

FISTS DOWN UNDER



Newsletter of the Australian / New Zealand chapter of the International Morse Preservation Society

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This month:

- 'Radio active' survey results
- The EZKeyer
- Let's stand up for straight keys
- International Lighthouse and Lightship Weekend activation

Members' news

The results of the Harry Angel Memorial Sprint (held on 3 May) were recently published and several FISTS members took out three of the top four places. Congratulations to Steve VK7CW #14164 (first), Joergen VK2KJJ #9689 (second), and both Andrew VK2ONZ #15873 and Chris VK2CTN #9057 (equal fourth). One of the aims of the FISTS Club is to 'further the use of Morse code'. Taking part in contests (and submitting a logsheet) is one way to support this aim.

Doc VK5BUG #14136 - I'm planning to finish building my 807-807 160m AM transmitter once I have finished upgrading my EMR status here. Having a ground mounted aerial means I am automatically a Level 2 station and there are a number of requirements to be met for that. My 170+85ft EDZ for 40m has its ends on two boundary fence lines, so I am replacing the 4m masts with 6m timber ones to assist with compliance.

I recently acquired a set of Yaesu twins from the early 70s: FLDX400 / FRDX400. Another project rears its head! Looking forward to having them both operational, even though most of my RF results from solar/ wind/ battery power here. 300W wind turbine + 300W solar panels into 496Ah of deep cycle batteries.

Thomas VK3EO #14161 - Just bought a new ATU for the setup, but I have a high noise level on 40m at the moment. I will be moving house in the next few weeks and will hopefully be able to set up a relatively noise free dipole for 80 through to 10m. Once that's set up, I will make sure I put out some calls on CW, because I think we need all the activity we can get. I haven't used 80m in a long time, so it will be good to have a band other than 40m to use at night.



VK3EO shack: Kenwood TS830S, Ameritron AL-80B.

Geo VK4XY #9069 - Took part in the Trans-Tasman contest on 19 July. I was only on for about 2 1/2 hours, covering 3 x 1 hour sessions. In that time, I had 20 QSOs with 9 stations. It is a slow moving test and needs lots more operators. I did not note any FISTS members. Band conditions were typical for a winter night.

Alan VK6PG #9018 - FISTS awards have been slow due to poor conditions these days. For me the magic FISTS WAS Award would be nice to have but still need about seven States to get there, HI.

I see that FISTS has now joined ClubLog and is listed in the clubs option. This might be of interest to other members and worth checking out: <http://www.clublog.org>

Plans are well in-hand for the 100th (2015) Anniversary of the Gallipoli Landings. I've written two papers, with another two to go. These are 'Gallipoli: Signals' and 'Gallipoli: Encryption Techniques'. Thank goodness we have the Internet to help with the research.

Chris VK2CTN #9057 - Recently installed an automatic antenna tuner module into the Elecraft K3. Band switching and tuning is so easy now, compared with a manual tuner. 80m has been really good lately, with low QRN and strong signals between VK and ZL.

Quiz

What do each of the following amateur radio acronyms ending in OTA stand for?

IOTA SOTA
JOTA RAOTA
CASHOTA

Answers:

Castles and Stately Homes On The Air
Radio Amateur Old Timers' Association
Jamboree On The Air
Summits On The Air
Islands on the Air

