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Ofcom  
Floor 3  
Riverside House  
2A Southwark Bridge Road  
London  
SE1 9HA

**Re: Ofcom consultation on the Future of Digital Terrestrial Television**

I am writing to you in my capacity as the Culture, Arts and Leisure spokesperson for the SDLP. The Social Democratic and Labour Party is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the future of Digital Terrestrial Television. With the switchover to digital due to occur in Northern Ireland in 2012 the availability of Freeview and the channels available is becoming increasingly important issue for households here.

It is my understanding that Freeview is currently only available to 58% of the population here and I look forward to increased availability of the service in advance of the switchover. SDLP representatives have highlighted difficulties in reception experienced in rural areas and particularly in the Glens of Antrim area and I hope that this situation is remedied at the earliest possible opportunity.

From the outset the SDLP support the proposal that TG4 is available on Freeview. Availability of Irish Language broadcasting in the North is an important issue as evidenced by the commitment in Good Friday Agreement to “explore urgently with the relevant British authorities, and in co-operation with the Irish broadcasting authorities, the scope for achieving more widespread availability of Teilifis na Gaeilige in Northern Ireland”.

Another key issue for constituents is the availability of Irish Public Service Broadcast channels such as RTÉ 1 and RTÉ 2 which are accessed by many households across the north through digital satellite, cable and spillover signals. The SDLP is deeply concerned that following switchover to digital will mean that fewer households will be able to access these channels. Similarly, households south of the border will also experience similar problems in terms of access to Public Service Broadcasters transmitting from the Northern Ireland. The SDLP would ask that Ofcom give greater consideration to the availability of RTÉ channels on Freeview.

Although it is beyond the competency of this consultation, consideration should be given to having a shared digital platform on the island.

Should you wish to discuss any of these issues further, please contact me.

Yours sincerely

Pat Ramsey MLA  
SDLP Spokesperson for Culture, Arts and Leisure