



25th July 2004

Party Political Broadcasting Consultation
Broadcasting Policy Division
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London
SW1Y 5DH

Dear Sir/Madam

Party Political Broadcasting Consultation

Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall (MK) would like to respond to the above consultation on one key point – the present unfairness of the qualification for party political broadcasts.

On page 15 of the consultation document, you note the Electoral Commission's recommendation that "qualification for a party political broadcast should continue to be based on the number of candidates being fielded by each party." On the same page, you note that the present "qualification criteria for party political broadcasts is that the political party should be fielding candidates in at least a sixth of the seats being contested."

From our perspective, this is a state of affairs which denies our party fair and equal access to the media during the election period. To put this in context:

- The United Kingdom presently has 659 MPs. State-wide political parties such as the Green Party or UKIP need contest only 110 seats (16.7%) to qualify for political broadcasts.
- Some flexibility already exists in the system to allow for political parties from Scotland (72 seats), Wales (40 seats) and Northern Ireland (18 seats) to have broadcasts. As a result Plaid Cymru, SNP, UUP, SDLP, DUP, Sinn Fein, the Alliance Party, the Workers Party and the Scottish Socialist Party were all able to gain television airtime leading up to the 2001 General Election.
- In Northern Ireland, only two of the six parties allocated broadcast time put forward candidates in all 18 seats (SDLP and Sinn Fein). The DUP contested 14 seats (78% of the available seats) while the UUP fought 17 (94% of the available seats). The Alliance Party and the Workers Party fought only ten and seven of Northern Ireland's 18 seats respectively (56% and 39% of those available).
- By contrast, at the last General Election, Mebyon Kernow – the Party for Cornwall put forward candidates in three of Cornwall's five constituencies (60% of the available seats). In 1997, we put forward candidates in four of the seats (80% of those available).
- In both the 1997 and 2001 General Elections, we were denied our own broadcast. In 2001, we fought a higher percentage of the seats available to our Party than the Alliance Party and the Workers Party in Northern Ireland who did have broadcasts.



- In both the 1997 and 2001 General Elections, MK was also the only political party standing in Cornwall which was denied a broadcast. In the same election, party political broadcasts for the Green Party, Pro-Life, Socialist Labour and the Socialist Alliance were screened on TVs throughout Cornwall, even though none of these parties had put forward candidates locally.

It is our view that the system whereby parties qualify for broadcast time must be reformed to allow a greater regional dimension, allowing genuine regionalist or nationalist political parties (which do not and cannot operate over the whole of the UK) fair access to the media.

This is already happening in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as noted above. It is therefore especially undemocratic for this not to apply equally to Cornwall and Mebyon Kernow. MK is campaigning for greater Cornish self-government and therefore only stands candidates in Cornwall.

How can the Department for Culture, Media and Sport justify a situation, whereby to get a parliamentary broadcast, Mebyon Kernow would have to stand in all five Cornish seats as well as 105 parliamentary seats outside of Cornwall?

Might I remind the Department for Culture, Media and Sport that political parties such as MK, which have traditionally been denied media airtime still have to pay the same deposit to stand and do not receive any other commensurate benefits.

This issue is of fundamental importance to MK and we would welcome entering into a dialogue with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to investigate how this situation can be resolved.

Thank you