

**Minister's Opening Statement**

**Joint Oireachtas Committee**  
**on the**  
**Report of the Future of Media Commission**

**14 September 2022**

Gabhaim buíochas leis an gCathaoirleach agus comhaltaí an Choiste as cuireadh a thabhairt dom bualadh libh inniu chun plé a dhéanamh ar an Tuarascáil um Choimisiún na Meán. *[Thank you Chair and Committee members for the invitation to meet with you today to discuss the Future of Media Commission report.]*

At the outset I would like to again thank the Professor MacCraith and the other Commission members for this insightful and detailed Report.

A diverse, vibrant and independent media sector is essential for our wider society, our democracy, our cultural development and indeed our social cohesion. Our media enlightens and educates us, and facilitates discourse and debate. Its content is a reflection of our society; a showcase for our unique culture and heritage; and it has the capacity to maintain community bonds. This has never been more clearly demonstrated, and indeed needed, than it was over the past number of years.

However, it is a sector that is undergoing profound change. Government recognises this, and committed in the Programme for Government to the establishment of the Future of Media Commission, with a remit to examine how media should serve Irish society, how well the current system meets these goals and what changes ought to be made to improve media in Ireland in the future. The Commission's timely recommendations will inform the framework to help Government achieve this.

The insights the Commission's report offers and its recommendations will feed into Government policy and directly impact the future of media in Ireland for the next 10 years and beyond.

Government accepted, in principle, 49 of the 50 Commission's recommendations, demonstrating how committed the Government is to supporting the media sector as it transitions to new economic models.

In relation to the recommendation to replace the TV licence with a fully Exchequer-funded model, the Government decided that in these challenging economic times, we must balance the needs of the country and economy as a whole. Our decision not to accept this recommendation was based on more than purely economic reasoning – we must also ensure the continued independence of media, and it is vital that we maintain a link between the creation and consumption of media content.

Government does recognise the need to reform the current funding model to ensure it provides for the new realities which the sector faces and importantly is sustainable. I have already set up a Technical Working Group that will report to me in November with practical steps to improve the TV Licence system to make it more efficient, sustainable and fairer.

A cornerstone of the Commission's report and recommendations is a regulator with a wider remit to address the shift in media consumption – a Media Commission. The Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill, which is currently progressing through the Oireachtas, provides for the establishment of such a new media regulator, Coimisiún na Meán.

A media regulator must now go beyond broadcasting, and An Coimisiún will replace the BAI and have a broader role in relation to media as well as online safety. It will thereby provide the regulatory and developmental framework to implement the Commission's report.

Two of the initial Commissioner roles will play a significant role in delivering on the Government's implementation of the Future of Media Commission Report – the Broadcasting Commissioner and the Media Development Commissioner. To help Coimisiún na Meán hit the ground running, I secured funding in Budget 2022 to enable an early establishment of the new body and competitions to fill Commissioner posts are currently in train.

Another key recommendation from the Commission is that the Broadcasting Fund be replaced by a new Media Fund, with six proposed new schemes added to the existing Sound and Vision and Archiving Schemes. While the new Fund will need to be underpinned by legislation, I have asked that two schemes be prioritised for development and rollout in 2023 on a pilot basis – the Local Democracy Scheme which will aim to ensure local media can keep the public informed on areas such as Regional Health Forums, Joint Policing Committees and Local Authorities; and the Courts Reporting Scheme which will enable improved reporting from local, regional and national courts.

The reform of the licence fee, together with the implementation of the Commission's accepted recommendations will enable RTE to build on its strengths as our national broadcaster. Through digital innovation and strategic planning, and with the support of NewERA and Coimisiún na Meán, RTÉ will further develop its mission to educate, entertain and enrich the lives of our people in a digital era.

Tugaim tús áite don Ghaeilge chomh maith ar leibhéal pearsanta agus gairmiúil. *[Another personal and professional priority for me is the Irish language]*. TG4 fulfils a vital role in supporting the Irish language, sport and culture in an innovative way and I was pleased to be able to provide TG4 with additional funding of €4.2m in Budget 22, building on a substantial increase in 2021, and leaving TG4 better funded than ever before. This has enabled TG4 to continue its innovative approach, to extend its reach, support the development of quality content, and to highlight key cultural and sporting events and festivals.

I very much support the Commission's recommendation that Coimisiún na Meán conduct a comprehensive review of the provision of Irish language services. Coimisiún na Meán will work with stakeholders to find synergies and build co-operation throughout the sector.

Coimisiún na Meán will continue and expand on the BAI's sustainability network to further promote sustainability in the wider media sector. I will also be asking An Coimisiún to prioritise the development of new gender equality and EDI standards for the sector, to ensure greater representation and content that reflects Irish society today. The recommended Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for sports broadcasting and reporting will help us showcase more diverse sports across multiple platforms.

I strongly welcome the Commission's recommendation to develop a National Counter Disinformation Strategy. My Department will lead on the Strategy's development in the coming months. We will work with the Irish Hub of the European Digital Media Observatory, industry stakeholders, and with Tánaiste's Department which is overseeing the Digital Services Act

The Commission was well briefed on the challenges facing the print sector. The expanded Media Fund will directly benefit the print sector, especially local media. The proposed Local Democracy and Court Reporting schemes I have referred to will be of direct benefit to the print sector, in particular local and regional outlets. The Commission has also recommended a consideration of indirect taxation measures for the sector, and there will be engagement on this matter in the context of the implementation process.

The Commission's recommendations will also benefit the radio sector in the years ahead, both from the widening of the Sound and Vision scheme to support news content, and from new Media Fund schemes, such as the Media Access and Training Scheme, the Community Media Scheme and Digital Transformation Scheme.

The Implementation Group established by Government has now commenced its work, with the initial task of developing a detailed implementation strategy which I intend to bring to Government in November. I will also be receiving a report from the newly established Technical Working Group on proposals to reform the TV licence system this November. Together with the establishment of Coimisiún na Meán, this will enable Government to deliver on its commitment to develop a framework to support our media sector for the next decade and beyond.

I thank the Committee for its invitation and I look forward to answering your questions.

Go raibh maith agaibh.

**(1274 words)**