

*Championing  
excellence and diversity  
in broadcasting*

Founded in 1983 by Jocelyn Hay CBE

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## **Response from Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) to the CMA on the proposed 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox acquisition of Sky Inquiry**

This response follows a decision by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to refer the proposed acquisition of Sky by 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox to the Competition and Markets Authority on media plurality and broadcasting standards grounds.

VLV urges the Competition and Markets Authority, in its consideration, to put the interests of citizens first. The VLV supports quality and diversity in broadcasting. There are clearly concerns on both these aspects, given the extensive media interests already held in the UK by Fox and associated companies and aspects of the way Fox news has behaved in the US, and we welcomed the Secretary of State's decision to refer both these aspects to the Competition and Markets Authority.

Our response is in two parts. Firstly we deal with the substantive issue of whether or not the proposed takeover undermines the principle of media plurality and secondly we comment on the broadcasting standards issues being assessed.

### **1. The principle of media plurality**

In our view the proposed acquisition of Sky plc by 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox will have the medium to long-term effect of diminishing plurality of cultural provision, of the range of viewpoints and of news production generally in the United Kingdom. Our evidence for this is the experience of the last few decades when concentrations of media ownership have progressively reduced the range of views available to readers and audiences. In the case of satellite television ownership we do not think that the various attempts that have been made to mitigate this risk by proposing time-limited forms of independence or quasi-independence for Sky News are a sufficient safeguard. We therefore remain of the view that the proposed merger will undermine media pluralism and is therefore against the public interest.

### **2. Broadcasting Standards**

In light of the numerous representations which have already been made which highlight the shortcomings of the journalism and integrity at News International and Fox News in the US VLV considers there is a significant risk that if 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox acquires 100% of Sky the standard of its news and factual output is likely to decline. We question whether the merged entity will have the same level of genuine commitment to broadcasting standards objectives as Sky currently has.

VLV recognises that there is a difference between press activities, which are self-regulated, and broadcasting activities, which are regulated by Ofcom. In a narrow sense, therefore, regulatory

responsibilities for the journalistic activities of the press subsidiaries of News International are unrelated to those of its broadcasting subsidiaries. On the other hand, the lack of appropriate management and editorial oversight at News International and Fox News in the US leads us to conclude that there would be risks that the culture of both these organisations which are controlled by the same parent company, the Murdoch Family Trust, could influence the operation and output of Sky News.

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***Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV)*** is an independent, non-profit-making association, free from political, commercial and sectarian affiliations, working for quality and diversity in broadcasting. VLV represents the interests of listeners and viewers as citizens and consumers across the full range of broadcasting issues. VLV is concerned with the structures, regulation, funding and institutions that underpin the British broadcasting system; it does not handle complaints.