

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The development of DTT essentially involves an upgrade of terrestrial, free-to-air broadcasting from a legacy analogue system to a modern digital system. Almost 500,000 (35%) of Irish households use terrestrial television as their primary means of accessing television services.

The provision of a national, free-to-air DTT transmission network regulated in Ireland is a priority in terms of broadcasting policy. It is considered as a prerequisite for a vibrant, relevant Irish broadcasting sector into the future. DTT can provide a range of new and improved broadcasting services to the Irish viewer in terms of both quality and quantity.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] broadcasting policy is complex, encompassing a range of cultural, economic and social issues, and a rollout of DTT involves a host of technical, legal, and commercial issues. Legislation in the form of the 2001 Broadcasting Act put in place a legal framework for the introduction of DTT in Ireland. A process was implemented by the Irish Government to introduce DTT on a commercial footing in 2001. This

process was unsuccessful, due to the withdrawal of the sole applicant for the multiplexing licence, and finished in 2002.

Since the termination of the previous process, the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources has been examining and reviewing Ireland's digital television policies.

### Benefits of DTT

The possibilities for improved free-to-air services through DTT are extensive and include:

- The availability of more channels (over 30 TV channels and 20 radio stations are available on the UK DTT service)
- Improved quality of service to viewers (including possibilities for wide-screen and high-definition TV)
- Increased viewer choice with regard to programmes, content and interactivity, including possibilities for data/broadband services
- New methods of communicating to viewers
- Improved ways of bringing late adopters of technology, which can include the more socially excluded, into the public information networks
- Potential improvements in the delivery government services

### Overview of Proposals for Development of DTT

This Department has examined the range of issues pertaining to the development of DTT and digital broadcasting in Ireland. The way forward is proposed as a number of steps.

- The Department will implement a broadcaster-neutral DTT demonstration Pilot over a two-year period.
- During the Pilot, the Department will engage with all relevant broadcasters and other stakeholders, on the issues around the development and financing of a national DTT rollout. RTE is expected to play a key role in a national DTT rollout. Experiences with the Pilot will assist in setting the agenda for such an engagement and will galvanise the discussions.
- In consideration of new national DTT rollout proposals that emerge, the Department will bring forward proposals for a recasting of the DTT legislative framework.
- When national DTT infrastructure build is underway and there is reasonable certainty around the future of free-to-air digital terrestrial broadcasting in Ireland, the Department will be in a position to make recommendations regarding potential analogue switch-off dates (see discussion below).

Analogue Switch-Off

A rollout of DTT creates the possibility that analogue switch-off (the turning off of the current analogue terrestrial four channel service) can occur. As DTT utilises spectrum in a far more efficient manner, analogue switch-off would ultimately release valuable spectrum that could be used for other broadcasting or telecoms services. An important rationale in the UK's argument for a move towards analogue switch-off, to be completed by 2012 according to official timetables, is the value generated by freed up spectrum (through auction etc).

Such additional spectrum in Ireland would allow Ireland to continue to match technological developments in other OECD countries, by providing additional spectrum to new broadcasting and telecommunications services. Future analogue switch-off is now taken as a given in spectrum planning groups across Europe. The Regional Radio Conference, meeting in June 2006, which decides on international agreements around spectrum, is planning for a digital-only world commencing in a number of years.

The European Union has issued a number of papers on the issue of DTT and analogue switch-off. Its most recent paper suggests a move towards the stipulation of mandatory switch-off dates at an EU level. Switch-off will not be possible in Ireland until there is adequate DTT coverage.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A best estimate at this stage is that funding of up to €6m will be required to cover capital costs of the Pilot in 2006, and approximately €2m will be required in each of 2007 and 2008.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]