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# Vicky Eatrides to the Rencontres de l'Association québécoise de l'industrie du disque, du spectacle et de la vidéo

From: Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission

## Speech

"A new song for a new age: Modernizing Canada's broadcasting framework"

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**Vicky Eatrides, Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer**

**Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)**

**Check against delivery**

Good afternoon.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional unceded territory of the Mohawk Nation. Let's take a moment to thank the Mohawk Nation and pay respect to their Elders.

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. I am pleased to be joined by some of my colleagues, including the CRTC's Vice-Chair of Broadcasting, Nathalie Théberge, our regional Commissioner for Quebec, Stéphanie

Paquette, and our Director General of Broadcasting, Alexa Gendron-O'Donnell. It is also great to see so many other familiar faces.

It is an exciting time to be here at the Rencontres de l'ADISQ. It is a real pleasure to be among so many people who are invested in the success of Quebec's music industry. We know that l'ADISQ has played a leading role in promoting Quebec-based artists for many years.

Thanks to everyone's collective efforts, Quebec's music industry has produced diverse and successful artists who attract audiences well beyond its borders.

One of those successful artists, the late Félix Leclerc, once said: "Il y a des maisons où les chansons aiment entrer."

At that time, songs were broadcast into a house primarily over the radio or on television. Of course, we know that the world is changing and there are now many more ways in which songs can enter our homes.

At our public hearing last year, l'ADISQ and other groups told us about the important role that radio and online streaming services play in connecting artists and Canadians, and how music is a source of cultural pride.

At the same time, we heard about the challenges the industry is facing, the need for stable financial support to help develop and promote the next generation of Canadian and Indigenous artists, and the importance of ensuring the discoverability of French-language artists on online platforms. And I know that these are topics that you will reflect on during your panel discussions this afternoon.

We understand the important role that radio and online streaming services play and we also know that there is a need for urgent action. That is why we are working quickly to modernize the broadcasting framework.

As you know, the CRTC is an independent quasi-judicial tribunal that regulates the Canadian communications sector in the public interest. The CRTC holds public consultations on telecommunications and broadcasting matters and makes decisions based on the public record.

Taking inspiration from the work that you do, and for the purposes of today's discussion, let's think about CRTC decisions as songs. Songs that come together in an album.

Let me start by spending a brief moment on one side of our album, and that is our work in telecommunications. I will then turn the record over and talk in more detail about our broadcasting work, which I know is of particular interest to this group.

As you may have guessed by my references, we listen to a lot of music on vinyl in our home.

## **Promoting competition and investment to deliver affordable and high-quality telecommunications services**

So let's start with a few words on telecommunications. The CRTC's vision is clear: we want Canadians to have access to affordable Internet and cellphone services while ensuring continued investment in high-quality networks.

Last year, the Government of Canada directed us to renew our approach to telecommunications policy. This direction requires us to consider how our decisions can promote competition, affordability, reliability, and consumer interests. The key to all of this – and how we deliver these goals to Canadians – is competition and investment.

For cellphone services, the CRTC established new rules last year that allow regional competitors to compete across Canada as mobile virtual network operators, or MVNOs. That is, they can use the networks of large cellphone companies to provide services. With this access, regional providers can offer Canadians more choice. However, this access is time limited and regional providers must build out their own networks within seven years.

Our approach is already showing results. Canadians can go online today and find cellphone plans from both regional and national players that were not there a couple of years ago.

We are hoping to see similar trends in Internet services since we released a major decision last month. That decision was made after 18 months of careful consideration and based on a broad public record that included over 300 interventions and a week-long public hearing. The decision gives competitors a workable way to sell Internet services using the fibre-to-the-home networks of large providers nationwide, while ensuring continued investment in networks.

We will continue to monitor the market closely to ensure that Canadians benefit from more choice for affordable, reliable and high-quality Internet and cellphone services.

I could go on about our work in telecommunications, but we are here today to talk broadcasting, so let's skip ahead a few tracks.

## **Modernizing our broadcasting system to promote Canadian and Indigenous content**

As you know, the *Online Streaming Act* requires the CRTC to modernize the broadcasting framework and ensure that online streaming services make meaningful contributions to Canadian and Indigenous content.

The Act and subsequent policy direction from government ask us to place significant importance on the creation, production and broadcast of programming that reflects Canada's diversity, including French-language content.

Before we get into the details of our work, let's start with the big picture and touch on three broad goals for the modernized regulatory framework.

First, ensure support for Canadian and Indigenous content, including French-language content.

Second, ensure that this content reaches audiences and can be discovered.

And third, ensure the availability of news and information at the local, regional and national levels in both official languages.

We know that achieving these goals may involve keeping some of what has worked for the system in the past, while also taking new approaches that will lead to success in the future.

We also know that people view these goals from different perspectives. Many are concerned about the future of news and information. We have heard from l'ADISQ that you are focused on the future of music and how different business models can support French-language culture and content.

So now that we have touched on our broad goals, let's take a moment to talk about the French-language market.

