

## Loss of RTE Radio 1 MW transmissions criticised

# Give us the power to rule on broadcasting say MLAs

By Claire Simpson

**T**HE assembly should have the power to decide on broadcasting issues to ensure RTE listeners in the north do not lose out when the Radio 1 medium wave service is scrapped next month, a Sinn Fein assembly member has said.

Assembly members cannot table a motion on RTE's decision because television and radio broadcasting is one of several "reserved" matters which have not been devolved to the assembly.

But Sinn Fein's Barry McElduff said the decision "serves as a reminder of why we need to get broadcasting into local hands."

RTE Radio 1 medium wave (MW) transmissions will stop from March 24, sparking fears thousands of northern listeners will be left with a patchy FM service.

The broadcaster's controversial decision has generated much debate, with politicians on both sides of the border including SDLP assembly member PJ Bradley and Fine Gael TD Simon Coveney calling on RTE to reinstate the service.

Dozens of bloggers have also discussed the issue, including the Dublin-based emigrant advice network which said the move would "affect (Irish) emigrants in Britain and beyond".

Mr McElduff said the scrapping of medium-wave and issues surrounding the digital television switchover showed broadcasting should be devolved.

"I am going to raise the matter with the office of the first minister and deputy first minister which has responsibility to liaise with the NIO on reserved matters and I will write to Shaun Woodward about the possibility of devolving broadcasting powers to the assembly," he said.

Mr McElduff said he would also request an urgent meeting with Belfast-born RTE director general Cathal Goan "to impress upon him the importance of this issue".

There are concerns that unless the assembly has some control over broadcasting and telecommunications issues, television viewers in the north will not be able to access RTE on a free service when the broadcaster switches off its analogue television service.

Although RTE is expected to switch to digital in 2012, there is no agreement to make RTE available to viewers in the north on Freeview.

## Move sparks waves of controversy



■ "The loss of our main radio station would be very sad."

■ "RTE's decision under Cathal Goan is an absolute disgrace. There should be no change until so-called improvements are tried and tested."

■ "I am very disappointed. I listen to RTE radio every day."

■ "I am sad to see medium wave go, I remember the days the radio sat on the high shelf so no one could change the station from RTE medium wave."

■ "It's a sad reflection on RTE that they cannot transmit to the four provinces of their own country while their opposition the BBC manages to transmit all over the world. My own national station can't even transmit within its own country. I am very disappointed by this decision but am not surprised."

■ "The medium wave transmission is the only transmission that we receive here in Belfast, the FM signal does not exist. When I phoned RTE on a few previous occasions about the poor medium wave reception I was told to listen to longwave. I think that says a lot about whether RTE cares if we receive their transmissions in the north or not."

■ "Hello I think it's terrible that RTE are

RTE's decision to scrap its Radio 1 medium-wave service has created much debate among readers of *The Irish News*. Here are some of your views left on our comment line

proposing to drop their medium wave service after all they did spend a lot of money on the Tullamore transmitter there only a few years ago. I don't know what Cathal Goan is at as director general but certainly I can't get

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longwave or FM where I live in a remote area of south Down. Hopefully medium wave will be retained and the dumbing down that started two years ago when they started the second helping service and dropping live matches during the summer will stop. Hopefully RTE will see sense and not go ahead with

this draconian measure."

■ "I am very disappointed that this is happening because I enjoy listening to RTE programmes both at night with the radio beside my bed and in the sitting room here during the day. I like to listen to the stories, the Mass on a Sunday and all the other various Irish programmes and I am disappointed this is being curtailed as of next month."

■ "I remember the first day Radio Eireann launched on Jan 1 1926. We were all very proud that we were going to have our own radio. I hope RTE don't go ahead and stop medium wave."

■ "I am disgusted by RTE's proposal to cease broadcasting on MW. Gay Byrne, Marian Finucane, Ryan Tubridy, Ronan Collins, Pat Kenny and Joe Duffy have been my "work colleagues" for the last 23 years. RTE is the national broadcaster and has a duty to keep broadcasting to the nation. It must continue to broadcast on MW at least until any proposed FM coverage has been

well established for the whole country. A promise of future FM coverage is not enough."

■ "The Irish News deserves great credit for its coverage and analysis of RTE's decision to terminate the MW service of Radio 1. However, this specific issue is only a symptom of a much greater problem; that of how broadcasting and telecommunications policy is administered

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in the north of Ireland. Despite devolution, telecommunications is a matter "reserved" to Westminster to determine on a UK wide basis. It was a strategic failing of all local political parties not to deliver these matters under the control of the Northern Ireland Executive."



■ LOCAL HANDS:  
Barry McElduff



■ REINSTATE:  
PJ Bradley