

Telephone 0171-963-5885	Published by the Joint Radio Company Limited	Facsimile 0171-963-5995
No 8	E-mail: info@jrc.co.uk	http://www.jrc.co.uk
		March 1998

WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY BILL

Nearly – but not quite

The Wireless Telegraphy Bill has almost made it onto the Statute Book – but not quite yet. The Committee Stage having been completed without amendment, it just needs its Report Stage and Third Reading to receive the Royal Assent. (Detailed report in Newsletter 7 and complete copies of Committee Stage and Second Reading Debate available from JRC.)

But at the last minute, the Opposition has tabled some further amendments for the Third Reading. Whether they are considered or not depends on the Speaker. JRC is keeping in close touch with the DTI Bill Team in case briefing is needed. However, having reached this stage, it is extremely unlikely that the Government would want to concede any amendments as that would require the Bill to be reconsidered in the Lords. The Bill is likely to receive its Third Reading on 11 March and come into force approximately 3 months later in June.

New Fees Regulation

The 1998 Fees Order has now been tabled. When it will come into force depends not only on the timing of the Bill, and the Radiocommunications Agency's approach to fulfilling its obligation to consult; but the Order has been 'prayed against' – a highly unusual step taken by MPs who object to a set of Regulations. The original date of 1 July 1998 may therefore slip, but since the Fees Order this year is unlikely to have a major impact on the utilities, the precise timing is of little importance to us. 1 April 1999 remains the target date for the subsequent Fees Order which will impact on us.

For budgeting, assume that the aggregate of **all your WT Act fees will rise 50% on 1 April '99**, a further amount equal to **50% of your 1998 fee will be added on 1 April 2000** and **final 50% increment on 1 April 2001**. By then, the mechanism is likely to have been reviewed and therefore the best assumption for fees post 1 April 2002 is the fee level at that date plus inflation.

Spectrum Management Contract

Under the New Legislation, it is likely that JRC will hold a 'spectrum licence', although individual JRC member companies will still hold their own Wireless Telegraphy Act licences. It is through these WT Act Licences that we expect finally to achieve that security of tenure that we have long sought. There will be a fundamental change in the way in which licence costs are apportioned to individual JRC members, reflecting a move away from charges reflecting purely administrative costs towards something closer to the commercial value of the spectrum. The Strategy Advisory Group is taking the lead in advising on a new formula for attributing WT Act licence costs.

Year 2000 Preparations

JRC has nominated David Priestley as our Year 2000 contact. If you need a compliance statement regarding JRC services; wish to know how we are proceeding with bringing the RF and ST Designer series software up to date; or have any other Year 2000 issues please contact David. As someone totally committed to IS solutions, david.priestley@jrc.co.uk is preferred to 0171 963 5886. David is also equipped to deal with another Year 2000 issue which may in the longer term prove even more damaging to communications than the millennium bug, that of Sun Spot Cycle activity.

TETRA, TETRALINK and something fishy.

I hope that you are all aware that we received a surprise Christmas Present from DTI in the form of an announcement of a proposed merger between the two previously competitive public TETRA operators NB3 and Tetralink. The key issue for JRC members was the statement contained within the announcement that not only was all the available spectrum in the band 410-430 MHz to be assigned to the merged company, but that there would most probably be no spectrum for Private TETRA systems until after a review in December 1999.

Despite strident representations concerning the apparent anti-competitive nature of this proposal, the merger and associated spectrum allocation decisions were confirmed in a Press Notice on 10 February 1998. We are therefore now working with the Agency and through their Consultative Committees to see how best we might be able to develop private TETRA options. To their credit, RA has now responded by issuing a consultation document on spectrum for private sector TETRA. A draft paper has been circulated to the Telecomms contacts in JRC member companies which will also be discussed at the Operations Advisory Group meeting on 18 March.

Copies of the Tetralink merger proposal and subsequent announcement, and the TETRA consultation paper and draft JRC response are available from Paula Murphy (0171 963 5797).

And what's fishy about this? Simply that Tetralink has changed its name to *Dolphin Telecommunications Ltd!*

Telecomms Training

Enclosed with this newsletter are details of the training courses available from Wray Castle. JRC has negotiated a special deal offering an introductory discount for JRC members. Our personal experience of Wray Castle has been very positive and we are pleased to be working with them and have their support for our Conference in June this year. JRC advice is to take walking boots and consider extending your stay for a day at either end.

