

# Public Service Broadcasting

Response by the Docklands Business Forum to  
the Consultation by the Minister for  
Communications, Energy and Natural Resources  
on the introduction of a Public Service  
Broadcasting Charge

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# **Response by the Docklands Business Forum to the Consultation by the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources on the introduction of a Public Service Broadcasting Charge**

## **1. Docklands Business Forum**

The Docklands Business Forum<sup>1</sup> (DBF) is the business association for the Dublin Docklands and is recognised as the primary business organisation by the Dublin Docklands Area Master Plan 2008. With more than 200 member organisations, representing over 45,000 employees, the DBF is a key stakeholder in the Docklands' area.

## **2. Why we are making a submission to the Minister on the PSBC**

Irish business organisations make a significant contribution to the Public Broadcaster;

- Businesses contribute the lion's share of the €156.3m in commercial revenue to the State Broadcaster<sup>2</sup>.
- Businesses pay TV licence fees.
- The proposals, as outlined, put an emphasis on businesses as a source of increased revenue for the state broadcaster.
- The charging structure proposed for businesses in the document is vague and unclear.

## **3. The Consultation Document**

It is the view of the Docklands Business Forum that the paper issued by the Minister as the basis for a public consultation fails to address the commitment in the Programme for Government to examine the *role* of the TV licence fee. It concentrates instead on the other two commitments of (1) changing the licence fee to a household charge and (2) the means of collection. It is the view of the DBF that this 'puts the cart before the horse' by ignoring the real challenges faced by public broadcasting in Ireland and concentrating only on the most efficient way of funding a system that may no longer be fit for purpose.

In this context the DBF has a number of concerns regarding the consultation document;

- By concerning itself with the changes in media over the last number of years only in the context of accessing broadcast content, the consultation process fails to address issues of more open access to and participation with new media. In an age where teenagers have their own TV channels on YouTube the Minister and his Department need to be clear about why a state broadcaster needs to receive over €180M in subsidy<sup>3</sup>.
- The document fails to examine the growth of independent media in Ireland and their delivery, without licence fee subsidy, of what was recently considered public broadcasting content. A topical example of this is the state broadcaster's Pat Kenny Show on Radio 1. For

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<sup>1</sup> [www.docklandsbusinessforum.ie](http://www.docklandsbusinessforum.ie)

<sup>2</sup> RTÉ Annual Report & Group Financial Statements 2012

<sup>3</sup> RTÉ Annual Report & Group Financial Statements 2012

years used as an example of the state broadcaster's worth, now, the exact same show is been broadcast by a private operator without licence fee support.

- The consultation document fails to address the fall in public trust of the national broadcaster. There is an unprecedented level of public cynicism caused by scandals such as Twitter Gate, Mission to Pray and nonexistent tapes of 'drug taking Ministers' to name but a few. There is also a widely held perception, often substantiated, of editorial bias on current affairs on a wide selection of both national and international subjects.
- The document frequently mentions the benefits to Irish society of PSB but fails to list them. Nor does it reference where these benefits may be found. It does state that public service broadcasting is "...vital... to the health of our democratic society by promoting informed debate and opinion on key national and international issues of public concern." But at a time when there is wide ranging and informed debate on news and current affairs programmes on independent TV and Radio this can no longer be considered a benefit to society of PSB.
- The document states that "there appears to be a significant level of evasion in the business or commercial sector" with regard to licence fee payments then fails to back this allegation up with any evidence.
- The consultation seeks views on the many and varied ways to pay the new Public Service Broadcasting Charge but fails to explain the reason for households and businesses being forced to contribute to the state broadcaster to use the licence fee to unfairly compete with non-subsidised Irish broadcasters.

In summation, it is our view that there needs to be a lot of work done before we get to the stage where we can start examining methods of funding for PSB. The Docklands Business Forum is ready to engage in a positive and constructive way to the real consultation that needs to take place on the future of PSB in Ireland.

We will suggest that;

- the current system be changed to be made more open and democratic;
- clear objectives for PSB should be put in place, objectives that could not be achieved by commercial funding alone;
- no one broadcaster be given a monopoly of PSB funding;\*
- all Irish based broadcasters should be entitled to apply for PSB funding;
- the revenue for PSB be entrusted to an independent organisation that awards it to competent Irish based broadcasters proposing the production and broadcast of a PSB programme; and
- the PSB revenue be awarded to Irish based broadcasters on the basis of a single programme or series of programmes.

If such policies were introduced it would begin a new and exciting era for PSB in Ireland by;

- introducing competition into the sector;
- bringing new talents and energies into the field of PSB;
- PSB revenue would be largely protected from abuse and misuse; and
- the new efficiencies resulting from competition would bring higher standards and increased output in PSB in Ireland.

\*We note that approximately 7% of the licence revenue goes to the BAI Broadcasting Fund for independent producers / broadcasters, but this small figure does not impact on the state broadcaster's monopoly of licence funding. We note RTÉ can also (and successfully does) apply for this funding.