Survey results

Chris VK2CTN #9057

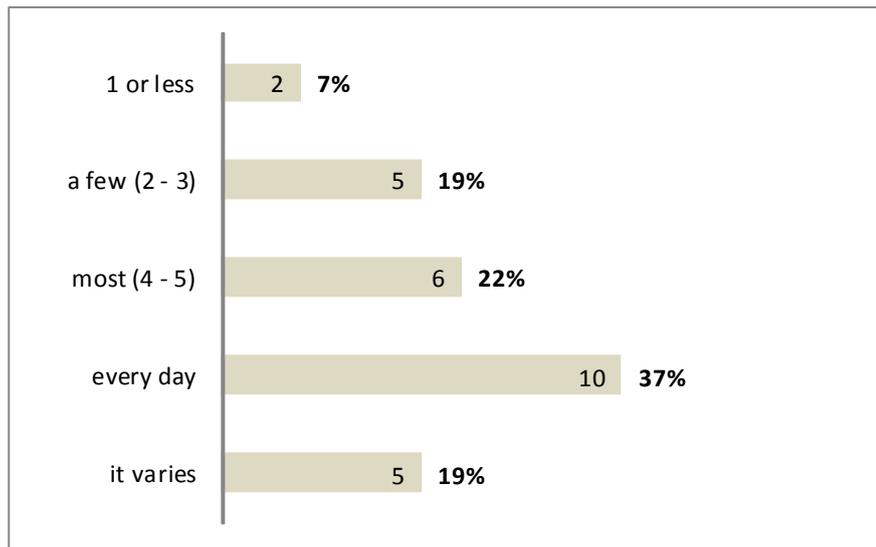


Last month we asked you how 'radio active' you were. That is, how often do you go on-air? The purpose of the survey was to get an idea about membership activity on the bands.

A total of 27 members completed the survey: 14 from Australia, 10 from New Zealand, 1 from French Polynesia, 1 from Guernsey and 1 from England. Excluding the latter two, this represents just 15% of FISTS Down Under members.

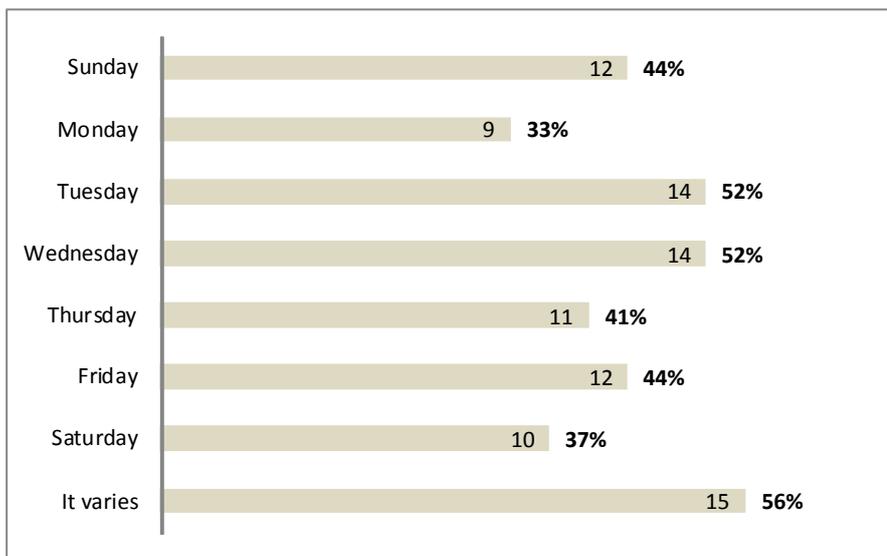
A graph of the responses to each question is shown below. Please note that the numbers in the columns represent the raw count data, followed by the overall percentage of responses to each option.

1. On how many days of the week are you likely to be on-air?



This question received an encouraging response, with 10 members (37%) saying that they go on-air every day of the week. Only two members (7%) said that they are likely to be on-air 1 day a week or less.

2. Which days of the week are you most likely to be on-air?



Tuesdays and Wednesdays are equally the most likely days that members go on-air, followed closely by Fridays and Sundays.



Wire antenna termination

- David VK3DBD #3756

Whether we use insulated wire, or bare wire on our aerials, we somehow feel the need to use old fashioned insulators. Why? Habit of course. Better to keep a low profile...

