

Dear Sir,

I am writing this submission to the interim Digital Britain report on behalf of the Scottish Public Radio Working Group. This initiative was set up by Fife-based broadcaster and independent producer Lesley Riddoch and Lothian-based IT entrepreneur and former Channel 4 Director, Ian Ritchie. Further details of the group and its members are included on the attachment.

The attachment provides a summary of our editorial ambitions for a new Scottish Public Radio service, proposed ways of working and details of the new and innovative partnerships we will develop to generate content.

Basically, we think there is a case for a not-for-profit station, along the lines of NPR stations in the USA. Part of our thinking is that technology is now sufficiently developed to give us easy access to a great deal of supporting material -- intelligent speech-based material from world radio stations and UK podcasters that could be deployed – giving us the time, money and airtime to focus on sourcing original high quality Scottish material. Various Scottish partners seem keen (in principle) to participate.

We've taken soundings from a great many people including John McTernan, Blair Jenkins, John McCormick, James Boyle, Lord George Foulkes (who helped us persuade Ofcom not to ditch the Talk 107 FM licence at Christmas) Lord Charlie Falconer, Lord Gus MacDonald, Mike Russell and Pete Wishart MSPs and Brian Wilson. All have been supportive about making sure radio isn't ignored in the efforts to get a new digital TV channel for Scotland. We have also been working on a business plan in association with Scottish Enterprise.

There have also been a number of meetings with Ofcom, both in Scotland and with Peter Davies in London.

We believe that our proposal outlined in the attachment has a very good 'fit' with the key objectives contained in the interim Digital Britain Report and would like to highlight the following key synergies.

- Section 2.4 outlines many of the benefits radio brings as part of the national discourse and as an important voice in local democracy. High quality news, intelligent speech and local information are all part of our proposal. A new innovative radio service can help meet Action 16 regarding '.....desires in Scotland for a stronger, distinctive national voice'.

- Section 2.4 Action 9 mentions the social gain from community radio. We plan to work with this sector to bring appropriate programming to a wider audience and provide sustaining material if desired.
- Section 3.3 has many aspirations and we believe SPR meets many of them. It will increase the range of news, analysis and debate. It will add plurality to commissioning, generate community and user generated content, widen the range of voices and add to the development of a creative cluster. It will be an important addition to informing the democratic process in Scotland, particularly at a time when many of our media outlets are contracting. The model we propose is also open to content created beyond the traditional closed networks and business models of existing broadcasters.
- Section 5 deals with skills and media literacy. Much of the content on SPR will be developed in partnership with members of the public, community groups, public bodies and educational establishments. Giving these groups opportunities to work in partnership with professional broadcasters will greatly assist in spreading communication and digital skills.

Our group is keen to participate further in developing the Digital Britain Report and to participate in the events being planned in the coming months.

We look forward to taking part in the process.

Yours sincerely,

Neil A Fraser

On behalf of the Scottish Public Radio Working Group.

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### Scottish Public Radio – a proposal

#### Overview

- Scotland is a reading, news gathering, talkative and discursive culture facing the prospect of a loss of Scottish based media. At this critical juncture, Scotland needs more, not less, national debate.
- Our newspapers are in decline and have so far been unable to develop credible multi-media offerings on par with UK and international papers.
- STV remains under considerable financial pressure, as does the whole ITV network.
- BBC plans to expand into local video journalism have not been permitted. Radio Scotland simply doesn't have enough airtime to transmit the wealth of material available. Long held ambitions to broadcast separate services on its FM and AM frequencies look more distant than ever.
- While small scale community based radio is thriving on the work of enthusiasts and volunteers, the bigger commercial radio groups have all but abandoned significant local speech content.
- The Scottish Broadcast Commission proposes that a digital TV station be created. It is a laudable ambition but it will require time and a significant amount of funding to be fulfilled. A radio service could be up and running in a relatively short time, at a fraction of the cost.
- The SBC's contention that a radio service will spring from a TV service is, at best, not proven. Historically, radio services have developed first and, once established, provided the template for similar TV services - Radio Nan Gaidheal to BBC Alba, World Service to World Service TV, 5 Live to News 24
- Radio is thriving - enjoying record listening figures and successfully exploiting new forms of distribution. A growing number of people tune in through TV sets, over the

internet and on their phones and other mobile devices. International audiences are also reached through internet streaming and many people are listening at a time to suit them by downloading radio content in the form of podcasts.

