

18<sup>th</sup> June 2008

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to offer my opinion with regard to ITV managements proposed changes to the Regional News map, with specific regard to the plans to merge ITV Westcountry and ITV West.

I am a Lighting Cameraman and Editor of 15 years experience in broadcast television. The last 10 years have been spent working at ITV Westcountry.

I just want to get across what I feel is the lunacy inherent in ITV management's plans for the future of this region.

In the first instance, merging West & Westcountry will produce an area stretching from the Isles of Scilly in the west to Weymouth in the east and all the way up to Tewkesbury as the most northerly point. This area is far too vast and insurmountably diverse, both in terms of audience and geography, to provide a truly representative regional news programme. As an example, Tewkesbury is closer to the Scottish border than it is to Lands End! On a similar note, due to the fact that there is no Motorway west of Exeter, it takes longer to drive from Exeter to Penzance than it does to get from Exeter to central London. People in Cornwall really are not interested, or indeed affected, by issues concerning those in Bristol, let alone Cheltenham or Gloucester. Equally people from the Midlands see Cornwall as a holiday destination and not somewhere their local news programme should be concerned with. At the same time, a reduced and merged service will not be able to serve this much larger community with anything like the coverage that audiences have become accustomed to from their local news

programmes. It simply will not be possible to have crews allocated to stories in some of the more remote areas of Devon, Cornwall and Dorset. In summer it can often take 3 or more hours to drive across Dartmoor, a journey of 30 minutes in the winter. I worry that the areas with decent infrastructure will be spoiled for coverage while those reachable only via grassy lanes will never be visited again. This is a story of rural areas losing out yet again because of decisions being made in those pale towers in the city.

Splitting the region for sub-regional opts also provides us with a glimpse of just how uninformed, or perhaps just uninterested ITV management are when it comes to serving their audience. ITV's current plan as you know is to split the new region into three parts; Cornwall and Plymouth, Devon and Dorset and West Somerset, existing ITV West region. Why? Apart from the obvious answer, which is that that's where the transmitters operate.

Unfortunately that's not what the audience wants. The most glaringly obvious error here is joining Plymouth with Cornwall. The Cornish have always historically considered themselves as a separate entity, very different in every way from the rest of the Westcountry region. You see this daily, Cornish flags, stickers on cars, the geography is different, the attitude is different, even the language! It may seem a silly notion to those who haven't experienced it but the Cornish really do consider themselves as different, and they're very proud of that fact. So to lump Cornwall in with Plymouth is ludicrous. Plymouth is where all the "news" happens. Cornwall will have to suffer a programme that rarely features Cornwall, and even the sub-regional opt-out will inevitably favour Plymouth. There just will not be the resources to cover these far flung parts of the new "super" region.

Why not leave the two programmes, West & Westcountry, as separate entities? I realise that ITV has commercial concerns but I am convinced that with some significant belt tightening it should be possible to create two

programmes and still make significant savings by using current resources more efficiently. I don't believe that anyone is under any illusion that, given ITV's plan to save the amounts of money they are committed to, the current level of staffing can be sustained but surely a significantly slimmed down version of the current models could be made to work. Two programmes are the only way the audience will receive anything approaching a true representation of the issues in their local communities.

I do hope that Ofcom listens to the public and ITV staff with regard to the plans for the future of ITV regional news. Surely a programme crewed from a hub site in Bristol or Plymouth, broadcast from Whiteley and watched by nobody is the worst-case scenario, but I wonder how far ITV management are willing to go to end this form of local news broadcasting forever.

Yours sincerely,