

I am member of the public with no affiliations to any broadcasting company, but I am a strong supporter of our national broadcaster, the ABC. As such, I have a number of concerns about the proposed Media Reform Green Paper.

If two commercial broadcasters in a licence area elect to transition to the new licence, the government would move the ABC and SBS to a shared multiplex arrangement. If the multiplexing is imposed on ABC and SBS, they would have to reduce the number of TV and radio channels they currently broadcast - the quality of their services would be compromised if they tried to retain all the current services - both TV and digital broadcasts.

The Green Paper does not outline any business rationale or practical and technological justification for the ABC and SBS to be forced to forego part of their broadcasting spectrum. The current broadcast spectrum allocation to the ABC and SBS delivers world class public digital television and digital radio services across our cities and regional and multicultural communities. The hidden agenda may be to combine the two public broadcasters into one.

The government says that it does not expect multiplexing to compromise transmission quality due to advances in compression technology. This may be based on similar moves to reduce the spectrum in the US, but there the majority of television broadcasters use cable, so the quality of public broadcasting is not greatly impacted. The Australian situation is very different.

Another issue is that if the ABC and SBS have an Australian content requirement which they exceed (as they're doing now), would the government then reduce their funding on the grounds that they're spending too many tax-payer dollars - i.e. overspending?? Mr Fletcher assures me that the ABC board independently decides how to spend their billions of dollars, but this requirement may be a chance for the government to step in and enforce more rules about spending. Minimum forced local content levels will diminish the independence of the ABC in deciding where they spend their money. The ABC and SBS are producing more local content than all other operators after years of extreme funding cuts. The ABC and SBS have established the highest standards and quality for broadcast video and audio in line with the expectations of their Australian audience.

A major flaw in the Green Paper is that it doesn't address what the benefit for consumers might be – if any. The effect of reduced radio and television broadcasting will be felt most severely in areas outside the major metropolitan areas. Instead of supplying more digital TV and radio services to rural and regional Australia there would be less channels available. Regional and rural consumers depend on the ABC. If the quality and quantity of ABC broadcasting is so compromised that it seriously disadvantages them, there could be a potential backlash from voters.