

*Dear Sir/Madam,*

The Community Media Council for Northern Ireland is the representative body for all 14 community radio stations in Northern Ireland.

Please find below the Council's response to your Consultation.

Individual stations may also be submitting their own individual responses also.

Many thanks,

*Sean Og Mac Braoin*

*An Cathaoirleach Deonach.*

**1. Do you agree with the proposed criteria for Ofcom to apply when considering a 5 year extension?**

We agree that a provision in law for the extension of community radio licences is needed.

We feel that decision to relicence should be based on achieving the targets of individual stations key commitments.

On this basis we feel that stations should receive licence extensions for a further five years. However, we strongly feel that licence extensions should not be restricted to one single 5 year extension. We believe that licensing extensions should be ongoing at 5 year intervals for stations without an arbitrary limit and subject to meeting key commitments and that such relicensing should not necessarily prevent other applicants applying in the same area to serve any community/community-of-interest that they have identified. Subject to frequency availability, there is no reason why there should only be one community radio licence in a region.

When it comes to relicensing, we feel that the key commitments of stations should be reconsidered amended to make sure that they continue to meet the changing needs of their communities.

**2. Do you think the 50% funding restriction from any one source should be lifted?**

Yes.

The amount of wasted energy and talent that is put into constant funding applications and securing finance would be better placed being put into social gain activities and any amendments to the current regulations which improve this situation would be welcomed.

We do not agree with the proposition that funding of more than 50% from a single source would represent undue influence and there are sufficient regulatory powers and provisions in the Broadcasting Code to prevent this happening.

We would apply this rationale equally to the 50% restriction on funding from advertising & sponsorship which we feel should be also lifted.

Furthermore, we oppose the rules prohibiting stations whose broadcast area overlaps with a commercial station whose MCA between 50,000-150,000 from carrying remunerated on-air advertising or sponsorship and would ask that the DCMS reflect once again on this.

We feel this amounts to restraint of trade and is in breach of competition rules. We would request that this matter be referred to the Competition Commission as a previous request made to Ofcom in this respect was not acted upon. If this restriction is retained then the MCA of 'small' commercial stations who are part of larger groups and who network any part of their output should be calculated on the basis of the total combined coverage across the networked group.

**3. i) Do you think that the rule prohibiting a community radio station from being licensed if it would overlap with an existing local radio service whose MCA is no more than 50,000 adults, should be lifted?**

Yes. We believe that the rule prohibiting the licensing of a station who would overlap with an existing local radio service whose MCA is no more than 50,000 adults is incompatible with competition regulations and should be lifted. We feel that communities are being denied a voice in areas supposedly served by small commercial stations but which are in fact served by one part of a large networked group.

**ii) If so, should the advertising and sponsorship restriction be applied to community radio stations that overlap with local radio services of up to 150,000 adults?**

No. We do not agree with the restriction on stations whose MCA is up to 150,000, preventing them either partly or entirely from receiving on air advertising and sponsorship. As previously indicated, we believe this amounts to restraint of trade and is in breach of competition rules.