### **Scottish Public Radio (SPR)**

- SPR will be run on a public service, not-for-profit, basis, funded by a combination of sponsorship and commercial income, contributions from educational and cultural trusts, and from listener's donations, in a model similar to the various National Public Radio stations based around the USA.
- Using Skype and ISDN lines to increase the range of voices on air without increasing "meeting miles", we believe there is an opportunity for a new format of radio station, one that would be genuinely innovative and would serve its listeners with an intelligent speech service, provide a real alternative to the BBC in public service broadcasting, and create a model that might be emulated elsewhere in the UK.
- SPR will seek to have a strong internet presence. As well as streaming and downloading, social networking, twitter and other new forms of communication will be used to develop a new, innovative relationship with listeners.
- Until DAB is a healthy platform and digital radio in cars is a mainstream feature, radio will have to use FM frequencies to reach listeners – in addition to digital, online and podcasting. The Talk 107 FM wavelength may be re-advertised – Ofcom's Radio Licensing Committee are due to decide in April.
- Initial discussions have been held with Ofcom Scotland on licensing and transmission issues.

### **Working in Partnership**

- A key element of the proposal is to develop content through partnership with public and other interested bodies. This brings considerable editorial benefits and should prove cost effective.
- Stories, books, debate, description, comedy, lectures, festival events, community projects, advicelines, community spots, education features, local history, guided walks – the list of what Scotland is doing, working to achieve and talking about is long and colourful. Scottish Public Radio could help Scots hear themselves and connect with and challenge the public bodies that drive their life. We'd aim to raise the bar for communication between agencies and the public they serve – dished up with **intelligence, humour and local savvy**. Some potential partners have been approached informally and are enthusiastic. They are anxious to work with professional broadcasters to develop new forms of communication.
- **Public agencies** are trying to inform the public about their activities and initiatives. From historic sites, DIY energy-saving programmes, re-training and re-skilling to health messages - agencies and quangos are spending large budgets to get their message over.

Slots and programmes on these subjects could really reach the public, thanks to the involvement and tweaking-power of professional broadcasters.

- **Education** - a wealth of audio material is already being produced by schools, colleges and universities as podcasts. We would work with our educational establishments to broadcast the best material – and hopefully raise standards in the process.
- The **arts community** are anxious for both funding and recognition. We would hope to work with artists and Creative Scotland to encourage the recording and broadcasting of publicly funded arts events ranging from comedy to drama.
- Edinburgh has five **festivals** and there are similar events across Scotland. High quality speakers, from across the world are attracted to science, book and other spoken word events.
- Political coverage is currently limited. SPR would seek to work with politicians at all levels to promote public debate and regular audience programmes.

### **Podcast savvy**

- Every journalistic venture needs sustaining material – in the case of SPR, quality speech broadcasting which is easy and inexpensive to obtain. Contacts have already been established with NPR -- who have offered their programmes cost-free – and with other public broadcasters across the world. There is a well established network of quality **English language broadcasters** who share and swap material. We would seek to bring the authentic voices of other nations and the best international material to a Scottish audience.
- We would seek content partnerships with established media organisations like the **Guardian** and **Scotsman** both of whose senior management we've met to discuss the supply of podcasts and possibly a news service.
- Some material produced by community, special event and internet radio based in Scotland is suitable for rebroadcast to a wider audience. SPR could be used as a sustaining service by community stations.
- There are numerous podcasters and independent radio producers in Scotland and elsewhere producing high quality audio which is only available via download. We would seek agreement to broadcast some of the best.
- The general public are a valuable source of content. We would encourage and facilitate 'citizen journalism' and use social networking tools to generate listener involvement.
- subject to Ofcom regulations private business will be able to sponsor programmes and slots.

### **Who we are**

This project was set up by Fife-based broadcaster and independent producer Lesley Riddoch and Lothian-based IT entrepreneur Ian Ritchie.

**Lesley Riddoch** is a SONY award winning broadcaster who set up the feminist magazine *Harpies and Quines* in 1990, was the deputy Editor of the Scotsman when the *Scotswoman* was published in 1995, and ran the charitable African online paper *Africawoman* for 7 years. She currently runs her own Fife-based radio and podcast production company, Feisty Ltd.

**Ian Ritchie** was a board member of Scottish Enterprise (1999-2005), the Scottish Higher and Further Education Funding Council (SFC, 2002-2007) and Channel 4 Television Corporation (2000-2005). He is currently Director of iomart plc, Edinburgh International Film and Science Festivals and Our Dynamic Earth, a Trustee of National Museums Scotland and Chairman of Computer Applications Services Ltd, Scapa Technologies Ltd, Caspian Learning Ltd, Connect Scotland and Honorary Professor, Heriot-Watt University.

Our working group includes former Managing Editor, Radio Scotland and Head of Sport at BBC Scotland **Neil Fraser**, former BBC Scotland Senior Producer, Radio and Online **Gill Davies**, former Talk 107 Presenter **Susan Morrison**, accountant **Liz Montgomery**, entrepreneur and business journalist **Lesley Campbell** and former Marketing Director of NCR Dundee, **Roger Beecroft**.

We have support from Scottish Enterprise in Edinburgh and have consulted widely within the industry. We're very keen to have some tangible business plan before making our plans public, so for the moment this information should be treated confidentially.

**Neil Fraser and Lesley Riddoch 11.3.09**