

## **Ofcom Plans Could Spell The End For High Production Live Shows**

Plans, which are now at an advanced stage by GOVERNMENT agency Ofcom, would flog off vital radio spectrum currently used across all entertainment platforms including live music, theatre, opera, sports events and the film industry, to the highest bidder and potentially deprive the British public of quality entertainment. Spectacular outdoor touring shows by leading artists such as U2, Coldplay, Robbie Williams and The Rolling Stones would be in jeopardy due to the loss of high performance radio microphones, in-ear monitoring and wireless instrument systems. It would also have major effect on the production value of West End theatre shows, creating a real threat of lost revenue from a reduction in tourist traffic visiting the capital.

“If the Government don’t intervene and tell Ofcom to think again, if they don’t make sure that they satisfy the ongoing requirements of the entertainment industry, then major artists will not be able to stage the great flexible musical experiences in the UK that wireless technology currently allows us to. Instead they’ll be reduced to just standing in front of a static microphone, like Top of the Pops 40 years ago”, stated Robbie Williams’ production Manager Wob Roberts.

Other major figures in the entertainment industry including Andrew Lloyd Webber and Sir George Martin have also publicly warned Ofcom of impending problems. Lord Lloyd Webber has even stated the potential to open his new musical on Broadway rather than in London if Ofcom don’t change their mind.

### **WARNING**

The Programme Making and Special Events (PMSE) committee have told Ofcom that they need the radio spectrum they currently use and can’t move elsewhere. They need a licensing system to stop illegal interference, and with thousands of diverse individuals and companies involved, they can’t take part in an auction anyway as they’d be sure to lose out to the deep pockets of the international mobile phone companies. Despite this Ofcom are still determined to auction the spectrum.

PRESS RELEASE

**Notes for Editors – Ofcom Plans Could Spell The End For High Production Live Shows**

- Ofcom has announced that it plans to auction all spectrum in the UK (Ofcom Spectrum Framework Review). This comes as a result of the transition from analogue to digital TV broadcasting. These changes pose a grave threat to the British Entertainment Industry as a whole, but especially to the **Programme Making and Special Events (PMSE)** sector. This sector relies on the unused spectrum that interleaves between current analogue TV broadcasts, to enable the use of radio microphones, in ear devices and other short-range wireless devices. These systems are integral to the production of content for recorded and live entertainment. **If the proposed changes to access rights to radio frequency spectrum go ahead, virtually all organisations that rely on radio spectrum for the production of content will be adversely affected.**
  
- The PMSE sector – Wireless Microphones, Wireless In-Ear Monitor Systems and Wireless Talk Back Systems - are a fundamental component of the British Entertainment Industry. This industry is worth a total of £15 billion per annum to the UK and employs in excess of 150,000 people. On a daily basis this sector is responsible for the production of content that has received world- wide acclaim and continues to attract a global audience. A vast array of organisations are reliant on radio spectrum for the production of content for **Performing Arts, Broadcasting, News Gathering, Film and Independent Production, Corporate Events, TV, Concerts, Night Venues and Sports Events**. In addition, other sectors that utilise the current frequency spectrum, including the Health Service, Education, and Local Government will also be affected.
  
- On the **19<sup>th</sup> December 2006** Ofcom published the Digital Dividend Review (DDR). The consultation period is now under way and it is essential that during this period there is regular and productive dialogue between Ofcom and the PMSE sector. The main concerns of the PMSE sector have, after considerable effort, been recognised by Ofcom. However while the published DDR makes specific mention to the PMSE sector, and of its relationship to the vacated spectrum, it offers little by way of workable solutions for the PMSE sector. It is therefore very difficult for those most affected, to prepare for their future after the switchover to Digital.

**It is now time for Ofcom to construct a practical solution to the unintended consequences of the Digital Dividend (DDR).** This solution must avert the irreparable damage that the plans to auction spectrum, would have on a world leading industry that depends on this resource for the production of content.

However to find this solution, a number of fundamental problems need to be addressed.

PRESS RELEASE

In the same way that the frequencies used for analogue broadcasting vary geographically across the UK, so too will the frequencies that will be used for digital broadcasting. The DDR appears to be advocating interleaving within this 'digital' spectrum as a solution, by putting the PMSE in the 'white spaces' that will exist in the 'patchwork quilt' that will cover the UK. This shows recognition of the concerns of the PMSE sector. However the PMSE sector requires more details of this option if they are to adequately construct a response to the consultation. Their chief difficulty remains that the DDR provides no information on:

1. **How much spectrum would be available to the PMSE sector?**
2. **In which areas will that spectrum will be available? i.e. What will the Digital Switch Over (DSO) frequency plan (patchwork quilt) look like?**
3. How many other bidders does Ofcom estimate there are likely to be for small local pockets of spectrum?
4. The DDR proposes de-regulation of Channel 69 - to be reserved for PMSE use? How would it be policed?
5. Would this spectrum be co-ordinated by JFMG or a similar organisation, or would the industry just 'fend for itself'? What protection against interference would there be unless spectrum use is coordinated?
6. Are there any plans to co-ordinate frequency use after 2008? How will the stated requirements of spectrum 'owners', that they must 'make available' frequencies for PMSE use until 2012, be policed and upheld?
7. What happens after 2012? No mention is made in the DDR of any plans after this date

Crucially the consultation paper has also failed to sufficiently acknowledge that as an Industry the PMSE sector is disparate and fragmented. This makes bidding for spectrum extremely difficult if not impossible. Answers to these questions are the fundamental starting points for an accurate and realistic response from the PMSE sector. Until more detailed information is provided on these technical issues, it is impossible for the PMSE sector to respond in any meaningful sense to the consultation process.

**Moving Forward**

In order for the PMSE sector to present a fair and objective response to this consultation these issues must be swiftly addressed with greater transparency and precision by Ofcom. When this occurs a viable solution will be constructed. More meetings are required with Ofcom to provide answers to these questions. **It is essential that as a result of this consultation Ofcom can guarantee that sufficient quality and quantity of spectrum be available to prevent the collapse of a renowned and valuable UK industry and provide timely answers to critical questions posed by the PMSE.**

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