Under the *Official Languages Act* and the *Broadcasting Act*, the CRTC must consider the French-language market's distinct status in the broadcasting landscape.

I do not have to mention to this audience the incredible history that French-language music has in Canada as a means of cultural expression and storytelling.

We have heard throughout our recent proceedings, however, that the Canadian market for French audio content is vulnerable.

And this is in the context of a changing industry.

Streaming is closing the gap with traditional radio in terms of listenership. According to Numeris and the Media Technology Monitor, last year, Canadians spent an average of 11 hours per week listening to radio and a little over 9 hours listening to streaming audio services.

This trend is also being seen in the French-language market, with the time Francophone Canadians spent streaming music increasing by more than an hour per week between 2019 and 2023.

There are opportunities and challenges that go along with these trends. On one hand, streaming services allow French-language artists to reach a global audience. But we also know that it can be challenging for listeners to discover new songs.

When we talk about discoverability, there is an important distinction to be made between the two official language markets. There is an abundance of English-language content online, both from Canada and other countries. But French-language content can be more challenging to find.

We have heard from stakeholders that the discoverability of Quebec artists and other French-language creators and media is a high priority – and it is for us, too. In particular, we know that l'ADISQ and its members have emphasized the importance of discoverability in today's digital environment.

So now that we have touched on some of the opportunities and challenges of the French-language market, let's move to the next song.

This track is about our work implementing the *Online Streaming Act*.

We have already made significant progress since the Act received Royal Assent, having launched nine public consultations and issued four decisions, with more to come.

The first decision focused on the registration of online streaming services under the Act. The second provided guidance on exemption orders and outlined basic conditions of service. The third set out regulatory fees. And the fourth set the base contributions that online streaming services will need to make to support Canadian broadcasting.

Let's spend a moment on that base contributions decision because it's an important step in addressing the challenges of the French-language market.

The public record upon which the decision is based is broad. We received more than 360 submissions and heard from more than 120 presenters during a three week long in-person public hearing.

Many of the submissions we received came from groups that represent Quebec's cultural community – including music and industry groups, such as l'ADISQ, radio broadcasters, and creators and artists from across the province.

We heard about the vital role that news, music and other content plays in communities. We also heard about how existing supports for these groups are working, and how funds like Musicaction and RadioStar are best positioned to administer contributions in Quebec.

We also heard from official language minority communities throughout Canada who stressed the need to support community-based broadcasting productions.

And we heard from many parties that more support is needed in this digital age.

That is why we are requiring online streaming services to make a base contribution this broadcast year, which started a couple of weeks ago on September 1<sup>st</sup>.

As you know, the contributions are being directed to areas of immediate need in the broadcasting system, such as local news on radio and television and French-language content, and will provide substantial support for the audio sector.

To ensure that funds are available as quickly as possible, the new contributions are being directed to several existing funds, including the ones that many of you highlighted in your interventions.

This decision is a key step in achieving the goals we talked about earlier. It provides support for Canadian and Indigenous content, including French-language content. It provides some flexibility to online streaming services, to support different business models. And it supports news, including through the creation of a new fund for commercial radio stations.

So that is an overview of our decisions so far. We will continue to look at how content is supported through upcoming public consultations. We will also be considering several other important policy issues, such as discoverability and how to define Canadian and Indigenous content.

Each consultation will contribute to the overall goals I mentioned a few minutes ago.

For instance, just two days ago, we launched a public proceeding on how the CRTC can strengthen its consultations with official language minority communities, and French-language communities more generally.

Moving forward, we know that we need to stay agile. That means we are listening, we are acting in a transparent manner, and we are clarifying our approach where necessary.



When we published our regulatory plan last year, we said we would continue to update it – and that is what we will do. So stay tuned.

## Setting up a Bargaining Framework for Online News

Now let's move on to the final song on our album. It is about our work implementing the *Online News Act*.

As you know, the Act aims to ensure that news organizations operating in Canada can negotiate agreements with the largest online platforms. The CRTC must set up the framework for mandatory bargaining between these parties.

We have an open public proceeding on the framework and will issue a decision in the coming weeks.

The government also made it possible for an online platform to ask for an exemption from the Act if they deal with a news collective. This means that a platform can reach an agreement with a single collective for a set amount of money, and not have to bargain with individual news outlets.

As you know, Google has requested such an exemption. Within weeks of the exemption request, we launched a public consultation on whether the agreement fulfills the requirements of the *Online News Act*. The intervention period closed just a couple of weeks ago and we are aiming to publish a decision quickly.

## Conclusion

We have covered a lot of ground this afternoon, and that brings us to the end of our album.

We still have a lot of songs to write, and I have no doubt that there will be at least another album's worth of material by this time next year.

Until then, we will continue to move quickly. Because we know how important the new broadcasting framework is to the future of Canadian and Indigenous content.

And to get that framework right, we need your ideas.

Everyone has a part to play. So let's use existing opportunities and create new ones to ensure that songs continue to enter our homes.

Thank you.

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