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Under the baton of maestro Roger Smith The end of a symphony of another kind



Roger Smith

The musical analogy that was made of a symphony orchestra and conductor from the very beginning of the 1997 World Radiocommunication Conference continued to the very end. "You truly are a maestro!", Robert Jones, Director, Radiocommunication Bureau, said to Roger Smith (Australia), Chairman of WRC-97, after the signing of the Final Acts. "Your warmth, wisdom and patience made for beautiful music. And to remind you of your leadership here at WRC-97, I would like to present you with something [compact discs] that hopefully you will enjoy listening to as you return to summer down under".

ITU News took this opportunity to ask Mr Smith what he really thought of WRC-97.

■ Mr Smith, what in your view were the most contentious issues for the Conference?

They turned out to be the ones we had predicted well in advance. Anyone would tell you, I suppose, that the non-geostationary satellite (non-GSO) systems in the fixed-satellite service (FSS), was a contentious issue. But we did work towards something that gave a satisfactory outcome. There were promising signs from the beginning of the Conference. There were tensions as well. But there was also a lot of good will. The key results we have achieved include establishing a basis on which new non-GSO FSS systems can develop. The methodology adopted is quite new and obviously will benefit from the

Mr Smith taking his final bows, after many curtain calls, said that the main objective of WRCs was to try to facilitate, to the extent possible, full access to the radio-frequency spectrum for all who seek it. While he found the musical analogy appropriate, he remarked that "it was certainly very hard to keep all of the players in tune, or even playing the same piece of music. I even recall one member of the orchestra in the closing minutes of

the Conference who was playing an English tune from a Spanish score. Still, the symphony has been completed".

further studies to be undertaken on sharing methodologies. I was particularly pleased also to see the Conference confirm the future for Ka band non-GSO systems for which the 1995 Conference had laid the groundwork. [WRC-95 allocated 400 MHz of spectrum in the 19 and 29 GHz bands to non-GSO FSS systems for Teledesic Corporation, which along with Motorola's *Celestri* were looking for an additional 100 MHz at WRC-97. The additional allocation has been made in the bands 18.8–19.3 and 28.5–29.1 GHz.]

Another contentious issue I would say was the broadcasting-satellite service (BSS) planning. That initially proved to be highly contentious and extremely time-consuming. The question here was primarily the concern that the old BSS Plan, which was drawn up by the World Administrative Radio Conference (WARC) in 1977 for Regions 1 and 3,

no longer reflected the realities. There was a need to make adjustments to the Plan to recognize the needs of new countries (new ITU Member countries or those which have geographically or administratively changed since 1977). Several developing countries also wanted additional channels. So I think in that respect, the BSS Plan proved very contentious. But with the good will of all and with the dedication of the Radiocommunication Bureau, the Conference made history by adopting not only the revised BSS Plan, but also a preparatory process to enable work to be done in preparation for a substantial planning task at another radio conference in the year 2000 or 2001.

■ ***What is really at stake in the non-GSO FSS arena, particularly for the user?***

I think there are huge commercial business and service interests at stake. It is not just a commercial issue of companies that wish to design, build and operate a satellite system that is dependent upon a regulatory framework which has yet to be put in place. It is all the services that will flow from it. I see these technologies and use of technologies not so much in the sense of the commercial interests that are trying to promote them, but rather of the people who will then want to use the services. Many of them will be the types of services that will impact on people that just simply do not have a satisfactory service now. And some of these services may be out of the financial reach of some countries. But I think anything that provides a better local communication infrastructure will, in the end, benefit everyone. That is why we had to try to give the new systems being proposed an opportunity to develop.

■ ***ITU's notification and coordination process for satellite networks has been in trouble for sometime now because of the so-called "paper satellites". Do you believe that the "administrative due diligence" concept agreed upon by the Conference will really improve the situation?***

I suppose from a personal point of view I have a more direct knowledge of the problem of satellite

overfilings or paper satellites. Australia was the sponsoring Administration for Resolution 18, which the Plenipotentiary Conference adopted in Kyoto in 1994 to review the Union's frequency coordination and planning framework for satellite networks. So I guess in a sense, we have a stake in raising the issue in the first place. We felt then and still feel that the problem of paper satellites and the massive coordination load that comes from them both renders the coordination and planning process quite unsatisfactory for the ITU and all the countries. That is why Australia and WRC-97 debated the issue quite extensively, first, in a Working Group of the Plenary and later, in the Plenary itself.

