

Ms. Rhona Parry,
PSB Review,
Ofcom,
Riverside House,
2A Southwark Bridge Road,
LONDON,
SE1 9HA.

11 June 2008

Dear Ms. Parry,

I write in response to the consultation that Ofcom is running on its *Second Public Service Broadcasting Review – Phase One: The Digital Opportunity*. I write in my capacity as a constituency MP and I shall therefore comment only on the proposals to effectively break up and to see the loss of itv Border, as this part of the review has overshadowed all the others in its importance to my constituents. I have already had the opportunity to discuss my views with a number of Ofcom officials and am grateful for that as well as having been part of a presentation made by the Save Lookaround campaign at Ofcom Headquarters in London and handed over a petition on the issue at Ofcom office in Glasgow.

I urge you in the strongest possible terms to reject ITV's financially driven plan to end the transmission of the separate Border regional news programme, *Lookaround*, after almost half a century. The ITV Border region is one with a strong and distinct identity. It is rural and peripheral, both in Scotland and England, but is also one which is surrounded by large conurbations in the shape of the Scottish Central Belt to the north and Newcastle/Sunderland and the industrial North West to the south. If our local public service news provision is subsumed into these areas, it would lead to a loss of identity and truly local news. We would be giving up a service which my constituents greatly value for something much poorer in return. And what for? I simply do not believe that under an interpretation of ITV's financial situation, the killing off of Border would save enough (if anything at all, as Border has been a profit-making region) to make any difference to ITV's overall finances.

Border's *Lookaround* ensures that the events in communities that local people either live in or near, or at least identify with, get their fair exposure in their local TV news. They have a ready comparison with the BBC, where for example, on BBC Scotland, communities in my constituency are only mentioned if there is some major calamity or in the "funny" story at the end of the programme. For this reason, *Lookaround* still has one of the highest ratings of any BBC or ITV regional news programme in the United Kingdom. It is highly valued by my constituents and they do not wish to lose it.

I believe, like my constituents, that a merger between Border TV and Tyne Tees TV news will be bad for our local area, as the news content will gravitate around the more populous and urban Tyne Tees region. A mere 10 minute opt-out will do little to ameliorate this. It is also the case that for many of my constituents who work or access shopping or services in Carlisle, what is happening in the Carlisle area is very relevant to them and they do not want to receive an opt-out service which prevents them getting any news at all from the Carlisle area.

Finally, and importantly, I also want to make clear that my constituents do not favour being "transferred" from the itv Border Region to STV (Scottish Television). It is an entirely false choice to pose a question as whether they want to receive their local TV service from Glasgow or Newcastle – they want to continue to receive it from Carlisle.

As a former member of the Scottish Parliament, I also know that the coverage of how decisions of the Scottish Parliament are affecting local people is dealt with in much more detail on Border than STV, where like the BBC, there is limited coverage of any stories outwith the Central Belt. It is an entirely spurious argument to suggest, as some appear to do that the Border Region has no place in the media landscape of a devolved Scotland. That is

why even local SNP politicians support its retention. I hope Ofcom will follow suit – my constituents are relying on you!

I happy to discuss this response further. Please acknowledge safe receipt.

Yours sincerely,

David Mundell MP