

[GB] Broadcast Entertainment Ban to Be Lifted

IRIS 1998-5:1/15

*Stefaan Verhulst
PCMLP University of Oxford*

The Department for Trade and Industry has announced that it will be lifting the restriction which has stopped British Telecom and other public telecoms operators (PTOs) from offering broadcast entertainment services. Margaret Beckett, president of the Board of Trade, issued at the end of April the Government's conclusions on the restrictions in "Broadband Britain: A Fresh Look at the Broadcast Entertainment Restrictions". The main points are that: (i) PTOs along with all other operators should immediately have the option to compete in the provision of broadcast entertainment to the 17% of UK homes currently outside cable franchise areas; (ii) PTOs and others should be allowed to compete in the provision of broadcast services, if they so wish, throughout the whole country from 1 January 2001 - which is a year earlier than the current Government's first intentions. The previous Conservative Government slapped the ban on British Telecom to encourage cable operators to plough funds into building networks. The ban was intended to be for 10 years, but it was uncertain if and when it might come to an end because the previous administration only committed itself to a review in 2002. While the final removal of the restrictions will require primary legislation, the ITC will be involved in implementing the immediate effects of the rule change. The licensing issues arising from the full lifting of the restrictions will be considered as part of a wide-ranging consultation to consider the implications of digital convergence for the regulation of telecommunications and broadcasting. This consultation will be launched later this year.

Department of Trade and Industry. Broadband Britain: A Fresh Look at the Broadcast Entertainment Restrictions

