

From: Mike Harris [mike@pangolin.co.nz]
Sent: 31 March 2002 12:07
To: radiocomms@pc.gov.au
Cc: support@aussiewinlink.org
Subject: Comments on the Draft Report on Radio Communications
Dr. David Robertson
Presiding Commissioner
Australian Productivity Commission
LB2 Collins St. East
Melbourne VIC 8003
Australia

Dear Dr Robinson,

My name is Mike Harris. I am a holder of British and USA Extra class Amateur Radio Licenses and a Volunteer Examiner for the US system. I have been concerned with long distance ocean cruising for many years and have contributed many magazine articles and written several books on the subject, the most recent being a second edition of "A Guide to Small Boat Communications" (Adlard Coles Nautical).

I have also built and administer the YOTREPS system, which is a voluntary scheme for reporting position and weather observations from vessels at sea. Essentially, this is a system that distributes reports to weather forecasters and search and rescue co-ordinators, and stores them in an internet data base where friends and families can see a plot of the track of participating boats. Further details of the scheme can be found on www.pangolin.co.nz/yotreps/index.asp. YOTREPS is an integral part of WinLink 2000, the Amateur radio e-mail system you have chosen not to allow in Australia.

The direct contribution this makes to marine safety is not, as you suggest in your prohibition notice, "... a substitute for instantaneous communication", but provides search and rescue co-ordinators with an immediate history of the courses, speeds and observed weather conditions actually experienced by boats in a given area. With this information, the SAR co-ordinators are better able to assess which vessels in the area may be best placed to render assistance and through WinLink they also have a means to communicate with them. In the past, there have been numerous occasions when yacht crews have been rescued by other yachts that are often the only vessels able to assist. Some I have been personally involved with as a radio Amateur and can provide details if required. In such cases the saving in tax-payer dollars is clear enough though with Australian amateurs unable to participate the benefits to this country will be limited.

I have read your grounds for this decision and the response by Anthony Van Vugt on 12/March. I am in complete agreement with his comments which I believe are fair and accurate and I can add little more. It appears to me that your decision is based on very limited information about Winlink and since there are few people in the country that have in depth knowledge of the system I feel deeply pessimistic about the outcome of your public hearings in April. However, please put me on your mailing list for further information.

Regards,

Mike Harris G0HOC/KB2SED/ZB2IS/A35MH

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Marine Software and position  
reporting for ocean cruisers.

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