

RTE radio to improve FM coverage in north

Switch-off gets poor political reception

Station boasts some of Ireland's top presenters

By Valerie Robinson and Claire Simpson

POLITICIANS on both sides of the border have expressed concerns about RTE's decision to drop its Radio 1 medium-wave service.

SDLP assembly member PJ Bradley said it "links the nation north and south".

"Its prime programmes of news and current affairs are speech-based and unlike long wave MW is available on all dual-band radios," he said.

"Medium wave is much easier to tune than FM no matter where one travels in Ireland.

"It is the national broadcaster and it must demonstrate its commitment to the people of Ireland"

PJ Bradley

"The elderly and those with limited vision are not into podcasts and the internet and they do not have the computer literacy to use anything more modern than the radio."

Mr Bradley said RTE must reverse its decision to "cut off" so many people, especially in the six counties.

"It is the national broadcaster and it must demonstrate its commitment to the people of Ireland," he said.

"Why, even back in 1926 when Radio Eireann broadcast from Athlone the signal was available in each of the

32 counties.

"RTE cannot claim to be progressive if it pursues a reduction in service policy."

Sinn Fein MLA Barry McElduff said it was "of absolute importance" that listeners across Ireland were able to access RTE radio.

"RTE is Ireland's national broadcaster," he said.

"It is part of our heritage, culture and identity.

"I was brought up in a house where my mother was always talking about 'crackling towards Athlone' when she was tuning the radio.

"RTE has responsibilities, duties and obligations towards all of its listeners in the north."

Mr McElduff said he was frustrated that he was unable to get a clear reception for many RTE Radio 1 programmes.

"I find it difficult to use RTE perfectly. I have to angle the radio and fix the aerial and in 2008 it's not acceptable," he said.

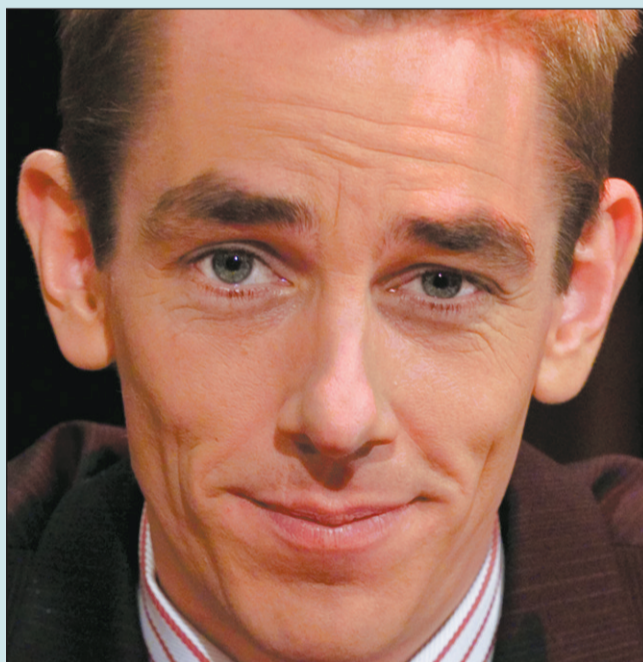
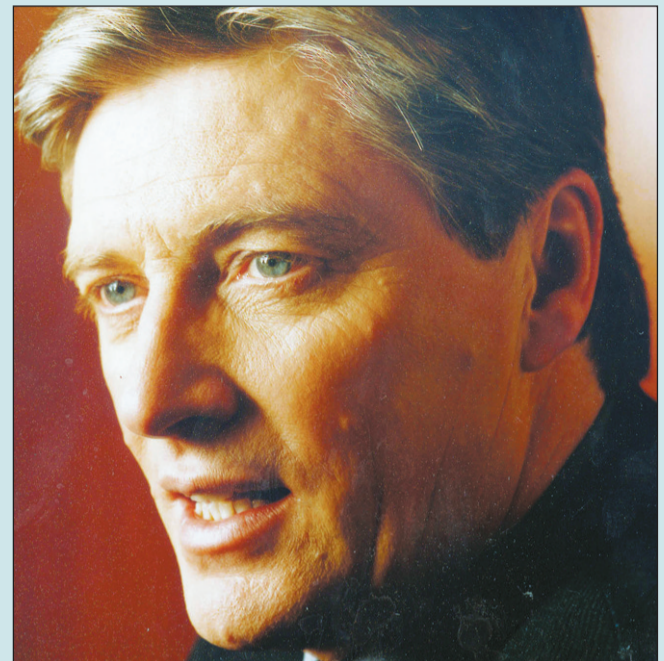
The Republic's main opposition party said it was concerned that RTE had made its decision without "any formal consultation process".

