

Centre for Justice and Liberty
Representing the Independent Christian Broadcast Media Industry

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Dear Sirs,

Thank you for yet another opportunity to respond in regard to media ownership rules. We would ask that all restrictions on religious organisations holding licences be removed to provide a level playing field for Christian and other religious broadcasters within the already existing, safeguards in the comprehensive rules on programme content.

The Centre Represents the UK Christian media industry including: music producers, radio and TV broadcasters, production companies and internet service providers – employing between them about 1,000 people with a £20-30million annual turnover.

The Industry Requests an opportunity for Christian and other religious broadcasters to apply for any UK broadcasting licence just like their secular competitors – to meet unfulfilled demand for Christian broadcasting nationwide from Shetland to the Channel Islands – and to adhere to existing religious programme content rules and safeguards. (Radio and TV exposure will enable the Christian music industry to develop and prosper at home and in European and International export markets).

We are asking Parliament to remove the ban against religious persons and bodies applying for licences for national and regional analogue and digital terrestrial TV services, and licences for:

1. National analogue radio services
2. National digital radio services
3. Local digital radio services
4. National digital sound programme services
5. Local digital sound programme services
6. National digital additional radio services
7. Local digital additional radio services

[UK Radio Authority Religious Ownership Guidelines 1997, Annex II]

Under the 1990 + 1996 Broadcasting Acts, all these disqualifications apply to:

- [a] A body whose objects are wholly or mainly of a religious nature
- [b] A body which is controlled by a body falling within paragraph [a] or by two or more such bodies taken together
- [c] A body which controls a body falling within paragraph [a]
- [d] A body corporate which is an associate of a body corporate falling within paragraph [a], [b] or [c]
- [e] A body corporate in which a body falling within any of paragraphs [a] to [d] is a participant with more than a 5% interest
- [f] An individual who is an officer of a body falling within paragraph [a]
- [g] A body which is controlled by an individual falling within paragraph [f] or by two or more such individuals taken together

[UK Broadcasting Act 1990 Schedule 2 Part II 2 (1)]

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Our view is that for 1,500 years in this country, rather than offend, Christianity has been the basis for bringing in laws to protect the weak and vulnerable. Our nation's laws were based on the Ten Commandments laying the basis for a history of religious tolerance where other cultures and faiths find refuge. We question if it is in fact the authorities themselves who are offended by the faith that speaks of love, joy, peace, patience and loving your neighbour as yourself. From our own experience, Christian radio and TV offers something both creative and positive to offer to the viewing and listening public.

The Christian Media Industry has grown in the last ten years because the restriction on satellite and local ownership was relaxed. It has made a positive contribution to the nation and broadcasting choice and diversity. National demand for Christian radio has grown larger from the delight of listening on satellite and questioning why this cannot be heard in cars alongside Classis FM, Talk, Sport, Virgin FM and Radio's 1,2,3, and 4? Why is it OK for one and not the other?

In this digital era, there is plenty of frequency to provide a wide variety of programming. Surely this is the opportunity to remove the ban and allow true choice and diversity, with Christians having the opportunity to apply for licences. They will then win or lose a licence on the merit of their application. The Christian broadcasters already have to compete for listeners on satellite and are more than able to compete for terrestrial licences and raise funds just like other Independent broadcasters.

We would dispute that religious content has a particular capacity to offend those with different views. This nation still has a State Church and still believes in freedom of religion. Surely it is not the Government's place to ban religious broadcasting when every radio and TV set has an on/off button giving people the right and freedom to choose for themselves.

We are sure that the DCMS are aware of the Radio Authority codes, which were put in place to prevent the exploitation of the weak and vulnerable and function today with the broadcasts on satellite and local radio. These would serve equally well to protect and enable Christian and other religious groups to apply for national TV and radio licences alongside their secular counterparts.

If the local digital ban is being removed, what makes the national anomaly so different? We would ask that the Christian media be given a fair opportunity to provide interesting relevant broadcasting. This would provide a level playing field regardless of race, sex or religion.

We believe that the whole of the Christian media industry is being thwarted by the ownership restrictions - an industry that would thrive, pay its taxes and benefit this nation. This would release British music and creativity to provide work, exports and opportunities for broadcasters, musicians, engineers, producers, writers etc. Why should they be openly discriminated against because they are religious? We ask that you will give them the opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



Gareth Littler
Director



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Director