

## Communications Committee Inquiry on Media Plurality

Written evidence for the House of Lords Communications Committee [Inquiry on Media Plurality](#) must be submitted by 1 May.

It remains to be seen if the expected [Communications Review](#) White Paper will be published by then but it is clear that the Inquiry will be a useful forum for debate of the issues that the Government may be discussing – in the event that it wishes to develop policy in this area. If the Committee's recent report on [convergence](#) is anything to go by, this is a group that is prepared to be bold and lead debate in this area, so civil society groups and academics should find it worthwhile to get involved.

Interestingly, the [Leveson Report](#) made a number of very direct recommendations on media plurality, notably an endorsement of the Ofcom report on media plurality (which is mentioned in this new call for evidence) and a call for further debate on media ownership rules.

Notably Leveson recommends that:

“the levels of influence that would give rise to concerns in relation to plurality must be lower, and probably considerably lower, than the levels of concentration that would give rise to competition concerns”.

(4.20)

He also says that a new legislative regime should give Ofcom (or possibly the Competition Commission) – rather than the Government – very wide powers and discretion:

“Ofcom has presented the Inquiry and the Government with a full menu of potential remedies, and I have not seen any arguments to suggest that any of them are inappropriate in principle. Each of them might be appropriate in a given set of circumstances and I recommend that the relevant regulatory authority should have all of them in its armoury”.

(1470)

and he also asks the government to consider periodic review of media plurality:

“I therefore recommend that the Government should consider whether periodic plurality reviews or an extension to the public interest test within the markets regime in competition law is most likely to provide a timely warning of, and response to, plurality concerns that develop as the result of organic growth recognising that the proposal for a regular plurality review is more closely focussed on plurality issues.”

(1473)

Leveson also (at 1476) made a series of recommendations about maintaining the role of the Secretary of State in mergers that seem to run counter to his broader attempt to introduce some separation of media policy from political concerns.

Whilst government action in this area depends on their political will, and whether they can escape the influence of the **Levesonian Megaphone**, it seems that in global terms Leveson is flowing with the tide: policymakers are becoming less enthusiastic about deregulation of media plurality with **Australian** and **New Zealand** reports both indicating that powerful media groups should be held more accountable than small bloggers. It seems policy elsewhere is wrestling with the same issue that the UK government is currently grappling with. How the new regulatory arrangements should distinguish between large groups whose power should entail greater responsibility – and the thousands of smaller publishers who should be allowed to bloom and multiply.

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