Some progress was made but I think less progress than I personally would have liked to have seen. The administrative due diligence concept* that the Conference adopted is unlikely to have any significant effect on the volume of paper satellites. My own personal view is that only some form of financial fee is likely to be more effective and beneficial in offsetting high costs to the ITU.

■ ***A lot of preparatory work went into WRC-97. Did this make things any easier?***

I am sure it did. Many of the issues were much more easier to debate and much more easier to try to settle because of all the preliminary work from regional groupings such as the Inter-American Telecommunications Commission (CITEL), the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT), the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT) and the Arab and African

* This concept requires regular disclosure of implementation data for satellite systems, such as the name of the spacecraft manufacturer, the name of the satellite operator, the contractual date of delivery and the number of satellites procured, the name of the launch vehicle provider, the name of the customer and the contractual launch date. This aims at minimizing the number of paper satellites by requiring information which becomes available when systems have reached an advanced stage of development and are soon to be deployed.

Groups. I think this is the first Conference, really, where I have seen such a large amount of preparation, not only technical preparation, but also bilateral and multilateral discussion and consultation and the attempt by a large number of countries to try to get together to harmonize their views on the various agenda items of the Conference. I am convinced that regional cooperation is now an essential benefit to conferences. The groupings enable individual country differences to be worked through and to be resolved away from the Conference floor.

However, some people may have not seen that in a positive light. Indeed, the fact that you get a grouping of countries together to reach common proposals may sometimes be perceived by some countries to be somewhat presumptuous. But I have seen it differently. I think it saves the Conference having to do that preliminary work. If the Conference had to try to harmonize and narrow down the gaps in the views between a large number of countries, that takes a lot of time.

■ ***Looking back at what seemed to be a very "punishing agenda" and at the remarkable achievements, what would be your advice for future WRCs?***

There is an increasing problem. We hold WRCs every two years but the volume of material that we want to consider is increasing exponentially and is already beyond the capacity of WRCs to handle efficiently. There is also the associated problem of the volume of work for administrations. Some people have suggested that we should stretch out these conferences and have them every three or four years. But in my view, that will not solve the problem of the volume of work. That, in fact, will be going backwards. We should be more practical in assessing priorities and keeping agendas to a manageable size.

■ ***As a regulator yourself, how do you perceive this role in an ever-changing telecommunication environment?***

As a regulator back in my own country, philosophically we have taken the view that our role is a sort of a misnomer in some ways because some people see a regulator as someone who tries to use regulatory measures to constrain or regulate things in a way that somehow prevents or controls something. Well, in a sense that is true but what we have always tried to do in Australia and what I think the ITU as a whole itself is trying to do is to turn it around and say well, our role is not to put rules in place to constrain people. Rather, it is to put rules in place that assist the orderly development of services. As regulators we put the road signs that prevent the accidents rather than the barriers that prevent cars going through.

Roger Smith is Senior Executive Manager of Planning and Standards at the Australian Communications Authority (ACA). Mr Smith has held several senior management positions in various aspects of communications since 1979. He was First Assistant Secretary (Division Head) for Broadcasting Policy from 1983 to 1989 and First Assistant Secretary for Radiocommunications from 1989 to 1993. He moved to the Spectrum Management Agency when it was established in 1993. This Agency became the ACA on 1 July 1997.

In recent years, he has been responsible for Australia's spectrum policy development, spectrum planning, technical standards and regulation as well as for international radiocommunication policy and management. He chairs Australia's International Radiocommunications Advisory Committee which is responsible for establishing the country's positions in, and contributions to, international forums including meetings of the ITU's Radiocommunication Sector and world radiocommunication conferences.

Since the Dubrovnik Assembly in 1986, Mr Smith has led Australian delegations to virtually every CCIR (International Radio Consultative Committee) Plenary Assembly or Radiocommunication Assembly (since 1993) as well as to WARC-92, WRC-93 and WRC-95. He has also represented his country on the ITU Council from 1987 to 1992 and attended Plenipotentiary Conferences, including the Additional Plenipotentiary Conference in 1992 (as Head of delegation). He has participated in every meeting of the Radiocommunication Advisory Group since its inception in 1993.