

Submission to National Director into review of the ABC and SBS

Overarching importance of the role the public broadcasters play. That, if they are completely independent of government controls, including an independent body to select best board members, with proper funding to do their jobs effectively, without restrictions on where that funding is spent (i.e. 'tied' funding), Australia's democracy is enhanced to the great benefit of us all. We are all aware of countries where the Public broadcaster is in fact a State broadcaster: i.e. the mouthpiece for the autocracy.

Commercial media owners can bleat all they like about the 'free kick' our public broadcasters get, but it is the public broadcasters who set the broadcasting standards for quality content, accuracy, holding truth to power, creating (by the requisites of their Charter) quality well-researched and resourced documentaries, drama and entertainment. ABC and SBS generate work that supports substantial businesses in the creative arts sector.

Most of us are cognisant of the issues engendered by social (or should that be 'anti-social'?) media: the extremist views, the blatant lies, the invective, etc. Those infamous 26 words (in the USA) rights of 'the socials' to not be regarded as 'publishers' and therefore to have the freedom to make public unverified information as though it is fact, emphasises the importance of having a robust fearless public broadcaster. Never has quality public (held to account) broadcasting been more important.

Australians still trust their ABC, but the axing of its budget (still not restored) over the last decade or so has emasculated it to such an extent that that trust is being eroded due directly to the inability of the ABC to perform its roles to the standards expected of it.

For example: Redundancies of quality ABC employees - both presenters and the support production staff have led to many limitations. The ABC is forced to adopt short cuts, where mistakes can arise with less critically reviewed production, almost no back-room employees (archivists and researchers).

The so-called 'efficiency dividend' was never about productivity, but was simply a crude budget cut.

There needs to be more staff to address a more divergent production process with digital transmission, whilst still being required to maintain AM and FM, and the restoration of Short Wave to reconnect those in the north of our continent who lost access to the ABC - all these via multiple radio stations, several television channels, and its vast digital platform. I believe the ABC should receive more funding than it used to have, as well as a restoration of what was slashed from its budget.

In particular, I submit as follows:

ABC's Charter:

- That the ABC's current Charter be locked in for a further 100 years. It has served this country exceedingly well, notwithstanding the constant onslaught of criticism by the likes of the Murdoch media that already controls much of the media in Australia.

Funding:

- That the recently introduced 5-year cycle for funding for the ABC be written into legislation to give the broadcaster certainty, and to ensure it isn't part of a political party's election promises.
- That occasional 'tied funding' handouts by government be dispensed with as they may have the effect of influencing the ABC Board and Management according to the government of the day's wishes.
- That funding be indexed annually in line with the Bureau of Statistics' wages indices.
- That transmission towers across the country are retained in (or re-acquired into) public ownership and maintained by the public service as a vital necessity in times of national or local emergencies. (No one can doubt that there will be ever more of these disasters in the years to come.) The current contracted-out method has cruelled the ABC's ability to honour the commitments of its Charter: the expectations that all Australians know about and expect of it.
- That transmission in all its forms is reassessed periodically across this vast land and that of our northern and north-eastern neighbours, who have always relied upon the quality of the ABC's Network Australia broadcasts, to ensure 24 hours a day reception.

ABC Board nominations:

- That the independent body which selects appropriate Board members is not over-ridden by the government of the day with so-called 'captain's picks'.
- That the nomination panel ideally includes a representative from either ABC Friends National or ABC Alumni.
- That those selected come from a passionate interest in or knowledge of public interest journalism, that they come from the sciences, the arts, academia, and NOT from commercial media.
- That the Minister stays hands-off from the Board nomination selection process other than to approve one of those recommended by the independent body.

Other:

- That the government of the day not make donations to commercial media as has happened in the recent past (\$40m to Foxtel).

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

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Lifetime Member of ABC Friends

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