

## **ELECTION REPORTING – RADIO AUTHORITY GUIDELINES** **(to replace Section 93 of the RPA)**

Section 93 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (the "RPA") has been repealed and replaced by broadcasters' codes which are to be applied to all radio and television broadcasters. The repeal means that there is no longer a legal distinction between the period before close of nominations and the period after it. It also means that candidates who withhold their consent from constituency reports or debates can now no longer effectively exercise a veto over all other candidates.

However, this does not weaken in any way your station's obligations to fairness, balance and accuracy. Extra care must also be taken to ensure, especially when a particular constituency is featured often, that undue prominence is not given to any single candidate over time. So, with the announcement of the dissolution of Parliament (the issuing of a writ in by-elections, or in local government the last date for publication of notice of the election) the following guidelines will come into effect. These are written specifically for commercial radio:

**Balance** : To be impartial, constituency reports or debates should give due weight to candidates of the main parties\*.

**Main Candidates** : If any candidate actually takes part in an item about a specific constituency, then candidates of each of the main parties should be offered the opportunity to take part.

**Others** : To be authoritative, it is right to make some distinction in the weight of the contribution between these main candidates and others. Constituency items which involve candidates should also include some participation from candidates representing parties with either previous significant electoral support (for example parties which have gained a few seats in other recent elections or individuals who have been elected before under another label) or parties with evidence of significant current support. Where a party or an individual is mounting a significant campaign in a particular region, this should be reflected appropriately in the coverage.

**Lists** : To be comprehensive and fair, full-length constituency reports or debates should include a list of all candidates standing. If a constituency is being reported on several times on the same station in a day, it may be enough to broadcast the full list once a day, with audiences directed to a full list of candidates (Teletext, station website etc) at other times.

**Invitations** : Programmes may decide to use either candidates or party representatives. But if the candidate from one of the parties is invited to take part, the other participants should, where at all possible, also be candidates. In exceptional circumstances if a candidate is genuinely unavailable the opportunity may be offered instead to a suitable party representative from within the constituency (eg: party official, agent or Councillor) but it should be made clear to the audience that the missing candidate(s) was invited and why they were unable to take part or decline to put forward any spokesperson. If a party declines to put forward any representative the item/programme will go ahead without them.

*\* The major parties in England are defined as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats; In Scotland these three plus the SNP, in Wales these three plus Plaid Cymru; in Northern Ireland the Ulster Unionists, the SDLP, the DUP and Sinn Fein. The election periods ends with the close of poll. Any other applicable guidance will be issued by Martin Campbell, Radio Authority Director of Programming and Advertising, from whose department general advice is also available. 020 7430 2724.*