Gentlemen;

First of all, I'm assuming it is not too late to make a submission to your Productivity Commission for Radiocommunications. Secondly, I'm assuming you may accept one from a visiting Canadian.

That being the case, I'd like first to perhaps clarify a couple of items concerning WinLink2000.

1.
Your first point was that WinLink could generate significant additional traffic, resulting in band congestion. In this regard, a single digital message is more efficient than what may be a multirepeated voice message. Also, a digital message to a closer station (Australian in this case) will be transmitted quicker, since errors will be fewer, than would the same message to a more distant location (say the USA).

But perhaps more significant is the fact that amateur radio traffic is always self regulating for traffic flow. The band widths are defined, and if they should become crowded, users will look for better times and conditions and failing that, the operators of repeaters and base stations will modify reception times or rules for connecting. I'd suggest that if congestion is not a problem in the US, where traffic is much greater than could be envisaged in Australia, then it will not be a difficulty here.

2.
It is true that unlicensed users may use voice transmission, although licensed amateurs are very careful to not conduct traffic with them. WinLink users however must be authorized by the system operators in the US before they are allowed to connect to a WinLink station. In this regard, WinLink is much more secure than normal amateur traffic. Perhaps it is assumed that WinLink can be accessed via the Internet directly. This is possible, using TelNet to connect to a small number of WinLink stations in the US and Canada (3 in total), but again only by screened users, who must be licensed amateur radio operators.

3.
Third party traffic restrictions is another noted area in the draft report. One could always say that all WinLink traffic from Australia (or any other country) is solely directed to the US, with whom Australia has a third party agreement. From the US it is redirected to the Internet. Perhaps of greater significance is that traffic out of the country is not by radio but by Internet to the US server which does the distribution.

4.
It should also be noted that WinLink2000 stations outside of the US do not constitute a system, but rather an extension of a system, very much like the Internet itself. While one can pass WinLink traffic from one Australian amateur station to another Australian amateur station or to an Australian Internet user either with or without an Australian WinLink2000 station being used, all such traffic is via the WinLink2000 server in the US. Using an Australian WinLink2000 station merely improves the quality and speed of transmission, reducing airtime as noted previously.

5.
While a yacht in distress may well opt to use WinLink as a means of communication in a disaster situation, it is true as you point out that EPIRBs are designed for that purpose, and, especially the newer generation with location transmission, do an excellent job of saying "Help!"

The main goal of a recreation boater, however, is not to be rescued but to avoid needing to be rescued. Most of us are basically cowards at heart and do our utmost to avoid dangerous weather. To that end, amateur radio in the traditional voice application is of outstanding assistance, and many individuals become amateur operators to access that information. Many other boaties chose to remain non licensed and passively monitor weather advisories by unselfish operators such as John, VK9JA who does an outstanding job of forecasting weather from his Norfolk Island home.

But as anyone who enjoys a Oz barbie must realize, one weather report might be valuable, but two are better. Those who depends heavily on the weather, such as sailors and fliers, soon learn to assimilate all the available date they can, and make their own calls. After all, it's their life. In this regard, WinLink has been doing an excellent job of transmitting data from New Zealand, Hawaii and other locations which make digital weather maps available. Therefore I would like to submit that safety-of-life extends beyond after the fact rescue.

6.
Your draft report also notes that there are other commercially available similar systems which could be

used instead of WinLink. This I suppose is true of all modes of amateur radio communication. There is also a non-commercial systems available (SailMail) to which you may be referring. This system operates identically to WinLink, using marine frequencies and a small number of world wide stations providing service for cost of operation. Many WinLink users also use SailMail, as it is an alternative for simple email communication and acceptable for 'traffic for gain' or business traffic. WinLink, wholly amateur frequencies only, is by necessity non-commercial. It should be noted that SailMail uses the same software that WinLink uses, developed by an amateur operator as a normal result of amateur experimentation and implementation. That amateur, Jim Corenman, KE6RK, has put many hours of his time into developing the software used by the! se system. In addition, there is a semi-commercial US venture (PinOak) which uses the same radio-computer interface as both Airmail (Winlink's software) and SailMail. The hardware is 'Pactor' and was developed by German amateurs as part of experimentation in packet radio improvements. My point is that even the systems used by non-amateurs have been made possible by amateur experimentation. Curtailing amateur operation will not be conducive to improved hardware and software.

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Last year I spent 1-1/2 months exploring Tasmania, which I now consider a potential retirement home if and when I 'grow up'. Concurrently I was using WinLink2000 for the first time while travelling in very remote areas. At that time I was using New Zealand WinLink2000 stations as well as VK7PU who was operating a WinLink2000 station with unlicensed condoning by the ACA. Technically he fulfilled all their obligations of the time, but I gather a license would not be issued as it might open the floodgates. As an aside, I would be surprised if more than 6 stations in Australia wished to operate WinLink2000 stations. The point I'd like to make is that being able to contact an Australian station was much quicker and of better quality than using the New Zealand stations. And the ability to keep in daily touch with our parents in Canada and Australia was apparently very comforting to them, similar to daily contact when sailing. Sometimes in ! open water it is easier to contact a US station than one of the two New Zealand Winlink2000 stations because of geography. Australian stations would be easier to contact than either of the existing alternatives, although I must say it is satisfying to be able to connect at 10W to a station thousands of miles away.

Unrelated to WinLink (finally you say) I'd like to make a couple of observations on licensing.

I have an Australian amateur apparatus license for use on my sailing vessel. That license also allows me (as near as I can tell) to operate my equipment installed in my vehicle. In this regard, I'd suggest that a spectrum license might be more applicable than an apparatus license for amateur licensing. The apparatus license probably started out as such when most, if not all, amateur operators operated only a base station located in their home.

One further request I'd like to make is that you consider recommending the dropping of licensing fees for amateur radio operating licenses. This was done by Canada a couple of years ago to reduce the administrative cost and to encourage the hobby, which has been discouraged by the wide spread use of cell phones and the Internet. These marvellous innovations in communication have reduced the drive to experiment, and thereby reduced to some extent the amount of innovative work by amateurs (WinLink/Airmail and Pactor excepted). Most countries realize that a reduction of amateur operators is a disadvantage in times of regional disaster and wish to see the hobby encouraged. Reducing annual licensing fees is a means to do this.

Respectfully submitted,
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