FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

Created in 1964 by Geoff Watts, a leading English short wave listener, and taken on by the RSGB in 1985, IOTA is an amateur radio activity programme designed to encourage contacts with island stations world-wide. The oceans' islands have been grouped into some 1200 'IOTA groups' with, for reasons of geography, varying numbers of 'counters', i.e. qualifying islands, in each. The objective, for the island chaser, is to make radio contact with at least one counter in as many of these groups as possible and, for the DXpeditioner, to provide such island contacts. For both it is a fun pastime adding much enjoyment to on the air activity. 22 separate certificates are currently available for island chasers, graded in difficulty, as well as two prestigious awards for high achievement. See IOTA Rules, Section A.

WHICH ISLANDS COUNT?
To count for IOTA islands need to meet a few simple rules relating to location. They must not lie in rivers, inland lakes or seas, narrow gulfs or largely enclosed bays. They must be a minimum distance from the mainland. And they must be shown and named either on Google Earth or on another officially recognised reference map. Most islands world-wide that meet these requirements are listed in this Directory. They are grouped wherever possible since they are far too numerous to be allowed to count separately. If you cannot immediately find the island you want in the list, look for the officially recognised island group name, e.g. the Canary Islands if you want to find Lanzarote. Where there is no officially recognised group, an IOTA group name is often given to cover a range of islands in a particular geographical sector. Look through these, possibly with an atlas to hand. If the island qualifies for IOTA, it will be covered by a group in the list and will normally be named. See Section B.

HOW DO I KNOW IF AN ISLAND HAS BEEN ACTIVATED?
For a specific island, it is not always possible to know or find out. The Directory indicates the IOTA groups that have been activated, not individual islands unless they constitute an IOTA group on their own. These are shown with a reference number, e.g. EU-001 for the Dodecanese. Such numbers are frequently quoted on the air or on QSL cards. IOTA groups with known qualifying islands that have yet to be activated are listed with a provisional number e.g. OC-288P. The number is confirmed as soon as a valid operation is judged to have taken place. See Section B.

WHAT IS THE SCORING SYSTEM?
For the standard category of application you count one credit for a confirmed contact made on any HF amateur band with each IOTA group listed. Additional credit is not given for a second confirmed contact either with the same island or another in the group. The only exception to this is if you are running a second record in the VHF / UHF category of application.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR AN AWARD?
The basic award is the IOTA 100 Islands of the World and this is normally where to start. But, before doing anything, make sure you have to hand the latest issue of the IOTA Directory with current island listings and award application rules as it will not be easy to prepare an application without one. You can download the Directory from the RSGB IOTA web-site[1]. Applications are made on-line on that web-site by means of the web-form provided. Complete your application and mark it as ready for processing. It will then be flagged up with your Checkpoint (for a list of these, see Annex A) for checking prior to it being cleared for acceptance on the Central IOTA Database. The standard

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[1] http://www.rsgbiota.org

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method of application requires sight of proof of contact either in the form of a QSL card or in the form of an on-line confirmation of the QSO in an annual IOTA Contest log or in a Club Log log. Once you receive confirmation that your application is being processed, mail the cards (where appropriate) with adequate return postage and the required fee to your Checkpoint. If you have matched IOTA contacts in either an annual IOTA Contest or a Club Log log, you may claim credit without submitting QSLs. See Section C.

WHY DO I NEED TO PROVIDE PROOF OF CONTACT?
IOTA is a difficult award programme to administer. IOTA groups are not always distinguishable by the call-sign prefix or suffix and mistakes can easily be made. To maintain the integrity of the programme the person certifying the application needs to be thoroughly familiar with IOTA and its rules and to have access to proof of contact, the IOTA Directory and a good atlas during any card-checking. To meet a demand for local processing of IOTA applications, a number of Checkpoints have been appointed overseas.

ARE PARTICIPANTS' SCORES PUBLISHED?
The IOTA Honour Roll and other performance tables giving participants' scores are regularly published on the official IOTA web-site. As a record of current achievement these listings are a popular feature of the IOTA Programme. See Section D.

