in those parts of the country where band occupancy is high. Also, although section entrants would be limited to 10W, stations entering other sections would be able to use high power to work them (and each other) and this could result in squeezing out the 10W stations anyway; the Committee felt that to modify the rules to prevent this was impracticable, due to the resulting complexity, and that this proposal should not be taken up. However, it was something to be borne in mind should circumstances change and this proposal will be considered further during the rule and calendar reviews.

Item 5.1 Remove most of the restrictions on use of the Internet in VHF/UHF contests

55% response, 71% agreement.

The Committee was in agreement with this proposal as it would bring all events into line with IARU Internet usage rules. There were some concerns expressed, however – for example, the use of a different callsign in a chat room rather than the use of the contest callsign.

*****Action*** G0FCT to look at concerns.**

Item 6.1 Simplify Contest Rules

53% response, 87% agreement

Already a Committee objective – deferred for the Rules Review.

Item 6.2 Issue more place certificates

51% response, 98% agreement.

The Committee felt that to issue too many certificates would devalue them as awards. If there were demand for participation certificates, these could easily be produced upon request. At present, certificates are issued according to the individual rules of the contest, with the proviso that the adjudicator may (1) issue additional certificates if circumstances merit or (2) decline to issue a certificate if the winner does not appear to have made sufficient effort to justify it (e.g. one entrant in a section who made only one QSO). Deferred for further consideration.

Item 6.3 Change references to 'UK' to read 'UK & CD'

47% response, 98% agreement

Agreed – this will be implemented in the 2016 rules.

Item 6.4 Add the VHF rule concerning copying of all info at time of QSO to HF rules

53% response, 93% agreement.

Agreed – referred to the Rules Review with the caveat that a careful check of the wording would be required.

Item 6.5 Make it clear that power means power output

51% response, 94% agreement

Agreed by the Committee

Item 6.6 Add an HF claimed score page to the CC Website.

47% response, 100% agreement.

The Committee were agreed in principle. G4CLA remarked the VHF Claimed Scores page takes data not from the 'Claimed Score' log header line, but calculates it from the submitted log during pre-processing, which avoids entrants' mistakes being put up on the site. This process is not presently available for HF contests and it is not likely that the Robot could be modified to implement the change in the immediate future.

Item 6.7 Add new North America and Japan/Asia awards to IOTA

30% response, 100% agreement

Agreed by the Committee. Awards (certificates and if sponsors can be found, plaques) will be made to the leading stations in each continent.

Item 6.8 Clarify notification of QRP operation in the Commonwealth Contest

32% response, 98% agreement

Accepted by the Committee.

Item 6.9 Change all references to 'BERU' to read 'Commonwealth Contest'

48% response, 56% agreement.

Already in hand by the Committee. However, the meeting felt that the original expansion of the 'BERU' acronym (British Empire Radio Union) had faded and that it was now accepted as a traditional short-cut name of the contest. There should therefore be no penalty against stations who continued to call 'CQ BERU'.

Item 6.10 Remove minimum power limit in all UKAC sections

48% response, 78% agreement

Accepted by the Committee

Item 6.11 Clarify how HF Championship scores are accumulated on operator callsign, not station callsign.

33% response, 100% agreement

Agreed. Referred to the Rules Review for clarification of the relevant rule.

Item 6.12 Reinstate the 'rule' that all logs become the property of RSGB on submission

47% response, 73% agreement.

Agreed by the Committee. Deferred for the Rules Review regarding alteration to the General Rules in respect of re-publication of content (re open logs) and of sharing of logs for Field Days and IARU events.

Post meeting Note: After some heated comments by a few contest entrants, it needs to be explained that the RSGB is not seeking to gain sole rights over any logs submitted. However, permission to use the contents of the submitted logs is necessary in order to provide open logs (see Item 1.1).

Item 6.13 Add 'Centre of Activity' to list of protected frequencies

48% response, 81% agreement

Agreed by the Committee

Item 6.14 Clarify VHF NFD MS Section time limit rule

43% response, 98% agreement.

The Committee agreed that time limits should be removed altogether.

5. 2015 Supplemental White Paper – results so far.

As of 22:37 on 12/09/2015, 53 responses had been received.

Question 1 – UKAC Scoring:

B1 = 21

M7 = 18

'Don't Care' = 7

Very polarised comments: vehemently against the adoption of B1 vs 'let's try B1'.

Question 2 – Machine Generated Modes

'Same sections' = 27

'Different sections' = 15

'Don't care' = 11

Comments are very mixed but less vehemently for/against than for Question 1

6. Operational Plan – 2016

GOFCT reported that the majority of the time-constrained elements of the 2015 plan had been completed as required.

The theme for 2016 is 'Promoting Amateur Radio'. Some items could be based on the recommendations from the Presidential Review, but other suggestions would be welcome.

MOBOX remarked that Jamboree On The Air (JOTA) and Thinking Day On The Air (TDOTA) are well-supported events within the Scouting and Guiding communities respectively and suggested that there might be an opportunity for an event linked with these days.

