

## **DRAFT**

To whom it may concern,

The GAA welcomes the opportunity to support the importance of a financially strong and editorially independent, National Broadcaster. As a country, over the last nine months we have seen firsthand the importance of a state supported National broadcaster in the dissemination of clear, concise public health messaging in a world increasingly dominated by commercial interest and political spin.

The GAA also welcomes the opportunity to put on record our thoughts regarding designated major events as part of the recently announced consultation process by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

Major sporting events play a ubiquitous and important role in Irish life for many reasons and the GAA is proud to provide the outlet for many of these occasions. The Association is also delighted that our show-piece marquee All-Ireland final days, as well our sister organisations' in the LGFA and Camogie Associations equivalent, are current listed events and endorse the continuation of this into the future.

We are acutely aware of our place in Irish life and the role we play - as a community outlet, a source of passion, pride and identity but also as an inclusive entity that opens its doors to anyone who wishes to become involved in whatever shape they desire. Watching Gaelic games on television can act as a much-needed source of distraction to some, a place of common ground to others and a connection to the homeland for those abroad during these most unprecedented of times.

We constantly seek to maximize the exposure and awareness of our games while achieving fair value for our broadcast rights. TV remains the most effective mass promotional tool available to us and is a vehicle that allows us to engage with over 500,000 members in a truly compelling 'appointment to view' fashion week in, week out for the entirety of the calendar year.

Indeed, a child - who may be one of 1.4m viewers on All-Ireland final day - watching his or her hero on television will naturally be drawn closer to the sport as a result and may even lead to them becoming a future All-Star in the next generation of GAA, LGFA and Camogie players. It is therefore crucial to manage GAA broadcast carriage appropriately.

Approximately 180-190 GAA games are televised each year (85% free to air), within which an unwavering commitment to the Irish language is evident in our long-standing relationship with TG4. RTÉ, the national broadcaster, has always carried all, or at the very least, most of the Senior Championship matches since its first foray back in 1962 and this mutually beneficial arrangement will no doubt remain in place in the years to come.

A small subscription TV element does exist within the current GAA broadcast portfolio, as it does in most modern-day sporting entities around the world. The involvement of eir Sport and Sky Sports (the latter of whom now employ over 1,000 people from their Dublin office) at GAA venues in recent years has ensured diverse production & presentation features, a healthy sense of professional competition among all stations and ultimately a better viewing proposition for those watching at home.

That unrelenting demand for GAA coverage from our members exploded in 2020 as those who were not permitted to attend matches due to mass gathering restrictions turned their attention to broadcast. As a result, online match streaming thrived and seen the Association launch its direct-to-fan streaming platform - GAAGO.ie - in the domestic market to ensure the nation could see the action and perhaps hold onto some sense of 'normality' during the lockdown. GAAGO is a JV with RTE. The entity reflects a different, cooperative approach to the new media landscape between the rights holder, in this case the GAA and the National Broadcaster.

The GAA has seen its primary revenue generation source - match attendance income - plummet to zero in the wake of Covid-19 outdoor gathering restrictions. As a result, an even greater onus has now been placed on the Association's broadcast rights and the critical need to achieve a fair commercial value for them.

The monies generated from the sale of media rights to interested bidders are of utmost importance to sustain and grow the GAA's raison d'etre - to foster lifelong participation in Gaelic games in every city, town, village and townland from Malin to Mizen head and everywhere in between.

83c of every Euro earned from broadcast deals is repurposed to GAA Provincial, County and Club capital and operational costs - this dividend is not stockpiled or indeed divided among individual private shareholders but distributed for the benefit of those volunteering within Ireland's largest sporting and cultural organisation. This may take the form of infrastructural grant aid, underage coaching in schools or broader local GAA community outreach initiatives.

The GAA does not want what is already a relatively small Irish sports rights market to be condensed even further, which might well prove to be the case if further GAA events were to be added to the designated events list, as it would have a profound knock-on effect to the Association as a whole.

Despite noble diaspora GAA involvement overseas, we are essentially an indigenous sport that relies on domestic commercial interests only and do not benefit from wider international recognition and appetite in the same manner as other codes such as soccer and rugby. Nor indeed do we benefit from a larger pooled financial pot from the sport's international governing body.

Covid-19 has already led to a slowdown in projected commercial sport values for the foreseeable future and Ireland will feel this contraction more than most owing to its size and

stature in the wider global sense. Creating a meaningful 'open market' for GAA broadcast rights will undoubtedly continue to prove difficult in the years ahead but the current designated sporting events list at least provides a fighting chance for the GAA to put its best foot forward in that regard.

The GAA wholly endorses the continuation of All-Ireland Final day as a listed major sporting event but does not wish to make any further additions or subtractions. We are very clear on the need to provide extensive and engaging broadcast content to our members and look forward to doing so into the future.

Your Sincerely,  
Seán Ó hÓráin  
Uachtarán  
Cumann Lúthchleas Gael