HOW DO I GET IOTA INFORMATION?
The IOTA web-site provides a wealth of information on island activity as do a number of other excellent websites and DX bulletins and web clusters. Access to one of these sources is a 'must' for the keen IOTA island chaser. See Annex G.

WHAT ARE THE IOTA MEETING FREQUENCIES?
The main frequency is 14.260MHz. Other ones on SSB are 28.560, 28.460, 24.950, 21.260, 18.128, 7.055 and 3.755MHz. The CW frequencies are 28.040, 24.920, 21.040, 18.098, 14.040, 10.115 and 3.530MHz. No specific frequency has been nominated for 7MHz CW but it is recommended that operations should include a frequency above 7.025 when the band is open to North America. The 14.260 frequency and other nominated frequencies are not reserved exclusively either for IOTA nets or for the making of island contacts but are shared with others on a normal non-interference basis.

CAN I HAVE A NEW GROUP ADDED TO THE LIST?
The standard answer is no. IOTA Management has set a limit of 1200 on the number of groups on the IOTA list to prevent the IOTA 'total' becoming an unmanageable figure. We took the view that an 'open-ended' programme would not be popular with the majority of island chasers, primarily for reasons of time and expense. Proof of contact has to be submitted for each credit claimed and there has to be a limit on the work that we ask Checkpoints to undertake. For every island that seems to be a good candidate for a separate IOTA group, there are hundreds of other similar candidates elsewhere, each with its own ardent champion! A detailed set of criteria have been used to establish the present list and, while we don't claim that different groupings might not have been equally feasible, we believe that the present list is fair, provides a useful mix of easy and difficult groups to work and at the same time reflects decisions taken at earlier stages of IOTA Programme development. IOTA Management is however committed to reviewing the list every five years. In the meantime, with the rare exception of the occasional new island DXCC entity group that might qualify under the rules for separate listing or of a previously declared 'barren' IOTA group found to possess a valid island, no new groups will be added. As

for the five year reviews, we can say only that, while we do not wish to bind the hands of IOTA Management in the future, we do not currently expect any changes made to be more than minimal. See Section E.

FOR DXPEDITIONERS

HOW MANY CONTACTS DO I NEED TO MAKE FOR MY OPERATION TO BE ACCEPTED?

There is no minimum required unless you are operating from a provisionally numbered group and are expecting that number to be confirmed. In this case, see Section E.2.

DO I NEED TO TELL YOU MY PLANS IN ADVANCE OR CONTACT YOU AFTERWARDS?

No, it is normally not necessary. Just let the DX bulletins know your plans so that they can publicise the operation. However, this said, there are occasions when you need to be in contact with us. If you plan to operate from a new, i.e. provisionally numbered, or rare IOTA group or a group which geography, politics, or licensing or environmental restrictions make difficult to access, please contact us early in the planning stage as there is a procedure you will need to follow for your operation to be accepted for IOTA. For routine, i.e. not new, rare or difficult, operations you do not need to send any documentation to us – in fact we prefer you not to do so – but it is prudent to keep travel invoices, ticket stubs, permits and evidence of being on the island in case of subsequent challenge. See Section F.

DO YOU PROVIDE FINANCIAL OR OTHER ASSISTANCE TO DXPEDITIONERS?

No. IOTA receives no outside sponsorship and fees do not fully cover the costs of management and programme development. However, the Island Radio Expedition Foundation, Inc. (IREF) is an organisation set up with the primary function of assisting IOTA expeditions to operate from all-time new or very rare IOTA groups. If you are planning an operation that you think will qualify for support, contact IREF[2]. In the current absence of more than one or two other funding bodies, work on the basis, particularly for DXpeditions to easy or moderately rare groups, that you will probably have to finance by far the major part of your expedition costs from your own resources. By all means advertise for support in the DX bulletins – this has quite a good record of producing contributions from individual amateurs. If, however, external funding is essential to the expedition going ahead, you need seriously to consider whether or not to proceed.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT THE RARITY OF AN IOTA GROUP?