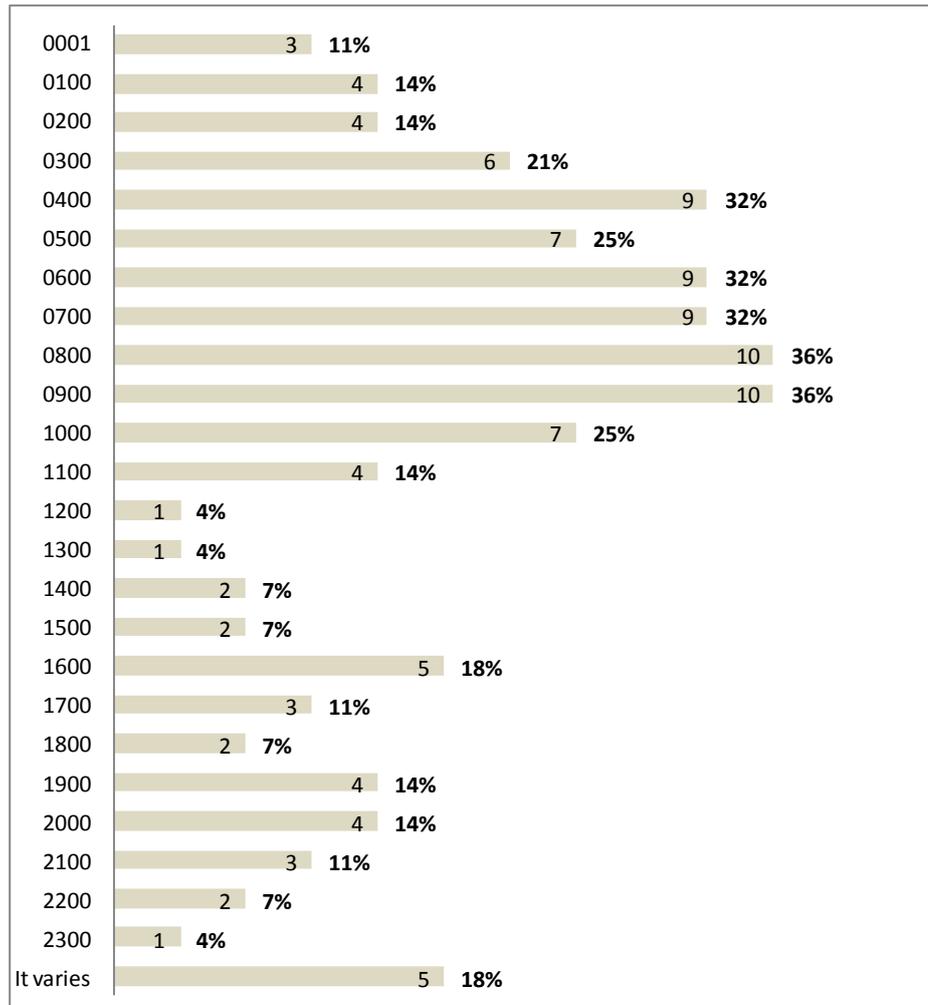
Fishing line is nearly invisible, even 50lb line. Modern nylon monofilament fishing line and other man-made ropes have excellent insulation properties.

One of the most durable and long lasting materials is garden strimmer/ whipper-snipper line. It is immensely strong and tough. I have never seen it chafe through or break, and it is certainly a superb insulator.

The photo shows a neat and secure termination. It doesn't matter that the screws in the choc block may rust eventually. There was a time when they were brass!

