

Invisible Ears That Can't Complain

Campaign to prevent the closure of RTE 1 252 Longwave service to Britain

IN SEPTEMBER 2014, RTÉ announced the cessation of its Radio One service on Longwave. This shocked many listeners in Ireland, Northern Ireland and even more so in the UK who use the service to maintain connection with Ireland.

Following the RTÉ announcement, a press conference appeal led by author, newspaper columnist and broadcaster Fr. Bryan D'arcy called attention to the matter "Radio Éireann is a home from home - a priceless link" which drew out substantial public outcry and led to RTÉ postponing the closure of the Longwave 252 service for two years while government funded research into the radio listening habits of the UK Irish is conducted.

Meanwhile, RTÉ have cut the signal power of Longwave 252 to half its original strength. This is likely to affect the opinions of the unwitting Irish diaspora who, as a result of the power cut, may change their opinion of the Longwave service.

The solution is simple - in a matter of hours and at almost zero cost, RTÉ could move the 252kHz service to 261kHz. This licence would be issued by Comreg given the support of Minister Alex White and a little diplomacy. And while the channel change might go unnoticed by many, it's effect would be a better service with improved reception over a wider area of the UK and beyond, ensuring that RTÉ Radio One can continue to reach out to the invisible, yet ever appreciative ears of the Irish diaspora across these Islands.

In the UK, 6 million citizens have an Irish grandparent and half a million are Irish born while 100,000 are pensioners who rely heavily on the RTÉ Radio One service to alleviate isolation.

These pensioners are known as the "invisible Irish" as they have little means to speak out against such matters as



James Moriarty is from Lispole near Dingle in County Kerry. He is 86 this year. He has lived in London since 1954. James is concerned he will miss news from Ireland and the familiar Irish voices on LW. In London, the RTÉ LW service is a lifeline to James and many other single older Irish people who keep in touch with home.

the closure of the longwave service, and yet many would agree that the service is most vital to this segment of the Irish diaspora - who don't have the means or facility to receive RTÉ Radio One via digital technology.

Myra Butler, an active volunteer with the Irish Community Care in Manchester, has first-hand proof of



ABOVE: Leeds LW 252 Campaigners. LEFT: Myra Butler, originally from North Cork, but in Manchester for decades, is leading the campaign in the North West.

the importance this broadcast is for the elderly. "The Mass each Sunday and other religious services are a solace to the incapacitated and infirm. They love the Joe Duffy programme and Seán O'Rourke. Then there is Céilídh House every Saturday evening etc. etc."

Myra continues, with regards to the survey that is being disseminated at present: "I have concerns about that. The questionnaires are very slow in getting to the applicants, if at all! I met a friend last night at a W.B. Yeats Poetry reading at Manchester University. She told me that she requested ten forms a week last Friday and only received them last Tuesday. That is about eleven days from original request. I have heard many likewise reports. The last date to request forms is 26th October. Bearing that in mind it will not give many the opportunity to return completed forms before Friday, November 6th.

"We appeal to RTÉ to extend the consultation period of this survey." ■