



## **SPECIAL BROADCASTING SERVICE (SBS) & NATIONAL INDIGENOUS TELEVISION (NITV) SUBMISSION TO COMMUNITY BROADCASTING SECTOR SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW**

**(SEPTEMBER 2024)**

### **SUMMARY**

- SBS and NITV appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the community broadcasting sector sustainability review (**the Review**) by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, and the Arts.
- We note that First Nations broadcasting funding [and licensing] is in-scope of the Review. We also note that the next phase, Phase 2 of the Review ('sustainability review' phase), considers the Government's work that delivers on important matters such as Closing the Gap, and digital inclusion for First Nations peoples.
- There is an opportunity for the Government to further leverage SBS and NITV's existing, innovative, and successful initiatives – to help drive desired outcomes for the community broadcasting sector (the **CBS**) and the communities served.
- While NITV is not funded through the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program (**IBMP**), there is scope for additional work by NITV (via partnerships and collaboration) to support the sector and further address the strategic priorities of the CBS's Roadmap 2033. Any funding for these collaboration opportunities would need to be supported by distinct and separate funding to SBS, and not drawn from existing or future funds allocated to the CBS or IBMP. This approach would deliver significant incremental benefits to First Nations CBS providers over and above existing funding, further improving sector sustainability.
- Where opportunities permit, NITV has and will continue to support and collaborate with CBS providers. We would welcome any further arrangements to share content, co-produce, and wider showcase or profile work of the CBS and those behind it.
- NITV and the broader SBS network are an efficient and effective means of transforming Government investment into impactful and high-quality outcomes that deliver strong public policy benefits.

### **ABOUT NITV**

NITV is an essential service by, for, and about First Nations communities across the country, having the unique and deep trust with the communities that has been forged over many years.

NITV is an associate member of First Nations Media Australia (FNMA, formerly known as Indigenous Remote Communications Association, IRCA) and holds a permanent seat on the FNMA board. In its 17 years of operation, NITV has worked consistently with the First Nations media sector, including in relation to career development of Indigenous media practitioners through a variety of initiatives. NITV also regularly shares content with other First Nations media organisations including those in the CBS.

NITV services for First Nations peoples incorporate cultural preservation and promotion,

news and information reflecting First Nations' perspectives, education and awareness, community connection and engagement, and training and career opportunities. In times of emergency and crisis, NITV plays a crucial role in meeting the information needs of First Nations peoples in a culturally appropriate way and often in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

NITV and SBS's trusted and accurate news services are also critical in addressing the community's need for reliable information in the face of growing mis- and disinformation particularly online. This was demonstrated in the context of the 2023 Referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament.

The NITV commissioning strategy has had emerging career practitioner opportunities each year through initiatives such as *Our Stories* and *Songlines* for First Nations practitioners to get their first industry screen credit. The commissioning budget is allocated with distribution across emerging First Nations directors, producers, and production companies to receive their first industry credits, as well as supporting mid-career and experienced practitioners through NITV's partnerships and distribution. The NITV Commissioning Guidelines ensure that two of the three key creatives for all NITV Commissioned content are identified roles for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander creatives.

To this end, NITV would welcome arrangements to further share content, co-produce, and wider showcase or profile work of the CBS and those behind it. As a recent example, NITV provided content free-of-charge to the First Nations radio network through National Indigenous Radio Service – most recently sharing our rolling coverage of the Garma Festival in August 2024.

### **Content sharing and collaboration - News and essential information**

NITV plays a unique role in ensuring access to place-based emergency information, presented in a culturally appropriate way, and in-language. These services complement the formal role of the ABC in emergency broadcasting. NITV's connection to remote First Nations communities is particularly important, as these geographical areas often experience a very high rate of extreme weather events.

Communities in these areas have specific information needs which can vary from those of the population in general. NITV has a strong record of collaborating with other First Nations media organisations and providing community information in times of need.

For example, NITV provided extensive television and online coverage during the floods in northern NSW in 2022, including from Lismore and Cabbage Tree Island, where almost 200 First Nations community members became homeless from the floods. NITV's *The Point* also collaborated with The Koori Mail national newspaper in providing additional coverage of the floods. As another example, the Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) region in Far North Queensland and the islands of the Torres Strait often have poor or no telephone service and cannot call or access emergency services. Access to emergency information on NITV services provides a link that would not otherwise exist. With additional funding, there is scope for NITV to work more with the CBS to amplify the reach of emergency and crisis information, for example, NITV can up-scale its (currently limited) Starlink and satellite connections.

NITV also played a critical role in distributing information during the COVID-19 crisis. NITV increased its news coverage to seven days a week, and supported FNMA to provide Indigenous media organisations across the country with content, delivering in-language health advice and activating social media events to connect communities. Logie Award-winning *Little J & Big Cuz's* hand-washing song and video *Everybody Wash-em Now*, are some examples of the content produced by NITV and widely distributed to First Nations media organisations across Australia.

