

*“Working for quality  
and diversity in  
British broadcasting”*



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## **News Release Immediate**

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### **TIME FOR THE LICENCE-PAYERS' VOICE TO BE HEARD – SAYS VLV: EXPOSING DECISIONS TO PUBLIC SCRUTINY:**

**The past week** has been one of the most momentous in the eighty four year history of the BBC – the licence-payer funded BBC. The momentous nature of events has been equalled only by the manner of their suddenness and secrecy: licence payers excluded from choices about how their money is spent: decisions behind closed doors, despite the promises of ‘the big society’.

**Starting now and over the coming months** Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) will be holding a series of events to inform licence-payers and the public at large about the proposed changes and their implications. A chance to explain will be afforded to key players – broadcasting chiefs in the BBC and beyond, government ministers, politicians of all parties, and the regulators. VLV members will have a chance to question the decision-makers, face-to-face. Our aim will be explanation and understanding, dialogue and inclusiveness – avoiding partisanship and defensiveness, dogma and over-simplification.

VLV is especially conscious of its heavy responsibility in representing the citizen interest – following the merger of the Ofcom Communications Consumer Panel and Consumer Focus into the Citizens' Advice Bureaux. We are determined not to fail licence-payers and the public at large.

**So watch this space for events in our series “Your chance to ask”.....**

### **Voice of the Listener & Viewer's Areas of Concern**

#### **(i) The BBC's New Burdens and Responsibilities**

**Last week the BBC was informed about, or agreed to, decisions involving :-**

- A freezing of the licence fee till 2017 – a 16% reduction over the 6-year period – with no allowance for inflation
- Taking over (from 2014) funding the BBC World Service – that's £260m a year currently paid by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- Taking over (from 2013) funding BBC Monitoring – exact cost unknown
- Taking over (from 2015) the funding of S4C (Wales' only non-BBC supplier of Welsh language television programming) – £100m + annually

- Funding (from 2013) superfast broadband in rural areas - £150m annually in addition to its existing commitment to facilitate the switch-over to digital TV transmission
- Helping to fund government plans for local TV - £25m capital in 2013/4 and then £5m annually

Taking into account those new spending commitments and the effect of a six year freeze on the licence fee, it seems the BBC could be faced with an eventual £600 million annual additional burden.

**So VLV members ask:**

- ***What will be cut – over and above the limited proposals in the spring 2010 BBC Strategy Review? Will the approach be ‘salami slicing’, eliminating some areas of programming or the loss of whole channels?***
- ***How will licence-payers be consulted? How will we hear and feel the decisions about the spending of our money?***
- ***Will World Service and Monitoring Service funds be ring-fenced? Will there be precautions against ‘seepage’ between these funds and the BBC’s domestic radio and television services? What role will the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence or any other government department play in determining BBC spending priorities?***
- ***What’s actually involved in rolling out super broadband, (in addition to facilitating digital TV and Radio switch-over) and in the support government wants from the BBC for new local TV services?***

(ii) The Regulatory Framework: How are things with Ofcom?

**The extra burdens on the BBC coincide with a significant lightening of regulation and loosening of controls on commercial broadcasters.**

**Statements emanating from Ofcom** suggest the media regulator is taking its foot off the regulatory pedal – in response to government actions and attitudes, actual or anticipated. Several key safeguards built into the remit of the independent regulator are now to be assumed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport. They include the monitoring of changes in media ownership and control.

**BSkyB** on current profit trends could by 2015 be earning more than £6 billion annually - **twice the BBC’s projected licence fee income.** So BskyB – already so strongly entrenched, with its press parent News International - could become **the** UK media superpower.

**VLV, in the interests of pluralism and empowered citizenship**, is against monopolies of any kind. We believe in a diverse and innovative media economy, resourced through a mix of commercial and public funds. But a balanced mix – in a framework reflecting social responsibility as well as market forces – is crucial. ***Media content is more than a commodity, it is one of the most powerful influences on our culture and democracy.***

**So VLV members ask:**

- ***How and when will changes be made to the 2003 Communications Act to validate some of these decisions? Will they be debated in Parliament?***

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- ***Will the content quality guarantees of the 2003 Communications Act be preserved?***
- ***To what extent will existing Ofcom principles and processes be subject to Ministerial interventions, and with what arguments?***
- ***Will Ofcom’s supervisory and enforcement powers be diluted in areas which affect the public as citizens rather than as consumers? Which exact powers now exercised by Ofcom will the Secretary of State reserve to him or herself? How will this affect the democratic process?***
- ***Will Ofcom still have the resources and political backing to persist with initiatives in key fields like media literacy and support for groups with special needs?***

**These and other issues will be addressed by VLV over the coming months, including at its 27<sup>th</sup> annual Autumn conference in London on Wednesday, 24 November : *‘Broadcasting: where are we going? More questions than answers’ at the Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1.***

**Commenting, VLV Honorary President and Founder, Jocelyn Hay said**

***“VLV has been working for the past 27 years to provide an open forum and collective voice for listeners, viewers and licence fee payers so as to ensure transparency in decisions about the future of British broadcasting – one of the most powerful influences on our culture and democracy. Because of VLV far greater respect has been given to the views of licence fee payers, and public consultation before major change has become the norm. *The sudden announcement and manner of the latest BBC settlement, coupled with the changes to the remit and powers of Ofcom, have destroyed these gains at a stroke.****

**The BBC is not just another Government department and safeguards were built in to the 2003 Communications Act to ensure its independence. We must not allow these latest changes to affect the editorial integrity of news and programme makers or the quality of the content they produce. VLV will therefore launch a series of activities and events over the coming months to inform the public and provide a collective voice through which licence payers can channel their views and lobby those responsible.”**

***Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) is an independent, non-profit-making association, free from political, commercial and sectarian affiliations, working for quality and diversity in British broadcasting. VLV represents the interests of listeners and viewers as citizens and consumers across the full range of broadcasting issues. VLV is concerned with the structures, regulation, funding and institutions that underpin the British Broadcasting system. VLV does not handle complaints but is in touch with Members of Parliament, Government, media regulators and broadcasters; publishes briefings, responses to public consultations and a quarterly newsletter; holds conferences and other events in different parts of the UK, open to the public at affordable prices; organises visits for its members to broadcasting centres and holds annual Student Essay Competitions and Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting.***

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION and conference tickets please contact: Jocelyn Hay, Honorary President, Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) or Linda Forbes, Conference Administrator on 01474 338711, [Linda.Forbes@vlv.org.uk](mailto:Linda.Forbes@vlv.org.uk) , [info@vlv.org.uk](mailto:info@vlv.org.uk) or visit [www.VLV.org.uk](http://www.VLV.org.uk)**