WINTER OF DISCONTENT

You may not want to be reminded of events over Christmas and the New Year, but JRC MD Adrian Grilli doubled his library of video clips of utility related weather incidents reported on the News. If you have access to any pictures, slides or video of incidents in your area, we would love to have copies which we would ensure are only used for your benefit, not to your detriment.

Wind of Change

One benefit of reporting to JRC is that we can share experiences on a non-attributable and anonymous basis. Economies in maintenance procedures seem to have been the main source of embarrassing failures, but one member's loss of digital microwave fixed links was seemingly because of a greater susceptibility to misalignment errors than the previous analogue equipment. Reports indicate that digital microwave dishes are best not mounted on tower legs as more support can be achieved on a tower face. Early links which were installed without the benefit of this knowledge simply replaced analogue dishes with digital on the same mounts. Dish flexing may also contribute to fading on long links during severe weather. If any other members have similar experiences, please let us know, in confidence if necessary.

"It's good to talk"

We were not the only people experiencing problems over the New Year. For those who experienced problems with the fixed telecommunications infrastructure we include copies of communications exchanges which seem to reflect the experience of a number of members. For what its worth, JRC had to change internet service providers from PIPEX to DEMON because the 0645 exchange seems immensely difficult to connect to from 0171 numbers during normal working hours.

Could it have been worse?

To put our problems in perspective, included is a sample of press cuttings highlighting recent problems in Canada due to the cold, and New Zealand due to the heat. Ironically, although Quebec Hydro was most affected by the recent ice storms, we have just obtained a video from Manitoba Hydro detailing the effects of a lightning storm in September 1996. Copies are available in VHS/PAL format from JRC (30 minutes in length). We are hoping to obtain a guest speaker from Entergy for our conference in June to describe how they were affected by the ice storm and how their communications systems fared.



ERMES Interference

You may have received a letter from the Radiocommunications Agency advising you of potential interference from the introduction of a new service called ERMES. This is a pan-European Paging System to enable people to be contacted at any time anywhere in Europe (there are still large areas of Europe not covered by GSM). Although the pagers are intelligent it has still been necessary to allocate channels to the service on a harmonised basis which may result in a minor increase in the possibility of interference.

Is my interference ERMES?

The harmonised European Band for ERMES is 169.4 MHz to 169.8 MHz, divided into sixteen 25 kHz channels. Interference is possible from ERMES on any JRC band, but it's far more likely that local ERMES signals will be noticed on the only JRC High Band channel H321 (169.050 MHz).

There are various formats used for paging systems in the UK. If you are unsure which format is causing you problems, then the following frequencies can be used as a guide to the type of paging affecting you. 137.975-138.3 MHz contains various POCSAG transmissions characterised by a "dirty" data signal (actually, just wider than normal for PMR) – a possible source of interference to J-Band systems. The frequency 153.025 MHz has a national Motorola FLEX system on it – it's quieter than POCSAG. Other transmissions around 153 MHz are POCSAG. Obviously, ERMES will be found in its 169 MHz band only when it starts to be installed. Most UK Paging systems are licensed for 100W into the antenna system, i.e. ERPs are likely to be far higher.

More information can be found on the ERMES Web Site: <http://www.ermesmousg.org/> General paging information on: <http://village.ios.com/~braddy/>

If you have any queries, contact JRC's Simon Parsons on 0171 963 5806.

JOINT UTILITIES RADIO CONFERENCE

9-10 June 1998 will find a large number of JRC and TAC (Telecommunications Advisory Committee of UK Water Industry) members at the Metropole Hotel Birmingham for the first **Joint Utilities Radio Conference**. Attached are preliminary details. When we have confirmed the speakers the final programme will be issued. Places will be limited so you are invited to reserve your places as early as possible. The 'free' places will be allocated according to a formula agreed with the JRC/TAC Conference Preparatory Group and endorsed by the JRC Board. Initially, it is likely to be based on one 'free' place per EA member plus 'free' places for all those on JRC Advisory Groups. For BG, it will be more straightforward allocating 'free' places as it is a single entity. However, even the 'non-free' places for JRC members will be heavily subsidised bargains!

Remember that this is a conference **for** utility users **organised by** utilities users. It is supported by industry who are bearing the lion's share of the costs through sponsorship and taking exhibition space. A significant number of organisations have already expressed interest in taking exhibition space, but if you are aware of anyone you think would be interested in sponsoring or exhibiting, contact Project Manager, Paula Murphy (0171-963-5795).