



cc J
W
HOME OFFICE
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE
LONDON SW1H 9AT

- 8 MAR 1990

Dear Mr Stanley,

NBM
R266
8/3

BROADCASTING BILL

I attach a copy of a statement which Mr Mellor will be making at the opening of the Standing Committee sitting this afternoon about the changes to the Bill which were agreed at the meeting between the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister on 6 March. In the normal way Mr Mellor would have preferred to have been able to give colleagues more notice of an impending announcement of this kind. But it was clear at this morning's proceedings on the Broadcasting Bill that there were likely to be pre-emptive and possibly unhelpful press stories about the changes. No 10 have therefore agreed that these decisions should be announced without delay.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of Misc 128, Robert Canniff (Office of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster), Jim Gallagher (Scottish Office), Stephen Pope (Northern Ireland Office) and Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely

JANE HARRISON
Private Secretary

Martin Stanley Esq
PS to Secretary of State
for Trade and Industry

BROADCASTING BILL : STANDING COMMITTEE F

Statement by Mr Mellor

Quality

As the Committee will be aware I have undertaken to consider a number of issues which have arisen during our scrutiny of the Bill, and, where I judge this appropriate, to bring forward amendments at Report Stage. Among the matters of this kind to which I know the Committee attaches particular importance are the various proposals that have been made for strengthening the safeguards for quality in relation to the allocation of Channel 3 licences. I thought therefore that it would be for the convenience of the Committee if I were to indicate now the view my colleagues and I have reached on these matters.

First we have decided that it would be right to specify that Channel 3 licensees must include a suitable amount of childrens programmes and religious programmes in their schedules. Our debates showed that there was support on all sides for providing guarantees for the continuance of these programme types. I hope in particular that the proposal in relation to religion, coupled with the discretion which I have already announced for the ITC to allow religious ownership of channels like the Vision Channel not using UK broadcasting frequencies, will be seen as representing a genuine desire on the part of the Government to respond to the concerns expressed about the future of religious broadcasting.

Secondly we have decided that it would be right to strengthen the regional requirements in the Bill by requiring the regional news which Channel 3 licensees will be required to broadcast to be of high quality, in line with the parallel high quality requirements for national and international news.

Thirdly we will bring forward an amendment to clause 17(3) of the Bill to make clear that the reference to "exceptional

circumstances" in which the ITC could award a Channel 3 licence to someone other than the highest bidder included the circumstance where the quality of programming offered by one applicant was exceptionally higher than that of the applicant offering the highest cash bid. As I have explained to the Committee I am in no doubt that the existing wording would allow the provision to be used in this way; but we accept that there would be advantage in making this clear on the face of the Bill.

Taken together these amendments will, I am convinced, give reassurance to all those who have expressed any concern at all about the quality requirements in the Bill. Once again they serve to demonstrate the willingness of my rt hon Friend the Home Secretary and myself to listen to reasoned argument and to respond to the debate with sensibly judged proposals.

I hope the Committee will understand if I do not today indicate the outcome of my consideration of the many other matters which I have undertaken to look at. The issues I have mentioned seemed to me to be those which the Committee would most wish to know about. I have certainly not forgotten about the wide range of other matters of concern to individual members, and I repeat the undertakings I have already given to come back with a considered view on these at Report Stage.

DSQUAL.SB





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Home Office

NEWS RELEASE

50 Queen Anne's Gate London SW1H 9AT
(Night line 01-273 4595)

8 March 1990

Contact Number: 01-273 4620

MELLOR CONFIRMS QUALITY CHANGES TO BE INCLUDED IN BROADCASTING BILL

Home Office Minister of State David Mellor QC MP today made the following statement in the Committee stage of the Broadcasting Bill:

"As the Committee will be aware I have undertaken to consider a number of issues which have arisen during our scrutiny of the Bill, and, where I judge this appropriate, to bring forward amendments at Report Stage. Among the matters of this kind to which I know the Committee attaches particular importance are the various proposals that have been made for strengthening the safeguards for quality in relation to the allocation of Channel 3 licences. I thought therefore that it would be for the convenience of the Committee if I were to indicate now the view my colleagues and I have reached on these matters.

"First we have decided that it would be right to specify that Channel 3 licensees must include a suitable amount of children's programmes and religious programmes in their schedules. Our debates showed that there was support on all sides for providing guarantees for the continuance of these programme types. I hope in particular that the proposal in relation to religion, coupled with the discretion which I have already announced for the Independent Television Commission to allow religious ownership of channels like the Vision Channel not using UK broadcasting frequencies, will be seen as representing a genuine desire on the part of the Government to respond to the concerns expressed about the future of religious broadcasting.

"Secondly we have decided that it would be right to strengthen the regional requirements in the Bill by requiring the regional news which Channel 3 licensees will be required to broadcast to be of high quality, in line with the parallel high quality requirements for national and international news.

"Thirdly we will bring forward an amendment to clause 17(3) of the Bill to make clear that the reference to 'exceptional circumstances' in which the ITC could award a Channel 3 licence to someone other than the highest bidder included the circumstance where the quality of programming offered by one applicant was exceptionally higher than that of the applicant offering the highest cash bid. As I have explained to the Committee I am in no doubt that the existing wording would allow the provision to be used in this way; but we accept that there would be advantage in making this clear on the face of the Bill.

"Taken together these amendments will, I am convinced, give reassurance to all those who have expressed any concern at all about the quality requirements in the Bill. Once again they serve to demonstrate the willingness of my rt hon Friend the Home Secretary and myself to listen to reasoned argument and to respond to the debate with sensibly judged proposals.

"I hope the Committee will understand if I do not today indicate the outcome of my consideration of the many other matters which I have undertaken to look at. The issues I have mentioned seemed to me to be those which the Committee would most wish to know about. I have certainly not forgotten about the wide range of other matters of concern to individual members, and I repeat the undertakings I have already given to come back with a considered view on these at Report Stage."