[IE] Digital Broadcasting

IRIS 2001-8:1/23

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RTÉ, the national public service broadcaster, established under the Broadcasting Act, 1960, has dual funding from an annual licence fee and advertising income. Successive governments in recent years have declined to increase the level of the licence fee, which at IEP 70 (EURO 88.88) remains one of the lowest in Western Europe. The Broadcasting Act, 2001 (see IRIS 2001-4: 9) makes provision for RTÉ to be involved in digital terrestrial television. In preparation, RTÉ sought an increase of IEP 50 (EURO 63.49). However, the Government, on the basis of a consultant's report, only awarded IEP 14.50 (EURO 18.42). Despite that setback, RTÉ has announced plans to launch four new digital channels, beginning in autumn 2002. A review of the licence fee is scheduled for 2003.

Meanwhile, the licence to operate the service, which will carry thirty channels on RTÉ's transmission network, is to be awarded on the basis of a hybrid beauty contest (80%) and auction (20%) competition. The process is expected to be completed by October. A separate competition to sell off RTÉ's transmission network is expected to begin shortly. The Minister for Arts, Heritage, the Gaeltacht [Irish-language speaking areas of the country] and the Islands is authorised to license six multiplexes, while the Director of Telecommunications Regulation may award further licences. The Director has issued a Consultation Paper (31 August 2001) in respect of regional and local digital services. The Independent Radio and Television Commission, which regulates the commercial radio and television sector, also has a role in regulating certain of the new services under the Broadcasting Act, 2001. The Commission, which is to be renamed the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland under the 2001 Act, is in the process of revising its policy on pluralism and diversity (Consultation Document, June 2001) in relation to existing and proposed new broadcast services.

"Licensing Regional or Locally Based Digital Television Delivery - Consultation Paper", Office of the Director of Telecommunications Regulation, Doc. No. 01/69 of 31 August 2001

http://www.odtr.ie/docs/odtr0169.doc

"Regulating for Pluralism and Diversity in Broadcasting - The Way Forward", Independent Radio and Television Commission Consultation Document of June 2001

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http://www.irtc.ie/vaca1.html

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