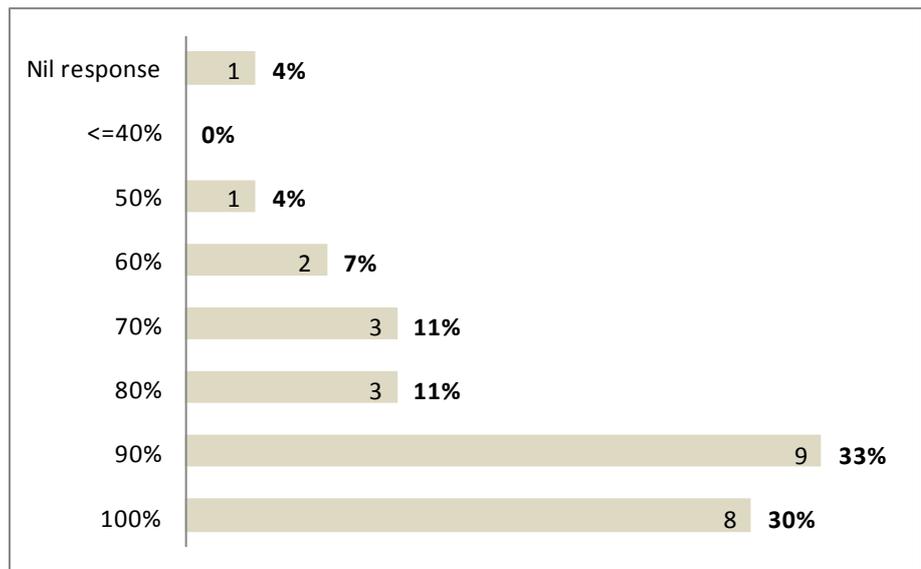


3. Which times (UTC) are you most likely to be on-air?



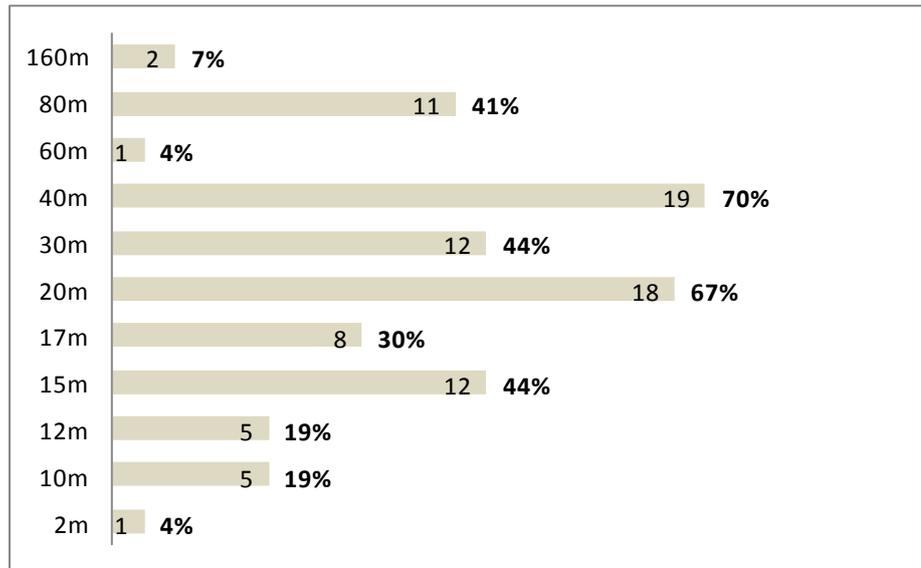
0800 and 0900 UTC are equally the most preferred times, with 0400, 0600 and 0700 UTC being equally the next preferred times. 0800 UTC equates to 6pm Australian Eastern Standard Time, and 8pm New Zealand Standard Time.

4. What percentage (approximately) of your contacts are made using Morse code?



Almost two-thirds of members indicated that they use Morse code for between 90 to 100% of their contacts. Perhaps this isn't surprising, since they are members of a CW club! There were no responses that indicated the use of Morse code in 40% or less of all contacts.

5. Which band(s) do you use most often?



The most popular band is 40m, with 70% of members using this band, followed closely by 20m. The most popular of the WARC bands is 30m, with 44% of members using this band.

Remarks

It was great to see that over one-third of members go on-air every day of the week, with Tuesdays and Wednesdays being the most popular days. The most likely time for members to be on-air is around 0800 UTC. Almost two-thirds of members use Morse code for between 90 to 100% of their contacts, and the most likely band to find members on is 40m.

The results of this survey provide some food for thought and may assist members with finding activity on the bands. Several members gave useful feedback and suggested ideas in the 'comments' section, which will be considered by the FISTS Down Under administration team.

Thank you to the following members who participated in the survey:

FO5MD	VK3AGQ	VK4ZW	ZL1WI
GU3TUX	VK3BAA	VK6PG	ZL2AIM
M0BVE	VK3FGE	VK7JB	ZL2AOH
VK2ASB	VK3HJ	ZL1ALA	ZL2APV
VK2CTN	VK3KX	ZL1ARW	ZL2AUJ
VK2GAZ	VK3XU	ZL1BRS	ZL3PAH
VK2KJJ	VK4MDX	ZL1MH	

Donations

Many thanks to the following members who included a donation when renewing their membership:

Stan ZL2AMM #9023
Phil ZL2OWL #14122

Membership renewals

Ralph ZL2AOH #1073

The following memberships are due for renewal to the end of August 2014. Some are well overdue.

