

Media Ownership Consultation Responses
Broadcasting Policy Division
Department of Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London
SW1Y 5DH

24/01/02

Dear Sir/Madam

In response to the request for views on restrictions to Religious Broadcasting I would like to submit the following.

Cross Rhythms, a registered charity, started broadcasting in 1983 on Plymouth Sound ILR, a weekly Contemporary Christian music and biblical teaching programme. In 1998 we launched a 24 hour a day radio station on Sky Digital (876). This broadcast is non-commercial and consists of approximately 80% music.

It is notable that Contemporary Christian Music is the fastest growing genre of music in the world, primarily in the USA where the Christian labels of multi million dollar selling artists, have been bought by major labels such as EMI and Warner Alliance. In the USA the growth of CCM has taken place since the 60's, backed up by radio airplay. Currently there are over 1600 Christian radio stations in the USA.

In response to point 1.2 in the consultation document of November 2001 concerning encouraging 'competition and economic growth', and point 3.5 concerning the encouragement of competition and new investment for UK industries, I would believe the UK Christian Music industry would stand to benefit very significantly from increased audience awareness of it's products. As with America however, this industry relies on it's core market base, Christians, to generate sales and awareness. Notably, songs with clearly Christian lyrics, get little to no airplay on mainstream radio stations. The comment is usually the quality is not good enough. In reply, the multi-million dollar industry, the use of exactly the same studios and producers for the albums released, and the fact that we ourselves are able to run a 24 hour radio station, with no discernable difference in quality to mainstream stations, makes this at best laughable, at worst prejudicial and grossly bias.

Cross Rhythms Radio station broadcasts nationally on Sky digital and has done for nearly 4 years without complaint or concern. We broadcast nationally on the internet too. Gratefully, we have also been chosen as one of the 15 groups involved in the government's Access Radio pilot scheme for community radio. We find it strange and an anomaly that we are free to broadcast or bid for these opportunities but would not be able to apply for a national license should one become available.

Often we hear that concerns over religious broadcasting centre along the comments in point 6.1.6 that 'religious content has a particular capacity to offend those with different views and opinions, or, sometimes, to exploit the susceptibilities of the vulnerable'. To be honest, the reality is that we all already have different views and opinions and I find that there is much concern within the Christians of this nation at the content of much that already passes onto our screens and airwaves. Christians are particularly offended by the high availability of pornography channels on satellite; the obvious rise in increasingly sexual and pornographic programming on mainstream tv; the increasing number of programmes that feature the occult as entertainment (from children's programmes upwards); the language and base humour employed by many popular dj's and presenters; and the use, by the vast majority of recording artists, of sexy videos, sexual gestures, expletive filled lyrics, and the use of drugs and violence as an acceptable lifestyle, in order to sell their music. Christians would feel the continual influence of programming of this nature already 'exploits the susceptibilities of the vulnerable', particularly the young.

In response, the call is that those who do not like certain types of programming know where the off switch is. Is Christian programming, which promotes reconciliation between people, values life and the family and

suggests 'love your neighbour' as a byline, really so threatening that the same response cannot be given to those who may not appreciate *it's* content?

We live in a world of differing views and opinions. Any restriction on religious broadcasting is effectively looking to remove certain opinions from the market place of discussion. Christians are not looking to be treated any differently to anybody else. The same codes cover our broadcasts. We are just looking to be treated the same, and to have the same freedoms.

As a Christian broadcaster I would add that we would have no problem with other religions having the same freedoms to broadcast too. In addition, in point 4.2 which details media limitations across 17 other countries, I believe I am correct that for all those countries listed, none have the religious prohibitions that exist in the UK.

We believe there is a valuable place for religion in the fabric of our society. In a recent international survey the UK was ranked the second most 'godless' country in the world, after Japan. This does not reflect a strength within our society, it reflects a dangerous loss. In a culture of media communication this is hardly surprising. The Christian church and other religions need to acknowledge they have not been very good at using the communication methods of our age, but similarly the restrictions and regulations imposed have held them back. After all these media restrictions on religious bodies over the years, now would be a very good time to take positive steps to allow religious broadcasting to stand freely in the market place, on their own merits

Yours faithfully

Jonathan Bellamy
Cross Rhythms
General Manager