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Head of General Broadcasting Policy Branch,
Room 413,
Department for Culture, Media and Sport,
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Tony Stoller
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

See 
Broadcasting Events of National Significance

I write in response to the Secretary of State's letter to the Chairman of the Radio Authority dated 10 July concerning events listed under part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996. We greatly welcome the opportunity to comment and the recognition that access to the coverage of sports events is not a matter where concern is confined solely to television.

The Authority considers it important that in radio just as in television no one organisation should be able to exploit a dominant market position to the disadvantage of listeners. In radio, the situation is to some extent the reverse of that which applies in television since for historic reasons the BBC owns the greater majority of exclusive sports contracts, whilst the commercial sector is keen to ensure fair access and appropriate coverage. This becomes increasingly important now that commercial radio attracts substantially more listeners in the UK than the BBC.

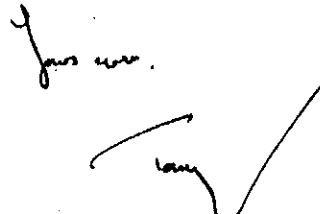
The Authority believes that the approach embodied in the concept of "listed events" is fully workable provided that such a list extends to subscription as well as pay per view (or pay per listen) channels. We consider that the list should be as short as reasonably practical so that the commercial market may operate unfettered on all events where there is not a genuinely special national resonance. With that in mind, we believe that the Secretary of State should be able to change the list by Order at any time to reflect the changing popularity of different sporting events.

We therefore agree that the four **criteria** listed in your consultation document are appropriate and are sufficient. The three **characteristics** which you suggest are broadly appropriate. However, the first characteristic might be amended to include radio as well as television. Your third characteristic - the history of live broadcast on free to air services - may need to be interpreted in the light of changing public tastes and the changing pattern of sport, and might become less relevant in future years.

We suggest that, in addition to the three **other considerations** put forward in your paper you might wish to add the importance of news access - both live and recorded. So far as radio is concerned, whilst the concept of "unbundling" is not relevant since highlights of programmes are not appropriate, there is a growing move for radio and television rights to be acquired by a single body. Given the relevance of radio in offering portable, flexible and up to the minute information about news and sports events it is particularly unfortunate where such an arrangement prevents free and fair news access. The listing of sports events could therefore usefully include confirmation of the right of news access so that any broadcaster could legitimately cover the progress of the event without diluting significantly the value of live commentary.

The Authority would be pleased to contribute to or participate in any future discussions on this topic.

Yours sincerely,



Tony Stoller
Chief Executive
The Radio Authority