



Emily Thornberry

Labour MP for Islington South & Finsbury



David Patterson
5th Floor
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

Our Ref: JM/HARD02009/02081389

19 July 2009

Dear Mr Patterson

Re: Free-to-Air Events Review

Please find enclosed letter I sent the Secretary of State for Culture, Media, and Sport last October about free-to-air sporting events.

I would be very grateful if you could include the points I raise as a response to the consultation you are currently conducting.

Yours sincerely

Emily Thornberry MP
Islington South and Finsbury

ON YOUR SIDE

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I am committed to keeping my constituents informed on issues which may be of interest to them, and the local Labour Party may write to you from time to time. If you do not wish to receive any correspondence from me, please drop me a line at the above address.

Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP
Secretary of State
Department of Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

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09 October 2008

Re: Review of free-to-air sporting events

I was interested to hear that you recently announced your intention to review the list of sporting events shown on free-to-air TV.

I think that protecting the place of sporting events with national significance on free-to-air TV is very important. I believe that there are strong grounds of principle for extending the range of sports that are guaranteed full live coverage on the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 networks – such as the Six Nations, Ashes, and Ryder Cup. I also support your comments about widening the number of sporting events with women teams that are shown on network television.

I understand from the DCMS leaflet on ‘Coverage of Sport on Television’ that certain national sporting events are only entitled to delayed coverage of highlights on network TV (i.e. ‘Group B’ events) because although they “*meet all the criteria for listing [they] can cause practical difficulties for the terrestrial free-to-air channels to broadcast live, perhaps due to the length or breadth of the event*” (p.6).

Alongside the principled reasons for extending the events on free-to-air TV, I believe there may also be a practical opportunity with the digital switchover coming up. I think the ‘practical difficulties’ with scheduling referred to in your department’s leaflet will be far less significant once the switchover has taken place, since there will be so much more airtime on free-to-air network channels.

I therefore think we have a great opportunity to extend access to national sporting events, which would, as a constituent of mine pointed out to me, be a popular extension of our Government’s decision to grant free access to museums in the late 1990s. I urge you to use the review to ensure that all sporting events with a national team are covered live and in full by the BBC, ITV, or Channel 4 networks.

Emily Thornberry MP
Islington South & Finsbury