
NZART: Licensing Of Amateur Repeaters, Beacons And Links - An Update

Summary

The MED has introduced a number of step-wise changes in the licensing of all radio services, including Amateur repeaters, beacons and links. Many of our members appear to be unaware of these changes, despite much publicity by the MED (several direct mail-outs to all licensees) and FMTAG and Council (Break-In, HQ InfoLine, Official Broadcasts and Branch visits).

Failure to understand these licensing changes can have costly consequences, particularly if the Annual Licence Fees are not paid by the due date.

The total cost of re-certifying a cancelled licence is in the region of seven to eleven times the Annual Licence Fee. Fines for operating while un-licensed typically start at five to twenty-five times the Annual Licence Fee.

The automated collection of Annual Licence Fees commenced in July 2005, for all services except Amateur repeaters, beacons and links. From that date the Amateur repeater, beacon and links licences showed an Annual Licence Fee of \$50, but fee collection was "turned off". The MED "turned on" the collection of the Amateur Licence Fee in July 2006, after 12 month's grace.

324 licences are currently in the name of NZART Incorporated. Failure to pay the Annual Licence Fee has serious practical and monetary consequences.

Failure To Pay The Annual Fee For An Existing Licence

SMART operates automatically, without human intervention, issuing emails at every step of each process. In the case of failure to pay the Annual Licence Fee for an existing licence, SMART automatically cancels the licence and erases all its engineering records, without human intervention.

This means that once cancelled, a licence cannot be re-instated. A new licence has to be applied for, and pass through the Engineering Certification process, as if it were a new licence application. The hidden dangers of this process will be discussed in the next section. SMART sends an email to the Licensee, advising of the cancellation, and of the severe consequences of operating the station without a licence.

SMART also sends an email to the nearest MED Field Office (previously known as the Radio Inspector's office). This describes the new licence granted (for inspection) or the old licence cancelled (for inspection to confirm that the station is no longer operating and has been dismantled). MED compliance action (warning or infringement notice and fine) follows if a cancelled licence station is found to be still operating.

With 324 licences currently in the name of NZART, it will be seen that the failure to pay the Annual Licence Fee has serious consequences. The largest group of these licences falls due for payment in two month's time.

Hidden Dangers Of Licence Cancellation

MED document PIB38 requires that each new or modified licence has to be certified to be compatible with every existing licence within a radius of 2 km, or more in certain circumstances. In other words, every new licence granted since our particular repeater licence was granted, has had to be made compatible with our old licence.

This is sometimes referred to as "first in time rights". Often the certification process reveals technical problems, requiring the new licence to be on a frequency other than that preferred by the applicant, and sometimes in a different frequency band.

On cancellation of an old licence, for example for non-payment of the Annual Licence Fee, the "first in time rights" are lost. The new, replacement, licence becomes the "last in time", and has to be made compatible with all existing licences. Similarly, a frequency or band change may be required.

The Special Case of TV Channel 39 (614 MHz To 622 MHz)

NZART holds 30 licences on Channel 39, distributed around New Zealand. These licences effectively prevent the use of Channel 39 for non-Amateur use, and force prospective broadcast applicants, for Channel 38 and Channel 40, to engineer their applications for

compatibility with our existing Channel 39 licences.

The recently proposed MED procedures for licensing additional Channel 39 Amateur stations , or for modifying existing Channel 39 Amateur stations, are more complex than previously .

It is likely that the cancellation of a Channel 39 licence, for non-payment of fees, would make it more difficult, or impossible to re-certify, prevent the re-licensing of that station. This is a serious hidden danger.

MED Spectrum Management And Registration Technology (SMART)

SMART is a fully automated licensing system. Each intermediate step of the SMART process must be satisfactorily completed before the SMART software permits commencement of the next step.

In the case of new or modified licences, one such intermediate step is the payment of fees. The process stops if the fees are not paid, and the application is erased from SMART after a period.

In the case of the Amateur Service, the minimum cost is \$50, being the Annual Licence Fee , plus a zero dollar Engineering Certification Fee, provided that a charitable MED-Approved Person, willing to waive the fee, and having the required software and 3 to 5 hours to spare, needed to certify each licence application, can be found.

The Amateur Licence Fee requested for a new application can differ from \$50, depending on the timing difference between the Application Date and the Annual Billing Date of the licence applicant.

In the case of the Amateur Service, when Engineering Certification by the MED is chosen, the typical fee is \$350, consisting of the \$300 MED Internal Engineering Certification Fee plus the \$50 Annual Licence Fee. Similarly, the Annual Fee can differ from \$50, owing to timing differences.

Another option is External Engineering by one of the Approved Radio Engineers or Approved Radio Certifiers, listed on the MED's web site. The Approved persons typically charge \$ 300 to \$500 for Engineering Certification of an application, depending on its complexity. Similarly, the \$50 Annual Licence Fee, and any timing-difference supplement, is additional.

Failure to pay either fee freezes applications at the payment request step.

The present NZART policy, of not paying the Annual Licence Fee, has stopped all new or modified licence applications. Existing applications, frozen by non-payment, are being automatically erased by SMART, as time progresses, while this policy continues.

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