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Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG
01-270 3000

MR R. de Ni
step.

PRIME MINISTER

RR 16
28/7

NEWS FOR CHANNELS 3, 4 AND 5

Douglas Hurd's minute of 21 July sets out revised proposals for commercial television news. I have seen your Private Secretary's letter of 25 July setting out your response. I am broadly content with Douglas's proposals, subject to two points.

First, Douglas proposes that we require all regional Channel 3 licensees to show high quality regional news. We agreed at MISC(128)3rd meeting that the quality threshold proposed in the Broadcasting White Paper should be enhanced, and that the enhanced formula was the most that was required. I doubt whether we should now add to it again - each addition makes it more difficult to resist further, similar proposals. Instead I suggest we rely on market forces to ensure that where there is a demand for high quality regional news, it will be supplied.

I also doubt whether we need require Channel 3 licensees to broadcast national news simultaneously. This would reduce their ability to schedule flexibly and so undermine their efforts to build up market share. The effect could be to weaken, rather than strengthen, the importance of commercial television news. I would therefore prefer to stick to our earlier proposal to require Channel 3 licensees to show high quality news in main viewing periods.

I am copying this minute to MISC 128 colleagues, to the Foreign Secretary and to Sir Robin Butler.

[Handwritten signature]

pp. [N.L.]
27 July 1989

[Approved by the Chancellor + signed on his behalf]

Broadcasting Policy Pt 9



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