7. HF Participation Analysis – G4FAL

Nick gave a detailed and very comprehensive analysis of the levels of support for the Society's HF contests and how they have changed with time. The results are mildly encouraging and a long way removed from the 'doom-and-gloom' so often peddled on the reflectors.

IOTA

Apart from 2015, when there was a dip in entries of about 10%, this event has shown solid growth in support since its inception, from 750 entrants in 1997 to its 2013 peak of over 2500. Most of the activity is in Europe and Asia with the Americas not as well represented as might be expected. Nick

suggested that Island Stations should be more strongly encouraged to send their IOTA Reference when CQ-ing.

80mCC contests

These events are holding steady, with the possible exception of SSB, which has shown a slight reduction this year. Lack of bandwidth for the SSB events is a known problem and may be a contributory factor in this. Nick proposed that the Committee should re-introduce the 3650 – 3700 segment for use during the SSB events.

*****Action*** G0FCT to sound out IARU feeling re: allowing the use of this contest-free segment for 80mCC SSB contests.**

Nick also proposed the formation of an RSGB 'Virtual Contest Club' so that operators who did not belong to any of the large clubs or contest groups, and whose local clubs did not support the Club Contests, could take part in the knowledge that their efforts were going to support a group of which they were a member and which could win an award. This would obviously have to be a 'General' group rather than a 'Local' group. The Committee were interested; one problem identified was that there was no way to pre-judge the level of take-up and it might prove necessary to have a number of such virtual groups, perhaps based, for example, upon RSGB Regions. There were also concerns that the creation of such 'Virtual Groups' might cause 'defections' from smaller clubs and Affiliated Societies, causing bad feeling between them and RSGB. G0FCT proposed that a virtual 'club' for each RSGB Region be created and entrants can enter on behalf of their local club and their region, the results from the regional clubs being listed in a separate table in the results.

Nick further proposed that the distance limit for 'Local' 80mCC clubs should be changed to 80km to bring it into line with the 80m AFS contests. This proposal was discussed in detail at the time; it was felt that the present 35km limit, coupled with the facility to specify a 'Virtual Meeting-Place', constituted the most appropriate definition of a 'Local' Club.

80m Club Sprints

Sprints are clearly not as popular a format as the 80mCCs and entries appear to be in decline. Nick described them as 'ailing, but not yet moribund'. Results are only just beginning to come in for the 2015 series and no trends can yet be computed.

AFS CONTESTS

Club Calls (1.8MHz SSB)

Nick's figures showed that, although total activity was lower than in the 80m events, support has been slowly increasing, on average, for the last ten years or more. Considering the problems of urban noise levels, lack of space for efficient antennas and the low power limit this was felt to be encouraging.

80m AFS CW

Total participation continues to decline remorselessly, albeit slowly. The number of teams competing, however, has remained remarkably steady for twenty years ... clubs continue to support the event but can no longer raise full teams. It is probable that this trend will continue as the number of CW operators in the hobby decreases.

80m AFS SSB

As with the CW event the number of teams taking part has remained remarkably constant over two decades. However the number of stations has increased substantially. This January's introduction of 40m did not produce an increase in participation but the word should have got around by 2016!

Proposals arising

Nick suggested that the rules for the HF and VHF AFS contests should be aligned, in an appropriate way. There was some demurral which remarked upon the completely different nature of HF and VHF contests. Nonetheless the principle was accepted, the Devil (in the detail) to be worked out later if possible.

Nick also proposed that the AFS and CC competitions should be rationalised, with AFS having two categories (National and 80km Local) plus a National/Regional RSGB club(s). This caused considerable discussion based around the differing natures of the AFS and CC events, the one being a team event with four stations per team, the other being an open free-for-all where everyone's contribution counts. No consensus was reached here.

Nick further suggested that the 80m AFS series should have a 100W power limit, the same as the Club Contests. G3UFY objected on the grounds the AFS contests are the only truly 'Open' local contests run by RSGB and that, if we are to train new operators to any decent standard, they need to experience and learn to handle the QRM levels involved. Again there was no consensus.

*****Action*** G3WRR and G4FAL to investigate ways to rationalise the 80mCC and AFS series Rules.**

PORTABLE CONTESTS

National Field Day

Entries show the same steady decline as seen in 80m AFS CW. The number of QSOs made by the winners is not falling, however, which implies that there is a lack of operators, rather than a lack of stations to work.

SSB FD

Although subject to some wild variations year on year, the average number of entrants and their QSO tally has remained broadly constant for ten years. There has, however, been a notable drift away from the Open section in favour of the Restricted section.

QRP FD (aka Low Power Contest)

This is a 'Niche' contest which never had a large following – nevertheless it has a stalwart core of supporters and has shown a slight upward trend in the average number of entries over the last ten years. The main problem appears to be that it is a summer contest but using winter bands, i.e. 80m and 40m. It has been said before that the event would benefit from the addition of 20m and Nick was in full agreement.

*****Action*** G4FAL to look at the possibility of including 20m and the potential rule changes required.**

Nick went on to put forward some proposals which he felt might stimulate activity.

