

Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, DC 20554

In the Matter of
Amendment of the Amateur Service Rules
Governing Vanity and Club Station Call Signs
Petition for Rulemaking: Amateur Radio Service
(Part 97)
WT Docket No. 09-209

REPLY COMMENTS ON NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING

The following reply comments are submitted by James R. Maynard III. I have held an Amateur Extra Class license and the call sign K5ZC since 1977. I currently serve as the chairman of the Minnesota Repeater Council, and am past president of the National Frequency Coordinators' Council and the Texas VHF-FM Society. These comments are my own, however, and not of any of the above organizations.

SUMMARY

The comments on club vanity callsigns generally support the idea that limiting clubs to one desirable callsign is a much better idea than limiting clubs to one station license. There are various ways to accomplish this, all of them preferable to the Commission's original proposal of limiting clubs to one license.

COMMENT

Most of the comments the Commission has received have concerned either the proposed 30-day waiting period for licenses of deceased amateurs to be made available, or else the fees associated with vanity callsigns. I have no opinion on the former, and the latter is probably outside the scope of this proceeding.

The commenters who have addressed the issue of desirable callsigns issued to club stations have almost unanimously agreed that the Commission's solution to the problem of having a club hold more than one desirable callsign is to restrict that, not to restrict licenses in general. ARRL, for example, said in its comment (paragraph 13, page 10):

The problem with a blanket limitation on club licenses and call signs is that many clubs have, for example, more than one station (such as a club that operates numerous repeaters). Those clubs have a legitimate need for more than one call sign. Furthermore, the proposed limit would not be sufficient to stem instances of "hoarding" desirable call signs through multiple club licenses. A person could bypass this rule simply by creating multiple clubs. There is no limit on the number of clubs that a group of four persons can form.

This is exactly correct, and other commenters have reached the same conclusions. I don't agree with ARRL's proposed solution of prohibiting clubs from having any Group A callsigns, as it seems just a bit too drastic to me. I would prefer such a solution to the Commission's original proposal, since, as I said in my original comment, that proposal would act to hinder the adoption of new technologies in the Amateur Radio Service.

Frederick O. Maia is the only commenter who presented any substantive argument at all in favor of restricting clubs from having more than one station license. His analysis of the problem is thorough and exhaustive, and the information he presents is valuable. The conclusions he draws from it are not, however.

Mr. Maia calls for cancellation or non-renewal of any club station licenses beyond the first. His stated justification (on pages 10-11) is

There is absolutely no reason for any club station to have more than one station call sign since Section 97.3(a)(25) and 97.119(c) authorizes the use of identifiers which may be included with the club call sign. A unique identifier could be included with a club's primary call sign should an additional call sign be needed. Identifiers answer any perceived need to differentiate between stations operated by a club.

Mr. Maia is apparently not familiar with the D-STAR system I cited in my original comment, as well as others. The D-STAR protocol does not allow for secondary identifiers; its callsign fields are six characters long. In order for a secondary identifier to be used, it would have to be only one character long and could only be used with the very group A callsigns that are at the center of the discussion (because of the required "/" separator). I doubt this is what Mr. Maia had in mind.

Mr. Maia also argues in favor of a provision prohibiting any trustee or club management from forming more than one club. There are many good reasons that multiple clubs might exist, such as legal requirements for owning various kinds of property, agreements with property owners, provisions of members' wills, or simply personal animosities. In amateur radio as in many other fields of human endeavor, a small portion of the people involved do a large part of the work needed to be done, and it's not uncommon at all for one amateur to legitimately be trustee of club station licenses for multiple clubs, the bonafides of which Mr. Maia would have no quarrel with.

Mr. Maia is correct in one thing, though. He says, on page 11, that

FCC enforcement action should be initiated when it is suspected that a club station has primarily been formed to gain access to a preferential call sign.

In fact, this would apply to any abuse of the callsign system, such as Mr. Maia cites earlier in that section. The Commission's enforcement power is more than ample to deal with such abuses, and a few well-publicized enforcement cases would likely end the problem.

ARRL has proposed several solutions to the scarcity of Group A callsigns in paragraphs 17-21 of its comment. I support all of them, though their idea of adding a format with a letter, two digits, and another letter seems more than a little strange, and might draw some opposition. Their proposal to allow issuing callsigns with the currently reserved WR prefix is especially worthy, as many clubs would choose such callsigns for their repeater stations if that were an option. The Commission has never stated its justification for holding these blocks in reserve, and any licenses with WR prefixes issued under the repeater rules have long since expired.

Several commenters suggested returning voluntarily relinquished callsigns to the pool after 30 days, instead of two years. I believe that a shorter period is appropriate, as a licensee can now cycle through several callsigns under the previous holder exception. Thirty days seems too short in the case where a callsign was relinquished by mistake. I would advocate 60 days, to allow ample time for a licensee to receive notification that his application had been processed and file an application to reverse the erroneous change.

CONCLUSION

The comments filed in this proceeding overwhelmingly oppose the idea that a club should be limited to a single club station license. Some form of limit to a club's ability to hoard multiple desirable callsigns without limiting the actual number of licenses is both possible and preferable.

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