9006 - 9007 - 9012 - 9053 - 9058 - 9066 - 9082 - 9083 - 9566 - 9609 - 9613 - 9674 - 9675 - 9677 - 9691 - 9697 - 9699 - 14124 - 14130 - 14131-14134 - 14135 - 14138 - 14142 - 14145 - 14147 - 14158 - 14167 - 14169



If you are listed incorrectly, wish to receive a replacement reminder notice or would like to discuss your membership with us, please email us at: fists-down-under@ihug.co.nz

Trawling the web

Ian ZL2AIM #9683



A site this month is one that I have been using for a year or so called the Four State QRP Group. They are an interesting group of amateurs who meet once a month for a social get together. The site is <http://www.4sqr.com/index.php> and they design and bring out kits that are fun for the CW enthusiast and of course cater for the QRP gang. I confess to being a QRP enthusiast for the past 12 years or so.

I would like to introduce you to a small but fully functional memory keyer which they call the EZKeyer. I built their earlier version (which is now discontinued) and found it to be easy to build and fun to use.

For the earlier version they suggest that it is built in the famous Altoids tin which is not easily obtainable in New Zealand, but I had found a slightly larger tin at the checkout at Farmers in Thames which worked just as well. But I was drawn to their newer version, which had its own enclosure and had some added benefits. I ordered it (they have PayPal etc.) and my landed cost was NZ \$54.97 (US \$45.00).

Most of the modern day transceivers have electronic keyers already built-in, but not all of them have memory keyers. I have found that my hand gets tired calling CQ CQ over and over again, notwithstanding that I use a paddle and not a straight key for calling a QSO. This is where a memory keyer holds its own. I have a few rigs that don't have memory keyers built in. They are my Yaesu FT817, OHR 100A, TenTec 1340 and Icom IC706MKIIG. Calling on these rigs can be a bit of a pain without the memory keyer. It gets even worse when you are in a competition or party and you have to keep on calling.

I didn't take any photographs of the kit when it arrived, but you can see from the following pictures that it was very easy to put together and had few components. They supply the enclosure as a flat box and you have to break off all the bits needed. I was a little wary of this as I wondered what would happen should the pieces not break off in a clean straight line. I needn't have worried, as they snapped off as intended.

The edges of the box need to be soldered to each other. I held the pieces together with a few elastic bands and tack soldered the box in a few places. That was enough to make the box strong enough for its intended purpose. It was a very easy process to build the box.

They don't supply the battery container but any plastic AAA battery holder will do the job. I just held mine in place with some glue. It took me about 30 minutes to populate the circuit board and another 20 minutes to build the enclosure. It worked first time.

It took me about 45 minutes to program the 3 memories for my purposes. Incidentally everything is supplied except the batteries and the battery holder. It has a speed range of 5 – 55 words per minute, and can hold three memories stored in EEPROM. Two of the messages can hold 47 characters whilst the third one can hold 79 characters.

There are two ways of changing the speed of the keyer. As you can see from the photograph of the bottom of the case (photo 3), they have printed the keyer commands and they have included a command for setting the speed. The second speed change can be done on-the-fly. Push and hold pushbutton #1 and quickly tap the dot paddle (to go faster) or the dash paddle (to go slower).

One of the problems with using a small memory keyer such as this one, is the fact that it is difficult to remember how to access the menu. Four State QRP Group have solved that by printing the menu on the rear of the box! The sidetone (600Hz) can be turned off. Once I had programmed my 3 memories I just turned that function off. Each message can be set to be repeated and the length of interval can be programmed. It doesn't need an on off switch as it uses flea power to do its job and then goes into sleep mode when not in use. They claim 1mA active and 1uA in sleep mode!

