

Session: **Managing sport in upcoming economic conditions II.**
Abstract nr: **EASM-0143**

The Economics of Listed Sports Events in a Digital Era of Broadcasting: A Case Study of the UK

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This paper will focus on direct regulations in sports broadcasting that regulate which channels are allowed to broadcast specific sports events. Examples of such regulations are the European *Listed Events* legislation and the Australian *Anti-Siphoning List*, which prevent pay-TV channels from broadcasting events that are of special value for society. It specifically concentrates on the UK since in 2009 an independent review of the UK listed events legislation was carried out by an Independent Advisory Panel (IAP) of experts appointed by the then Minister for Culture Media and Sport, Andy Burnham. The author was one of those appointed to this review committee and was present at all Panel meetings where evidence was presented. This Independent Advisory Panel (IAP) received evidence from broadcasters, national and international governing bodies of sport, and media experts over a four month period as well as appointing an independent market research company to carry out both qualitative and quantitative surveys on the views of the public. This paper uses that recent evidence (or at least that part of it that is in the public domain) to examine the question of whether or not in the coming digital age of broadcasting it is still necessary for governments to intervene in broadcasting markets to ensure that major sports events are shown on channels available to the whole nation or at least a high percentage of it. This issue is relevant outside the UK as the Australian government is reviewing its Anti-Siphoning list in 2010 and other European governments are likely to be doing the same in the next few years.

The terms of reference for the 2009 IAP were that the Panel should review:

- **The principle of listing;**
- **The criteria against which events were currently, or might in the future be listed; and**
- **The events which make up the current list, and those which should do so in the future.**

The main criterion for listing in the previous review in 1998 was that the event has a special national resonance, not just a significance to those who ordinarily follow the sport concerned; it is an event which serves to unite the nation, a shared point on the national calendar.

For a sporting event, it would also fall into one or both of the following categories:

- **it is a pre-eminent national or international event in the sport;**
- **it involves the national team or national representatives in the sport concerned.**

Obviously it was part of the Panel's remit to consider the suitability of this criterion.

The paper looks at the theoretical case for and against listing and then goes on to analyse the evidence submitted to the Panel. The evidence submitted is discussed under the following groupings:

- **UK Sporting Organisations (concentrating on the evidence provided by those responsible for the sports of cricket and rugby union). Evidence was submitted by 28 UK Sporting Organisations;**
- **International Sporting Organisations (concentrating on the evidence provided by the IOC and FIFA). Evidence was submitted by six International Sporting Organisations.;**
- **Terrestrial Broadcasters (including the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5). All together, 7 terrestrial broadcasters submitted evidence;**
- **Satellite Broadcasters (concentrating on the evidence provided by Sky, the only satellite broadcaster to submit evidence)**
- **The Public (evidence on the public's attitude to the listing of events was collected by the British Market Research Bureau (BMRB) in 12 focus groups discussions across the country and in a survey based on a representative sample of 2,072 adults aged 15+).**

In addition to the above evidence the Panel were provided with forecasts of the major changes likely to take place in the broadcast market over the next ten years in particular after the UK switches over to digital only transmission in 2012.

The paper concludes with the main issues that the Panel identified in the consideration of all the evidence and the recommendations to the Minister as a result.