[IE] Minister Announces List of Major Sports Events

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Candelaria van Strien-Reney
Faculty of Law, National University of Ireland, Galway

On 15 October 2002, the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources published a list of major sports events that the Government has approved as events that are of major importance to Irish society and which should continue to be available on free-to-air television services. The Minister has the power to do this under section 2(1) of the Broadcasting (Major Events Television Coverage) Act, 1999, which implements the relevant provisions of the "Television without Frontiers" Directive, but this is the first time that the Minister has used this power.

The impetus for the drawing up of the list arose last summer when the national public service broadcaster, Radio Telefís Éireann (RTÉ), lost the right to screen live coverage of the Republic of Ireland's home international football matches for the next four years. The Football Association of Ireland (FAI, the body governing the sport in Ireland) sold the rights to Sky Sports, so the games will only be available on a pay-per-view basis.

The list of events was drawn up following consultation with members of the public and with sports bodies. The following events are to be free-to-air on a live basis:

- The Summer Olympics;

- In Gaelic Games: the All-Ireland (i.e., including both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) Senior Inter-County [Gaelic] Football and Hurling Finals (Gaelic football is distinct from "association football" (soccer) and hurling is a popular Gaelic game, somewhat similar to hockey, which is played by men);

- In Soccer: Ireland's home and away qualifying games in the European Football Championship and the FIFA World Cup Tournament; Ireland's games in, and also (whether Ireland participates or not) the opening game, the semi-finals and the final of, the European Football Championship Finals Tournament and the FIFA World Cup Finals Tournament;

- In Rugby: Ireland's games in the Rugby World Cup Finals Tournament;

- In Horse Racing: the Irish Grand National and the Irish Derby;

- In Equestrian Events: the Nations' Cup at the Dublin Horse Show.

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The Minister has also designated Ireland's games in the Six Nations' Rugby Championship as events to be available on a deferred basis.

The Minister must now seek the approval of the Oireachtas (the Irish Parliament) for the list before he can submit it to the European Commission for final approval under the "Television without Frontiers" Directive.

The Minister has also announced that he intends to introduce amendments to the Broadcasting (Major Events Television Coverage) Act, 1999. The first of these proposed amendments would facilitate the determination of a fair market value for television sports rights where negotiations have broken down between a broadcaster and the organiser of a designated event. The second proposed amendment would give a qualifying broadcaster (RTÉ, or TV3 - Ireland's only commercial television broadcaster) the right to secure the broadcast rights for a designated event directly from the organiser where exclusive rights to such an event had already been sold to a non-qualifying broadcaster at the time of the original designation.

"Dermot Ahern Announces Free to Air TV Sports Events", Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources Press Release (including the List of Events) of 15 October 2002

http://www.marine.gov.ie

The Broadcasting (Major Events Television Coverage) Act, 1999 of 13 november 1999

http://www.gov.ie/bills28/acts/1999/a2899.pdf

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