If you are working portable (and that is the real fun of QRP) then this is a lovely small bit of essential equipment along with a small paddle such as the Palm Mini Paddle. I am having quite a bit of fun using this memory keyer along with my FT817. A great combination!



1. EZKeyer (front panel)



2. Inside the box.



3. Commands menu printed on the back of the box.



4. EZKeyer and Palm mini paddle

Key dates

FISTS Activity Day

Every Tuesday

Send CQ on the FISTS calling frequencies and hopefully you will quickly be answered by a fellow FISTS member!

Remembrance Day Contest

Sat 16 - Sun 17 August

0300 UTC - 24 hours

This contest commemorates the Amateur Radio Operators who died during World War II and is designed to encourage friendly participation and help improve the operating skills of participants.

It is held on the weekend closest to the 15th August, the date on which hostilities ceased in the southwest Pacific area.

It is preceded by a short opening address by a Guest Speaker transmitted on various frequencies during the minutes prior to the contest. During this ceremony, a roll call of amateurs who paid the supreme sacrifice during WWII is read.

More details: www.wia.org.au

Let's stand up for straight keys

Ken ZL1AIH #9094

Back in the '70s I was working at the Mitsubishi dry-dock near Hiroshima during a refit and conversion of a small cargo-passenger ship, mv 'Enna G'. Originally built for the Holland-America Line for the trans-Atlantic run, it accommodated 70 passengers in luxury (for those days). Even the Radio Officer had his own bathroom.

During the voyage back to San Francisco with only a skeleton crew, I experienced extreme constipation for the first time in my life. After several days without relief, the discomfort was so bad that I could not sit down. The Chief Steward opened the Doctor's surgery but we could not find any appropriate medicine.

If you have ever tried to operate a straight key while standing up, or use a typewriter for 15 minutes (5-figure code weather map), believe me, it's a struggle. The Master recommended a 'Medico' message to RCC Honolulu which would have included name, rank and medical condition which would have been extremely embarrassing for me.

Meanwhile, news of my condition had spread among the crew. The 2nd Steward (a gentle giant from Tonga) arrived at the Radio Room with a small bottle of white syrup and a tablespoon, advising two spoonfuls. Fortunately my cabin with private bathroom was next door. The relief was both violent and immediate.



Ken ZL1AIH - performing a Bach prelude in the Passenger Bar, 1976.

The Chief Bartender was not impressed. The few Bach devotees listened intently while the others quickly finished their drinks and left the bar. He gently pointed out that when the Tongan group were entertaining, his bar sales soared.

I got the message when he offered to send free drinks, provided I confined the Bach Preludes to my cabin.

Epilogue: While berthed in San Francisco awaiting cruise passengers, I bought myself a fine (expensive) classical guitar (my other hobby) and within hours the 2nd Steward asked me if the Tongan boys could borrow it to practice as a singing group to entertain the passengers during the cruise. I went ashore and bought a more suitable and inexpensive guitar and donated it to the Tongan group.

What goes round comes round. When my watch-keeping time overlapped dinner (daily time-zone changes) a Dining Saloon steward would bring a menu to the Radio Room and later deliver my dinner on a tray, neatly cut into bite-size pieces so I could operate or type with one hand and eat with a fork.

Them were the days.

International Lighthouse / Lightship Weekend

Doc VK5BUG #14136

I will be taking part in the International Lighthouse and Lightship Weekend (ILLW) and Adelaide Hills Amateur Radio Society (AHARS) Parks Awards on 16 and 17 August.

The details are:

Times: Core 0001-0630 UTC; other times as available ad hoc (holiday format)

ILLW reference: Marino Rocks Lighthouse number 2087

AHARS Park reference: Marino Conservation Park

QTH: 35.0537 S 138.5118 E 128m ASL

Frequency of operation: 28040 - 28060 KHz

Mode: QRP CW

Callsign: VK5BAR (Adelaide Hills Amateur Radio Society club callsign)

Station: 5W, homebrew 5/8 lambda vertical and radial farm, homebrew Cootie key

QSL address: PO Box 401, Blackwood 5051 South Australia



Marino Rocks Lighthouse



Until next month, 73