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Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

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24 June 1986

The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd CBE MP  
Secretary of State  
for the Home Department  
Home Office  
Queen Anne's Gate  
London SW1H 9AT

Dear Douglas,

Thank you for copying to me your letter of 10 June to Willie Whitelaw about your proposed statement on community radio. I have also seen Nicholas Edwards' letter of 12 June and Geoffrey Howe's recent comments.

I welcome the experiment and am content with the strengthening of the regulatory arrangements you propose.

We should, however, recognise that there will be presentational difficulties with the announcement of the 23 stations you propose to license. There may be criticism from the supporters of a number of unlicensed broadcasting stations which the experiment has been unable to legitimise. This will have implications for my Department's Radio Investigation Service (RIS) which is responsible for action against unlicensed broadcasters. We may face a resurgence of unlicensed broadcasting by, for example, Radio Jackie which may well have stayed off the air so far in the hope of receiving an experimental licence. In inner cities such as Birmingham, which were excluded from the original selection of locations, action by the RIS against ethnic stations may become even more difficult to carry out than at present.

I note that you intend to invite applications for another neighbourhood station in Scotland. I think we must recognise that this is likely to re-open the arguments over the geographical allocation of licences, and in particular the claim that London is over-provided for at the expense of the regions. I have in mind, in particular, the claims of some of the English

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inner cities with large ethnic communities which have demonstrated a demand for community programming by their support of unlicensed stations: Kenneth Clarke's letter of 11 June to David Waddington about the 'PCRL' station in Handsworth is of relevance here. We shall need to decide, therefore, what line we intend to take in response to such claims.

Like you, I am anxious that the experiment should now get under way as quickly as practicable. My officials are already working with yours on the assignment of frequencies and on licensing conditions. There are, however, certain mandatory radio regulatory procedures which can only be launched when exact transmitter sites are known. A station will therefore be unable to start transmitting until some two months after we have details of its final technical characteristics. A station's own preparations for broadcasting may of course take at least that long.

I understand that our officials are still discussing the role of the Radio Investigation Service in enforcement action against stations which breach their licence conditions. We shall need to reach agreement before the first station goes on the air, but this need not delay your statement.

I am copying this letter to the recipients of yours.

*ms*  
*Paul*  
PAUL CHANNON

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Legislation: BROADCASTING  
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