In the Commonwealth Contest, the introduction of additional HQ stations in the UK or Crown Dependencies.

It was also suggested that, because the Commonwealth Contest is essentially intercontinental, it was wrong to exclude CC contacts from the bottom 10kHz of 80m, particularly as the rest of the CW band is occupied by a European (Russian) event which makes DX contacts difficult, and that use of that segment by CC stations should be allowed.

*****Action*** G0FCT to investigate.**

In the 21/28MHz Contest, Nick produced a graph which showed how strongly the participation was linked to solar activity.

He suggested the inclusion of 20m, coupled with rebranding the event as a 12-hour DX Contest and altering the scoring to give a sliding scale with 20m QSOs being the least valuable and 28MHz QSOs being worth the most.

He also recommended changing the exchange so that it would be more obvious to overseas stations 'stumbling across us' and also introducing some incentives for overseas stations – he suggested an award for the best hourly QSO rate for each continent.

There was considerable discussion, during which other matters, including inter-UK working, were raised.

*****Action*** G4FAL to evaluate proposals and draw up a draft set of rules for consideration.**

Finally, Nick proposed that RoPoCo2 (CW) should be moved to a Sunday evening (he suggested in September, outside the main holiday period and at a more sociable hour). This was broadly in line with the response received from the White Paper question. He went on to suggest that the exchange should be changed to rotating QRA locators (or any zip code) to encourage overseas participation. He also felt that similar changes should be made to RoPoCo1 to align the two events. This matter was deferred to the Rules Review, as being related to Agenda Topic 4, item 2.4, previously dealt with.

*****Action*** G4FAL to draw up a draft set of rules for consideration.**

8. Cheerleading in HF AFS Contests - GW3SQX

Ed gave an in-depth presentation during which he detailed the history and development of the AFS events from the first 80m CW event to the present Super League.

Ed felt that really substantial change was necessary; he was keen to introduce more emphasis on the 'Club' aspect of the events and set out his proposed changes in great detail.

In summary, his proposals were:

SSB and CW contests to be two-band 80m and 40m

160m contest to have 2 modes, counting separately

No band or mode change limitations

No band or mode score normalisation

A certificate to be awarded to the club with the most stations on the air in each contest.

Contest exchange to be standardised over the three events:

No report, but retain Serial Number

Include a 3-character Club Designator

Include Status, as Non-member, Club member or Club HQ

Scoring system to be standardised over the three events:

Contacts with Club HQ stations – 12 points

Contacts with Club member stations – 4 points

Other contacts – 1 point

Ed felt that, while not addressing the 'cheerleading' problem directly, the change in scoring system would reduce its effect to miniscule proportions. He proposed that these changes should come into effect with the 2016-2017 Super League. He also opined that, because responses to White Paper questions usually seemed to come from the most active and competitive participants, those who might benefit the most from the changes were likely to be 'out-shouted'.

G3UFY objected to the proposals on the grounds that they would completely change the nature of the only true 'Open' contests that we have in the Local Calendar. The extended exchange would slow down QSO rates, thus ensuring that the 'big boys' stayed running for longer. The lack of restriction on SO2V/SO2R activity would further exacerbate the bandwidth problems. And that, if there ever was a proposal that should go in a White Paper, this was it!

In the event, there was no time available to discuss the proposals in the detail required and the matter was deferred until a later date.

9. Definition of a Receiver – G4BVY

With Roger being unable to attend, this item was put aside for consideration at a later date.

10. Use of excess power in 80mCCs – G4BVY

Roger has been doing some interesting work around the RBN networks and SDRs and feels he is in a good position to identify stations running excess power. There was a good deal of interest in this item, but with Roger unable to attend it was deferred to be dealt with later.

11. Definition of /P

This was a suggestion submitted by G3UFY in response to the question of a disabled operator establishing a portable FD station in the garden at their Registered Address, while complying in all respects with the contest rules (i.e. whether one could be 'Portable' at the Registered Address). The Committee felt that careful consideration of the licence made this perfectly clear and that there was no need for this specification.

12. Communication Ideas – G8LZE

The Committee agreed that this item was best dealt with by the usual Committee email scheme.

13. Any Other Business

G0FCT – Ian remarked on the IARU Bandplan and the desirability to move the lower end of the SSB sector down from .150 to .100. Also the need to establish Guard Bands (e.g. +/- 5kHz) around Centres of Activity and other special frequencies. The Committee were in agreement.

G0FCT – IARU Contest Rules - Discontinue separate MGM sections in 50/70MHz IARU contests and permit true multi-mode operation (i.e. any legal mode but still respecting the band plan) in all sections in all IARU V/UHF contests. This was deferred for discussion at a later date.

G0FCT – IARU Log Submissions – All adjudicators please make sure that IARU logs are submitted by the second Sunday after the contest.

G6XSY – Consider the introduction of an YL or Youth section (or perhaps just an YL/Youth Award) in contests to encourage entries.

14. Date of the Next Meeting

To Be Announced ... in or around March 2016.

The meeting closed at 16:11 hrs.