The IOTA web-site shows for each group, by means of a search routine, the percentage of total record-holders who have the group credited. A 'most wanted' list is also provided showing, for each continent, very rare (defined as credited to less than 20% of record-holders) and moderately rare (defined as 20 to 30%) IOTA groups in descending order of rarity. See Annex H.

CAN I PUBLICISE MY OPERATION THROUGH IOTA HQ?

Yes, on the RSGB web-site. You are encouraged to enter details yourself via a web-form available there. This service is moderated so there may be a delay before the information appears. Please do not include queries about island validation, assistance with funding, etc. Don't forget, you could also obtain useful publicity by forwarding this information directly to the DX bulletins. See Annex G.

WHEN IS THE IOTA CONTEST?

The IOTA Contest, now one of the most popular contests in the contest calendar, is always held on the last full weekend in July each year. It is managed by the RSGB Contest Committee[3], not by IOTA Management. For contest information, see its web-site[4].

CAN I RESERVE AN ISLAND FOR THE IOTA CONTEST?

All you can do is to publicise the fact that you are planning to operate from a particular island during the July contest. Do this through the normal publicity channels, including reflectors. See Annex G.

CAN I USE THE RSGB IOTA LOGO ON MY QSLS?

Yes, you can use the logo so long as you do not amend it in any way. It can be downloaded from the RSGB IOTA web-site.

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE ON QSL DESIGN GENERALLY?

Continuing growth in popularity of the IOTA Programme makes simplification of the card-checking procedure essential. Care on QSL design can help enormously if it removes all scope for ambiguity about the island location at time of contact. It is for this reason that we require the island name to be printed on the card and that the island is one that is recognised as valid for the programme through its listing in the IOTA Directory. **Please, therefore, make sure that you print the island name, as well, of course, as your call-sign since failure to do this can invalidate your operation for IOTA**. Also, although it is not as essential, please print the IOTA reference number on the card but first check it against the listing in this Directory as some numbers have changed from earlier listings. See Section C.4.

CAN YOU PROVIDE OVERSEAS LICENSING INFORMATION?

Ask RSGB Headquarters[5]. Or you can check the web-site[6] run by Veikko Komppa, OH2MCN which covers the licence requirements of almost every country in the world. It is regularly updated and is undoubtedly the most comprehensive source of other countries' licensing information available on the Internet.

ABOUT THE ON-LINE SYSTEM

WHERE CAN I FIND DETAILED INFORMATION ON THIS?

Section C.5 and, in more detail, Annex C provide information on how to get started, including the registration process for preparing an award application. Go to the web-site and browse through it. Each screen is accompanied by a full explanation of the features available. This has been translated into several languages with, it is planned, more translations to come.

IS THERE ANY PROGRESS TOWARDS GETTING CREDIT ELECTRONICALLY FOR QSOS WITHOUT SENDING QSLS?

Yes. A major rewrite of the IOTA software was started in late 2015 and is scheduled to be fully released in spring 2017 although some modules could be launched as early as mid-2016. The main new feature will be a facility for confirmation of contacts by the matching of QSO information with logs in Club Log. Keep a watch for announcements on the IOTA web-site.

You can claim credit for contacts made in IOTA contests from 2004 onwards without submitting QSL cards provided that the other station submitted a log and the contact details match. Usually in late November each year, a few weeks after the contest has been adjudicated, the logs will be uploaded to the IOTA web-site to enable applicants to claim credit.

WHAT ABOUT LOGBOOK OF THE WORLD (LOTW)?

We are continuing software development and one of our projects is to investigate the potential for linking up with ARRL's LoTW.

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[2] http://www.islandradio.org

[3] iotacontest@rsgbcc.org
[4] http://www.rsgbcc.org/hf/rules/2016/riota.shtml
[5] Iota_hq@rsgb.org.uk
[6] http://www.qsl.net/oh2mcn/license.htm