

## Statement

A request from Celador Radio Ltd to change the published Format of Solent regional station The Coast was discussed by the Radio Licensing Committee ('RLC') at its meeting on 23 May 2011.

The current Character of Service of the station is as follows:

**AN ADULT ALBUM ALTERNATIVE STATION PLAYING AN ALBUM-LED\*, CREDIBLE MIX OF ADULT-ORIENTED MUSIC, WITH PARTICULAR APPEAL FOR 40-59 YEAR-OLDS, WITH 24-HOUR NEWS.**

\* Album tracks which become UK Top 20 singles, or UK Top 20 singles subsequently appearing on albums, would not qualify.

The new Character of Service for The Coast proposed by Celador was as follows:

**A CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY ROCK STATION FOR LISTENERS OVER 40 IN THE SOLENT REGION.**

The crux of Celador's request, therefore, was to change the station's music policy from Adult Album Alternative ('Triple A') to classic and contemporary rock. Since a key part of the character of the Triple A format is to air artists' less familiar repertoire, rather than their more familiar hit singles, the proposed change also involved removal of the current requirement for the majority of music on The Coast to be album tracks (defined as tracks which have never made the UK Top 20 singles chart, past or present).

Ofcom determined that the request, if approved, would result in a substantial change to the character of the service, and therefore in accordance with the statutory requirements the proposed changes were subject to a public consultation.

Ofcom received nine responses to the consultation. Two respondents were in favour while the majority (seven) were against the Format Change Request.

Of the two respondents supporting the change, one welcomed the potential advent of a rock station in the region, while the other was also content with the change provided that the proposed new service would remain music-intensive and that the rock output should not be too "heavy".

A common denominator among the individual respondents opposing the change was their enjoyment of The Coast as it is presently constituted, and that confining it to one genre (i.e. rock) may reduce the choice of listening available in the market. A number of respondents mentioned the album track requirement as being an important consideration in the original licence award, and the reason why the station still sounds highly distinctive. One respondent was particularly concerned about the potential for music overlap with the other Solent regional service, Wave 105, thereby potentially reducing listener choice, and with regard to this was concerned about the ambiguity of rock music as a genre.

Non-confidential responses may be found, along with the consultation document, at:

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/the-coast/>

Ofcom has the ability to consent to Format changes under conditions included in each local analogue commercial radio licence, in accordance with Section 106 (1A) of the Broadcasting Act 1990, if it is satisfied that at least one of the following criteria is met:

- a. The departure would not substantially alter the character of the service
- b. The change would not narrow the range of programmes available in the area by way of relevant independent radio services
- c. The change would be conducive to the maintenance or promotion of fair or effective competition, or
- d. There is evidence that, amongst persons living in the affected areas, there is a significant demand for, or significant support for, the change.
- e. That the change would result from programmes in the licensed service ceasing to be made at premises in the area, or those programmes would continue to be made wholly or partly at premises within an area approved by Ofcom.

The RLC was satisfied that the proposed change of Format would not narrow the range of programmes in the Solent region by way of relevant independent radio services (section 106(1A)(b)).

The view of the RLC was that while, under the proposed change, the Triple A format would disappear from the Solent market, it would be replaced by another format, classic and contemporary rock, which is currently unavailable on local commercial radio in the Solent area (or, at least, unavailable in the sense of having a specialist genre-based station entirely devoted to it). The core target audience for both formats remains essentially the same – i.e. men aged over 40, and it was noted in Ofcom's published statement setting out its reasons for the licence award, made in 2005 to Original 106 Ltd, that "adult and classic rock", and "classic alternative rock", were identified (among others) as being key music genres that the new station would provide which were under-represented on local commercial radio in the Solent region.

Regarding the issue of potential musical overlap with Wave 105 raised in the consultation, the RLC noted that Wave 105's Format, which requires the station to play "a spread of Adult Contemporary and Soft Adult Contemporary hits," does not contain any specific requirement to play rock music, and airplay data suggest that Wave 105 is very much a "variety" station playing a wide mix of artists and genres drawn from the Adult Contemporary radio format.

Having determined that the request satisfied one of the statutory criteria set out in section 106(1A) of the Broadcasting Act 1990, the RLC also agreed that there were no further, discretionary, grounds on which to refuse the request.