

PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

URCA Consults on Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) in The Bahamas

Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) has been a topic of interest over the past few months in The Bahamas. The likes of the United Kingdom and Canada have enjoyed the benefits of PSB via television and radio for many years, with the BBC and CBC providing high quality original programming for audiences in those countries.

The Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority (URCA), the regulator of Electronic Communications Sector (ECS) in The Bahamas, which includes the purview of broadcasting, has published a consultation document that sets out URCA's conclusions and preliminary recommendations regarding PSB in The Bahamas. In particular, by articulating a definition of PSB that is fit-for-purpose for The Bahamas, alongside a clear remit for ZNS that focuses on what audiences want, URCA hopes to ensure that Bahamians have access to a broader range of high-quality Bahamian programming in the future.

The document allows for further input into how PSB should be developed, and all interested persons and stakeholders have the opportunity to respond on various issues that URCA will consider prior to publication of a final report with recommendations to the Minister in 2011. It is important that feedback is received and considered, and participation is encouraged in the process of developing the most suitable PSB model for The Bahamas. Responses to the document should be submitted to URCA by 25 February 2011.

URCA under the Communications Act (Comms Act 2009) is required to publish a report with recommendations to the Minister about;

- The role of public service broadcasting in The Bahamas;
- The remit and corporate governance rules of the Corporation (i.e. the state broadcaster ZNS);
- The preferred method of funding any public service broadcasting obligations that are recommended; and
- Necessary amendments to the Broadcasting Act.

To ensure the report to the Minister is comprehensive, URCA adopted an evidence-based approach using international best practices by reviewing other PSB models, corporate governance arrangements around the world, along with various types of local research gathered from individuals, broadcasters, producers and others, and analysis of the research. Mrs. Kathleen Smith, Senior Case Officer at URCA, stated, "for the first time in The Bahamas, URCA commissioned three complementary strands of audience research, to assess levels and priorities of programming. Focus groups examined audience perceptions of the quality and importance of local programming, and diaries were kept by individuals on their radio and television consumption. Also the research did not focus solely on New Providence but incorporated results from nine other islands including Inagua and Cat Island." ZNS as well as private TV and radio broadcasters completed an information request which provided details on the types and amount of local and foreign programming which included first-run versus rebroadcast programmes.

The complete Public Consultation – Review of Public Service Broadcasting -ECS 29/2010 can be downloaded from URCA’s website at www.urbahamas.bs. Comments are to be received by URCA no later than 5:00 p.m. on 25 February 2011. URCA continues to act in a transparent manner in the execution of duties as mandated under the Comms Act.

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