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HOME AFFAIRS SELECT COMMITTEE: ADDITIONAL PROGRAMME SERVICES

One subject on which I expect to be questioned when DTI officials appear before the Select Committee on 20 April is the availability of spectrum for additional programme services and the outcome of the current technical studies - including whether they will be published.

In view of the fact that the results of the studies (and in the case of MVDS, much of the detail) have been reported fairly extensively, especially in the technical press, the cloak of confidentiality is somewhat threadbare. While we shall be reticent as to the key findings, I do not think we shall be able to avoid giving factual answers to intelligent technical questions based on what has been published in the press.

The basic line I propose to take, subject to your views, is that:

- a) these are technical studies, designed to inform the development of policy, on which Ministers have not yet reached conclusions (except in the case of VHF - see below). Ministers have made it quite clear that in reaching decisions they will consider the position of BSB etc.
- b) DTI's locus in this is a technical one, arising out of R division's spectrum responsibilities. If the Committee want to discuss the case for and against new services, they should go back to the Home Office.

- c) On technical and spectrum matters, we will be happy to help on factual background (eg amount of spectrum required to achieve a given degree of coverage; who is currently in which bits of the spectrum; the mechanics of international coordination; the sorts of aeriels which might be needed for the various types of services) but will as far as possible decline to draw conclusions, beyond what we have already revealed in our memorandum.

I would like to say, in addition (in the light of recent Ministerial correspondence) that, while Ministers had still to consider the issues in depth, they did intend shortly to make public the main results of the studies. I hope that you and colleagues to whom I am copying this letter can concur with this proposal. Perhaps the point could be covered in briefing Ministers on Lord Young's letter of 12 April to the Home Secretary, which itself advocated early publication?

My Secretary of State's letter also proposed an announcement on VHF before 20 April. I do hope his Ministerial colleagues can be encouraged to agree to this.

I am copying this letter to Wilfred Hyde (Home Office), Paul Gray and Brian Griffiths (No 10), Anthea Case (Treasury), Anthony Langdon (Cabinet Office) and Tony Nieduszynski here.

3 copies

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A J MACDONALD