

SUMMARY OF STATEMENT BY IBI TO JOINT OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE ON ARTS, MEDIA, COMMUNICATIONS, CULTURE AND SPORT

June 2025 - Our 34 Members are deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric of the nation, broadcasting locally, regionally and nationally. The independent radio sector has a combined share of 70% of radio listenership daily, representing over 2.5 million listeners.

Our Member stations employ 1,069 people directly across Ireland, including 170 journalists and provide highly valuable services to listeners, including in times of emergency.

Our Members provide a diverse range of high-quality public service programming including News and Current Affairs, local and national sports coverage, a range of music genres, and factual programming. They play a key role in listeners' lives by providing discussion, connection, companionship and highly trusted programming. In very simple terms, they provide choice to listeners.

The work of our newsrooms was hugely impressive during the recent weather emergencies and in the elections in 2024. That work continues every single day of the year.

Independent radio stations remain hugely popular in Ireland. However, the advertising landscape in Ireland has undergone major disruption. Tech giants and social media platforms now gain €1 billion approximately in advertising revenue from the Irish market each year.

We in radio are committed to quality journalism, through our highly trained and professional people. We take our responsibilities in relation to fairness, accuracy and balance extremely seriously and have a proud record of protecting and serving listeners.

Our members have responded to the economic challenge by investing and innovating and, as SMEs, we are nimble and agile.

We wish to continue to play a role in providing quality news and information and a platform for proper exploration of issues – however we face undoubted economic challenges in doing this, and this is why we need assistance.

Our sector's key requirement is a level playing field, along with fair and proportionate support to sustain and strengthen News and Current Affairs. At present, independent stations receive less than one-third of one percent of the total annual Exchequer funding allocated to the media.

We broadly welcome the Bill and the promised funding for News and Current Affairs. However, there are several key improvements that we consider critical.

Firstly, the need for ringfencing of funding for the uniquely regulated independent radio broadcasting sector, so that the role of our sector is recognised by changes to the one-size-fits-all or “platform neutral” nature of journalism schemes currently. Instead, we in IBI propose recognition of the special and different responsibilities and duties which apply to the independent radio sector, as regulated and licensed.

And secondly, the need to remove the impossible obstacle of “additionality”, currently seen in restrictions of funding to narrow or “new” categories, which excludes our experienced newsroom teams involved in core News and Current Affairs, in favour of temporary contracts.

What additionality or confining funding to “new” or restricted output means is an arbitrary concept that all of the excellent work currently done by the journalists, editors, current affairs presenters and producers, researchers, and others in our sector bringing you top class services 24/7/365 are not deemed to qualify for any support whatsoever. Only if extra work is done by different people would that be supported. That does not take account of the excellence of the core work our newsrooms do day-in and day-out, or of the difference between radio and other media.

Our members are already required to provide News and Current Affairs content as part of their licences. The facts are that they consistently exceed these licencing requirements. You will all be familiar with the amount of airtime dedicated by your own local station to the most recent Local, European and General Elections as well as Referendums. Such work should be supported.

In the Local Elections last year as an example, a total of 436 hours of election count and results coverage took place on 34 independent stations.

We believe that any review of public service content must include proportionate representation from our sector. Additionally, Coimisiún na Meán should recognise the vital role of independent stations in delivering emergency information during crises—especially when broadband and mobile networks are unavailable.

In relation to a review and expansion of the Sound and Vision Scheme we believe that ringfenced funding for radio is absolutely essential due the low levels of funding currently going the sector from the Scheme.

We further point out that there is a clear and emerging need at European level to urgently revise the State Aid rules in relation to how they apply to providers of essential News, Information and Current Affairs services.

Proportionate and meaningful support would preserve and enhance the delivery of quality and accurate News and Current Affairs and stem the erosion of those services which has been seen in the UK and US, leading to “News Deserts” where disinformation and misinformation run rampant. In that situation, society can become deeply polarised and proper debate within a democratic framework becomes almost impossible. In contrast, our radio services deliver accurate information – in real-time – and are therefore the best protection against dangerous disinformation and misinformation.