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CBB calls for frequencies to be set aside for non-commercial TV

The Coalition for Better Broadcasting is calling on the government to set aside some of the recently returned digital television frequencies for non-commercial television.

"SkyTV was recently required to return four sets of digital television frequencies that it wasn't using to the government," Myles Thomas said today.

"Each set of frequencies contains enough spectrum for several nationwide and regional television channels. As government decides what to do with them we ask that at least one of those sets be reserved for non-commercial television.

"The Ministry for Culture and Heritage or NZ On Air should manage the 'Non-Commercial Set' as they do for non-commercial radio frequencies, to help set up a non-commercial television station in New Zealand.

Mr Thomas pointed out that prior to the digital switchover, each region in New Zealand had at least one television frequency set aside for non-commercial or public service use. But this had been lost with the switchover to digital television.

"Now is the time to right this wrong and establish the same frequency conditions that existed prior to the digital switchover. This would enable licence fees to be waived for future non-commercial broadcasters, on the condition that public service and non-commercial conditions were met.

"The odds are already stacked against any potential non-commercial television channels trying to get established in the highly competitive broadcasting sector. Forcing non-commercial television broadcasters to pay for spectrum, while non-commercial radio channels, do not, would be unfair and would likely put broadcasting out of reach of non-commercial broadcasters for at least twenty years."

Mr Thomas pointed out that the government is required to deliver a variety of broadcasting genres to New Zealand audiences, under the Broadcasting Act and the Regional and Community Broadcasting Policy Framework, which it ratified in 2009.

"Setting aside spectrum to enable a public service television channel to be established would help deliver this, Mr Thomas said.

Some Background:

(Digital Switch Over) DSO meant that for every analog frequency the existing broadcasters owned, they received a 'set' of digital television frequencies that