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Ms Dee Forbes
Director-General
RTÉ HEAD OFFICE
RTÉ
Donnybrook,
Dublin 4

30th July 2021

Re: Responsible Broadcasting and Climate Change

Dear Ms Forbes,

Comhshaol, the Climate Bar Association is a specialist association of the Bar of Ireland which is dedicated to pursuing pro-environmental initiatives within the Law Library and in society more widely.

We write further to public criticism of RTÉ on its failure to mention climate change when reporting on the recent catastrophic weather events around the world.

We share the astute observation made by Irish Doctors for the Environment in their open letter to RTÉ dated 22 July 2021 that, *“To report on these record-breaking events without mentioning climate change is as egregious as reporting on the unprecedented spike in ICU admissions last April without mentioning a global pandemic.”*

RTÉ is under a legal duty to comply with certain statutory obligations as a broadcaster under the Broadcasting Act 2009, as amended. These include duties to ensure that *“all news broadcast by the broadcaster is reported and presented in an objective and impartial manner”* and *“the broadcast treatment of current affairs, including matters which are either of public controversy or the subject of current public debate, is fair to all interests concerned and that the broadcast matter is presented in an objective and impartial manner”*.

We note the statement issued by Jon Williams, Managing Director, RTÉ News, on 27 July 2021 that, *“From September, every journalist in RTÉ News will take part in a workshop looking at climate science, and the reporting of it.”*

Chair: Cliona Kimber SC **Secretary:** Christopher Mills BL **Treasurer:** Conor O’Higgins BL
Committee Members: Deirdre Ní Fhloinn BL, Louise Reilly BL, Aoife Sheehan BL, Donnchadh Woulfe BL
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We welcome any positive development, but believe that far more is required in meeting your obligations as a public broadcaster to lead the conversation about the climate crisis, and the impact it is having.

The need to respond to climate change reaches into all areas of our lives, and is not confined to science alone. Solutions to the climate crisis have an interface with national environmental law and with EU environmental law Policy, and with public debate on legislative proposals and even, post Brexit, with transboundary international law given that part of island and waters of Ireland are now outside the EU. Strangford Lough, for one, has now become an international waterway governed by international environmental law.

Because of its expertise in Climate and Environmental law, Comhshaol the Climate Bar Association is well placed to contribute to and inform public debate. We acknowledge the resource limitations on RTE at the present time. We therefore publicly offer the assistance of the Climate Bar Association and our Barrister members in the programme for upskilling planned by RTE this autumn. Comhshaol would be happy to part of the national solution to the challenges of climate change.

The climate crisis is an immediate and existential threat and must be treated as such. We therefore join Irish Doctors for the Environment and urgently call upon RTÉ to:

1. Change its editorial policy to ensure the climate crisis is covered in the breadth and depth that an emergency of this magnitude demands.
2. Hire a dedicated environmental correspondent.
3. Strongly reconsider its sponsorship arrangements with high carbon industries such as aviation and dairy in order to avoid conflicts of interest.

Le meas,

Clíona Kimber
Chair, Comhshaol, the Climate Bar Association

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