



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

**James NICHOLSON MEP**  
MEMBER OF THE BUREAU - QUAESTOR

3rd December 2008,

Yiannis Thoedorou  
Ofcom  
Riverside House  
2A Southwark Bridge Road  
London SE1 9HA

Dear Mr. Thoedorou,

As a Northern Ireland MEP I believe that some of the recommendations put forward in the Second Public Service Review put at risk the high quality public service television we receive in Northern Ireland from both the BBC and UTV.

In particular the option of a single licence for Channel 3 across the UK is something I strongly oppose. UTV has delivered high quality news for many years. It is highly valued by the audience and its place in Northern Ireland's broadcasting future should be guaranteed. Indeed without UTV, we believe that the BBC service would not be as competitive as it currently is.

To quote directly from Ofcom's own commissioned research for this Review, the Opinion Leader report which was an annex to the Phase 2 document, states in relation to UTV and other devolved nations services "*guaranteed continuation in their current forms as providers of nation's news...acts as a default decision criteria...These channels have a symbolic value beyond their PSB provision, and are seen to represent national identity in ways in which other TV channels do not.*" Opinion Leader report. 1.2 Overview of findings, p5.

I strongly oppose the proposal of a single Channel 3 licence for the whole of the UK. As a newly devolved Assembly we need a strong local broadcaster to report, analyse and scrutinise the workings of this Legislature.

A UK-wide licence would be detrimental to the viewer and take local accountability away from programme makers. A single licence would not benefit viewers as it would potentially lose all the regional strengths and lead to a homogenised service across the UK.

A single licence would lose audience in the devolved nations and regions and actually make the provision of public service content for these nations less viable rather than more viable. I would argue that the sense of ownership a locally accountable and branded service provider adds to the audience loyalty is something that a single licence holder could never achieve.

While I understand the commercial difficulties facing all ITV licencees, there should be a bare minimum of five licences proposed for the future, those being Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England and the Channel Islands.

Yours sincerely,

James Nicholson M.E.P.