



The New Foundation Licence– Your Entry into Amateur Radio

The hobby of Amateur Radio has a long and proud history. The very first radio amateurs were true pioneers of radio technology. 'Amateurs' invented and refined much of the early radio technology and were the first to transmit music, radio plays, and information to the handful of people who were fortunate enough to possess a new fangled radio receiver.

During the war years, amateur radio communication was silenced, but radio amateurs enlisted as highly trained and technically competent radio operators in all theatres of war. After World War II the hobby of amateur radio flourished. Radio clubs sprang up in schools all over the world and kids went home each night to build some new contraption, or have a chat with someone over the wireless. A lot of these young people went on to become the mainstay of the technical professions and developed much of the modern technology we enjoy today.

How times have changed. Now, Australia is facing a serious shortage of skilled technical people, especially in the area of telecommunications. Our country, more than ever before, needs bright young people to become technicians, scientists and engineers, instead of lawyers, finance managers and mobile phone salespeople – we already have plenty of these!

Unlike CB radio operators who are limited to operation on two small segments in the VHF and UHF bands, amateur radio operators enjoy the use of extensive frequency allocations within the MF, HF, VHF, UHF, SHF bands and beyond.

Depending on the licence grade, amateurs are permitted to use any currently available mode of transmission such as voice (AM, FM, SSB), digital, TV, etc. Also, there are a number of orbiting satellites that amateurs can use to relay their transmissions back to earth, including the international space station, and talk to amateur radio operators in other countries.

With the skills shortage being a high priority, the Australian Communications and Media Authority, in consultation with the Wireless Institute of Australia (the peak body representing Australia's amateur radio operators), has introduced a new entry level 'Foundation Licence', which came into operation on Wednesday 19 October 2005.

In the past, obtaining an amateur radio licence meant long hours of study and having to learn Morse code. However, since January 2004, Morse code has been dropped as a requirement for an amateur radio licence. The 'Foundation Licence' focuses on candidates having basic knowledge and skills sufficient to demonstrate competency in the assembly and operation of an amateur radio station, using commercially available equipment.

'Foundation Licence' candidates will also need to be aware of how amateur radio relates to other users of the radio spectrum, licence conditions, technical basics of electricity and electronics, transmitters, receivers, antennas, etc.

Depending on the prior technical knowledge of the candidate, it would be possible to obtain a 'Foundation Licence' after only one two-day workshop.

Shortly, 'Foundation Licence' candidates will be able to purchase a 'Foundation Licence' study manual from their local Newsagents. This comprehensive manual contains all the basic theory candidates need to study to be able to pass their theory examination. Local amateur radio clubs, Amateur Radio NSW and the Wireless Institute of Australia will be holding regular workshops

and examinations for 'Foundation Licence', 'Standard Licence' and 'Advanced Licence' candidates.

The 'Foundation Licence' provides a great opportunity for young people to foster an interest in radio communications technology and perhaps lead them on to a rewarding career in science, electronics, or communications.

And for those who are contemplating, or are already enjoying, their retirement, the 'Foundation Licence' offers an opportunity to enter the wonderful hobby of amateur radio and to communicate with other people within Australia and around the world. Outback travellers, sailors, retirees, or anyone with a little time to spare and a curious mind will find amateur radio very rewarding. The new 'Foundation Licence' makes obtaining an amateur radio licence very achievable with just a few hours of study.

The Internet is a great source of information on amateur radio, the Wireless Institute of Australia (WIA) website www.wia.org has a lot of information including links to club websites and a link to the WIA broadcast pages.

The Blue Mountains Amateur Radio Club (BMARC) website www.bmarc.org has information on meetings, workshops and other club activities.

For information on 'Foundation Licence' workshops and examinations, contact the Secretary BMARC on: education-bmarc@bmarc.org

Amateur Radio has been dubbed as 'The world's only, fail-safe method of communications'