

John Glover
Ofcom
Riverside House
2A Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 9HA

Our Ref: 2049.MB.JG.Ofcom

01/05/2013

Dear John,

The Isle of Man Communications Commission's Response to Ofcom's Consultation on the Award of the 600 MHz spectrum band

The Isle of Man Communications Commission is a Statutory Board of the Isle of Man Government. The Commission is responsible for licensing and regulating telecommunications and broadcasting on the Isle of Man under the Telecommunications Act 1984, the Radio Masts Regulation Act 1988 and the Broadcasting Acts 1993 to 2007 (all of Tynwald). The Commission also has a statutory duty to keep under review programme services received in the Island and the quality and content of those services, and to further the interests of the Island in this respect.

The Isle of Man was the first nation in the British Isles to switch off analogue television broadcasts in 2009, having moved successfully to digital terrestrial television (DTT). However, this accomplishment was marred by the loss for the Island's DTT services of ITV3 and ITV4 a few months later, following the reorganisation of the multiplexes to accommodate high definition services (HDTV). The loss of ITV4 was of particular concern to the Island, due to its excellent coverage of the TT (the oldest and longest motor bike road race in the world) and the Tour de France, which has featured the successes of Manx rider (and Team GB Olympian) Mark Cavendish. The reorganisation focussed people's attention on the change from terrestrial TV being universally available to an arrangement that disproportionately benefited viewers in urban areas, who now have access to 6 multiplexes, as opposed to viewers in less densely populated areas who have access to 3 or fewer multiplexes.

The discrimination in favour of large urban conurbations has continued with the recent awards of local TV licences in 19 UK towns and cities. This inequity is set to continue with Ofcom's current proposals for the award of a licence to establish temporary digital terrestrial television (DTT) multiplexes in the 600 MHz spectrum band (550-606 MHz). The Commission notes that, once again, Isle of Man transmission sites are not included in Ofcom's proposals. The Commission understands that the proposed 30 transmission sites are all main sites with large population coverage and therefore the most commercially attractive for prospective multiplex operators.

However, once again, these areas are also ones where viewers are in the least need of platform choice as they are the same areas that are attractive to cable TV and IPTV operators (as well as receiving the full complement of DTT channels and possibly local services as well).

We appreciate that Ofcom's proposals to award the 600 MHz band for DTT is to encourage consumer migration to MPEG2-compatible equipment and to sustain the attractiveness of the DTT platform (and ensure its survival). However, with the ongoing lack of any supplementary services, the platform is now less and less attractive to consumers outside London and the larger UK cities, who must revert to satellite or IPTV (where good enough broadband is available), for any real consumer choice in TV channels. When each successive tranche of spectrum to be used for DTT services is made available only for the benefit of towns, cities and the commercial broadcasters transmitting to them, there comes a point when the usefulness of DTT as a platform for anyone living outside major conurbations comes into question.

The Isle of Man Communications Commission therefore urges Ofcom to consider this significant and completely discriminatory variation in service availability, and to reconsider its proposals for awarding the 600MHz, with a view to instead ensuring the continued coverage of areas in the British Islands (such as the Isle of Man) and large parts of Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and rural England.

The Commission also requests that Ofcom ensure consumers should be properly informed of the very real and considerable limitations of the platform that may apply in their area, as well as the eventual switch off the terrestrial services involved in this latest DTT venture, to accommodate mobile broadband services, before choosing a TV platform and investing in equipment. All too often the Communications Commission receives complaints from Isle of Man consumers who have either bought TV equipment only to find the services available are far fewer than they had believed from the publicity, or who are well aware of the difference between what is being advertised and what is available where they are, and are simply fed up of having the virtues extolled of services that are inaccessible to them. Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Begg', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Begg
Head of Regulatory Policy
Isle of Man Communications Commission