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19 June 2003

Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP
Secretary of State
Department of Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London
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Dear Secretary of State,

You were kind enough to meet us during the early discussions on the Draft Communications Bill. Your comments then, reaffirmed in the Policy Narrative of last May, led us to believe that the subjective and opaque system of public interest tests for cross media mergers would be brought to an end.

We entirely agreed with the government's view, (as set out in para 9.4.7 of the Policy Narrative) that public interest tests create additional costs and uncertainties, and we welcomed your commitment that they would be "removed". We also agreed with the view expressed last May that "the rules that remain, constitute a sufficient check on the power of newspaper proprietors for the public interest to be satisfied".

You will therefore, I'm sure, appreciate our genuine concern at reports that the government is actively considering an amendment from Lord Puttnam, which would have the effect of reintroducing a public interest test for cross-media mergers. We at DMGT have welcomed the broadly deregulatory thrust of the Bill and fear that an amendment such as this would only serve to undermine that good work, and inhibit greater investment in UK radio by increasing the level of risk involved.

I sincerely hope, for all the reasons we have discussed in the past, and in keeping with your own instincts for better regulation, that this amendment will be resisted.

Yours sincerely,

Roger N. Gilbert

cc: Rt Hon Patricia Hewitt MP