



 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

ARCHBISHOPS'
COUNCIL

The Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP
The Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

25 January 2002

Dear Madam

1. The Church of England is pleased to respond to the media ownership questions that are raised in the DCMS consultation.
2. The Church of England welcomes the commitment to ensuring that diversity and plurality will be safeguarded in the change to a more competitive broadcasting environment.
3. The Communications White Paper in Para 4.9.2 refers to the 'particular capacity of religious views to offend those with different views...' Whilst recognising that this can sometimes be true, the Church of England believes that the expression of the religious or spiritual side of our humanity is an essential part of healthy and whole living. It is the proper expression of this aspect of life that we wish to see in all aspects of broadcasting, not just the explicitly religious.
4. Far from religious viewpoints being the source of controversy or offence to those with different opinions, it is often religious sensibilities that are offended by broadcasting which is insensitive to religious belief or which is devoid of the understanding that people hold sincere religious views.
5. Religious broadcasting is therefore a vital part of broadcasting provision and ought to be available within the mainstream as part of the commitment to diversity and plurality, irrespective of specialist activity.
6. The Church of England would wish to see a broadcasting environment in which different opinions and views can be expressed with tolerance and respect. Religious broadcasting should have a significant profile in this area because these are values promoted by mainstream religious belief.
7. The Church of England believes that the historic commitment to Public Service broadcasting and to the statutory requirement to include religious broadcasting within the terrestrial channels should be defended. This is the best way to ensure that the public has access to mainstream religious opinion and a gateway to the spiritual dimension of life. Such arrangements, once foregone, are hard to re-instate, if experience in other parts of the world is anything to go by.

8. The Church of England would not wish to see religious bodies impeded in the ownership of broadcasting licences of particular kinds. To do so is a denial of the right to free speech and the open commitment to diversity and plurality will be undermined unless this argument is accepted.
9. That does not mean that this is a right without obligations. All licence holders, including religious bodies, must understand that they have a public duty to regulate content and account for what is broadcast. Religious bodies seeking a licence must be able to manage the expression of views with tolerance and mutual respect, but must also be allowed to broadcast their own views with integrity and without interference.
10. Where the available spectrum is limited, this is of particular significance because of the need to ensure that access is fairly granted as well as being freely available. Unfair access, or access that is perceived to have been granted unfairly is perhaps worse than no access at all. It would therefore be vital that DCMS established a coherent and acceptable system for judging between competing claims including other than purely economic criteria. Such a system would need to judge whether news and current affairs services could be provided without the *appearance* of bias in the case of a national or multiplex licence owned by a religious body.
11. The Church of England seeks to work ecumenically in matters such as public policy wherever possible. The Church of England is aware of the submission being made by the Churches Advisory Council on Local Broadcasting (CACLB) which is an ecumenical body and to which the Church of England belongs. This letter may be read alongside that submission, a copy of which is included for ease of reference. It is also aware of the complementary submission of the Sandford St Martin Trust.

Yours faithfully

The Rt Revd Nigel Mc Culloch
Bishop of Wakefield