

# *Consultation on Media Ownership Rules*

## **A response from the Scottish Episcopal Church Information and Communications Board**

Introduction - We note the care that is being taken to consult widely and welcome the principle. We would urge adherence to the Government's first principles contained in *A New Future for Communications - We will ensure that citizens and consumers are safeguarded*.

Public Service Broadcasting – We continue to be concerned that all elements of public service broadcasting are contained within mainstream output and press for an assured place for religious programmes within the remit for public service broadcasters. A more lightly regulated sector would probably lead to the disappearance of some religious programming. The experience of de-regulation in commercial radio has shown this to be a likely outcome, unless specific care is taken to ensure the place of religious broadcasting.

Controls on religious groups holding licenses – The Government's proposals are generally welcomed. However, the potential for offence to be caused by groups pursuing some religious agendas has been demonstrated elsewhere in the world. The 1990 Broadcasting Act already allows religious bodies to hold local terrestrial analogue licenses and there is a case for them, with proper safeguards, being able to hold national licenses – both analogue and digital – and for digital to be added to the categories of local licenses.

Ownership and access to radio – Some 60% of the commercial broadcasting industry is currently in the hands of the larger groups and the more this trend continues the less local control there will be.

As new forms of access to radio develop, it is important that controls governing this are in place to prevent a replication of the way in which larger scale commercial radio stations have moved into the hands of a few multiple operators.

Conclusion – It is essential that nothing be done to reduce consumer confidence and also – with regard to radio and television broadcasting - to ensure a broad mix of programming, including religious broadcasting.

**Gerald Stranraer-Mull  
Convener of the Board**