Fine Gael communications spokesman Simon Coveney said the broadcaster had a duty to its listeners.

He said its public service remit included a responsibility to anticipate and deal with any potential negative social consequences of changes to their broadcasting platforms.

"The main driver behind this decision is that it costs RTE €1.5 million (£1.1 million) per annum to power the MW transmission network and so it is a cost saving exercise," Mr Coveney said.

"I am all in favour of providing greater efficiency and cost cutting where appropriate. However, decisions by RTE always need to take account of their public service remit to rural as well as urban listeners."



■ FAMILIAR VOICES: Clockwise from top left, RTE Radio 1 presenters Marian Finucane, Pat Kenny, Joe Duffy and Ryan Tubridy

RTE Radio 1 is home to some of Ireland's most high-profile and best-paid presenters.

In 2006 the state broadcaster released details of its presenters' 2004 salaries with Pat Kenny coming out as the highest paid broadcaster thanks to his dual careers as a radio and television host.

The 60-year-old, who presents one of Radio 1's most popular shows - *Today with Pat Kenny* - as well as RTE's flagship TV programme *The Late Late Show*, earned €899,000 (£670,000).

A former chemical engineer, Kenny first began working for RTE as a continuity announcer in the 1970s. He presented political discussion show *Saturday View* on Radio 1 and became a television broadcaster on the *Today Tonight* current affairs programme in the mid 1980s.

He was also co-presenter of the 1988 Eurovision Song Contest.

Kenny works for RTE on a contract basis, along with three of Radio 1's best paid presenters, Marian Finucane, Joe Duffy and Ryan Tubridy. Finucane, described by President Mary McAleese as "the country's top female broadcaster", presents *The Marian Finucane Show*, the highest-rated weekend radio show in Ireland.

The 57-year-old, a trained architect, also started work in RTE as a continuity announcer in 1974. She took over veteran broadcaster Gay Byrne's early morning slot after he retired in 1999.

In 2005 her 9am weekday slot was taken over by Tubridy and her show was moved to weekends. She was paid €439,000 (£327,000) in 2004 and is RTE's third highest earner.

Duffy presents radio interview and phone-in show *Liveline* every weekday from 1.45pm to 3pm.

RTE's fourth highest earner, he was paid €279,000 (£208,000) in 2004. He studied social work at Trinity College Dublin and reportedly shared a house with former Labour leader Dick Spring during that time.

He famously gave one of the readings at the Papal Mass in Galway racetrack in 1979, along with former Bishop of Galway Dr Eamon Casey and Fr Michael Cleary.

Tubridy (34) is one of Radio 1's youngest presenters. He was paid €216,000 (£161,000). He also has twin careers in radio and television, presenting *The Tubridy Show* on the former and his Saturday night chat show *Tubridy Tonight* on the latter.

Claire Simpson

Regulator contradicts RTE claim that MW

By Claire Simpson

RTE has claimed that part of its reason for axing Radio 1 on medium

wave was because MW is "environmentally unsound".

However, Ofcom, which regulates the communications industry in Britain and North-

ern Ireland, said the effects of radio waves on humans had never been highlighted as a major concern.

"We are aware that radiation

effects on humans at the various frequencies have been considered but due to the relative distance from humans of broadcast transmitters (as

opposed to phones or other mobile radios) it has never been a real issue other than for people working on or immediately adjacent to

broadcast radio masts," a spokeswoman said.

"As for the visual environmental impact it is generally accepted that this is reduced