As noted above and by the CBS's Roadmap 2033, the volume of mis- and disinformation is growing exponentially particularly online, fuelled by algorithms which favour polarization, and by the ease with which artificial intelligence can generate and publish misleading information and/or content from extreme viewpoints.

The importance and value of trusted and free sources of news and information is intensifying in these conditions, which makes NITV and SBS's impartial and accurate news content – on all platforms – more important than ever. We would welcome more content-sharing arrangements between our network and CBS operators to help mitigate the growth of mis- and disinformation.

### **Collaboration opportunities**

The services, information and content delivered by NITV are already delivering positive outcomes. However, there are significant opportunities to scale up and leverage the existing public investment in NITV and SBS. The below is an example of an existing successful partnership between NITV and CBS participant, the Torres Strait Islander Media Association, a model that could be expanded and scaled across other areas of the country, with appropriate incremental funding.

#### **NITV/TSIMA Partnership - An impactful, innovative, and scalable initiative to elevate community perspectives and utilise the reach and resources of NITV and SBS**

An innovative and impactful initiative rolled out by NITV on Waiben (Thursday Island) is demonstrative of the significant role NITV can play in delivering innovative solutions to meet the digital inclusion needs of First Nations communities, using NITV's reach and resources to partner and build capacity at the community level.

NITV has partnered with Community Broadcasting licensee, the Torres Strait Islanders Media Association (**TSIMA**), to place a full-time journalist, Carli Willis, on Waiben with access to a Starlink and satellite service. This is a straightforward initiative in terms of design and implementation but has a range of benefits which far outweigh the financial investment required to establish the project.

The presence of a journalist in the Waiben community creates the opportunity and pathway for stories of local significance to gain a national profile through the NITV and wider SBS network. Without such profile, it is far more difficult to elevate these stories and issues into the local and national political landscape. Visibility for First Nations stories frequently results in an increased political profile for the subject of those stories.

This is highlighted by a recent story filed by Carli Willis, addressing the lack of access to digital services on Waiben and the outer islands of the Torres Strait, and the impact of proposed solutions to cultural practices in the region. The story was covered across our digital services, as well as a TV news package that aired on *NITV News* and *SBS World News*.<sup>1</sup>

A further example is an article published by NITV on 2 May 2024 entitled *Calls for better access to health prompts historic gathering of Torres Strait Islander doctors on Waiben*<sup>2</sup>, filed by Carli Willis. This story reports on an initiative of the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA), which involved taking a group of Torres Strait Islander doctors from the mainland to the islands for the first time. The story provides profile and exposure to issues of access to Indigenous health services, and the need for culturally safe care and the right health and civic infrastructure. These stories are shared on NITV

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/regional-communities-are-suffering-from-a-lack-of-access-to-reliable-communications/x3v0i829z>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/calls-for-better-access-to-health-prompts-historic-gathering-of-torres-strait-%20islander-doctors-on-waiben/j1s5f1nqg>

platforms and across NITV's social media accounts to spread awareness and ensure the broadest possible reach for the article.

There are also immediate and practical connectivity benefits arising from Carli Willis' access to a satellite phone, provided as part of her role with NITV, which did not previously exist on Waiben. In the event of an emergency which damages or deactivates Waiben's telecommunications infrastructure, the community has access to a vital means of accessing and sending critical emergency information.

In addition to filing stories on critical issues for the Indigenous communities living in the Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) in Far North Queensland and the Torres Strait, Carli Willis is filing stories covering the many positive community events and developments which would otherwise not reach audiences in communities across Australia, due to the cost of sending a journalist to a remote location.

### ***Model can be scaled with funding***

NITV has funded this initiative through internal budgets and identified savings and has designed and implemented an extremely cost effective and scalable model. The benefits of this initiative, relative to its cost, are significant.

NITV would welcome the opportunity to design and implement similar initiatives in under-served and remote communities across Australia. However, NITV is not currently funded to scale-up or expand this offering.

Funding in support of an expanded delivery of these services would provide critical and tangible benefits to CBS providers in remote communities. Funding could also be considered to specifically fund NITV's efforts to gather and distribute emergency information during natural disasters, including in collaboration with the CBS, as a considerable number of First Nations communities live in areas which are susceptible to extreme weather events on a regular basis, weather which is expected to worsen in the future.

NITV would welcome the opportunity to discuss the costings and design of this or similar initiatives with the Government and other First Nations media providers.

In addition to this initiative, NITV and SBS could also assist in areas such as media training for community leaders, building capability in digital media among CBS providers, or the development, production, and distribution of more First Nations children's content.

## **CONCLUSION**

SBS, with NITV at its heart, has a dedicated strategy for amplifying and sharing authentic and culturally informed First Nations stories and perspectives with all Australian communities. This work can be further leveraged to increase support for the CBS and the Roadmap 2033, though any funding should be distinct to the CBS or IBMP to maximise investment in the sector.

NITV and SBS would welcome any additional opportunities to work with First Nations media providers operating in the CBS, and to engage further on the proposals in this submission or any additional measures under consideration.