



Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

Submission into the Review of options to support the
national broadcasters' independence

31 August 2023



FECCA pays its respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present and recognise the land we live and work upon was never ceded. FECCA proudly supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice protected by the Constitution.

FECCA acknowledges that our work on behalf of multicultural Australia has learnt from and been enriched by First Nations peoples and organisations. We are committed to continuing to listen, learn and support First Nations peoples in the journey to a more inclusive society.

Who we are

FECCA is the national peak body representing people from multicultural communities and their organisations across Australia. Through the membership of state, territory, and regional councils, we represent over 1,500 community organisations and their members.

What we do

For over 40 years, FECCA has proudly worked alongside culturally and linguistically diverse communities, the broader Australian society and the Commonwealth Government to build a successful, productive and inclusive multicultural Australia where everyone, no matter their background or how long they have lived in this country, can belong, contribute and reach their full potential.

FECCA draws on the lived experiences of the people and their descendants that have migrated to Australia and the expertise of its extensive and diverse membership to develop and promote inclusive, innovative and responsible public policy that reflects the needs and perspectives of multicultural Australia. We are dedicated to building a strong, innovative and inclusive multicultural nation that harnesses its greatest strength, the diversity of its people.

Foreword

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) welcomes the Review of options to support the national broadcasters' independence, particularly the opportunity to provide input into the appointment process for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) boards. The review is an important step in strengthening the independence and representative capabilities of our national media broadcasters so they can better serve the diverse Australian society.

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Context

Multicultural Australia

Australia is a truly multicultural nation. In 2021, almost 30 per cent of our population was born overseas, and a further 22 per cent had at least one parent who was born overseas¹. With the diverse range of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities represented in our society, it is important that all members of the nation feel a sense of belonging and the confidence to participate in social, political and economic life.

Multicultural communities are not homogenous. The experiences and perspectives of people from multicultural backgrounds are not only affected by their cultural identities, but also by other intersecting social and political identity markers such as age, gender, sexual orientation, impairment, class, religion, and visa status, but also factors such as the area in which you live. These identities do not exist independently; each informs the other and can have overlapping and compounding effects on a person's life experiences.

The media landscape does not reflect our diverse society

National media platforms play a vital role in contributing to our sense of national identity and reflecting the diversity of Australian society. They can be instrumental in fostering social belonging and participation, through their provision of in-language news, fair representation of diverse communities, and inclusion of community perspectives². However, numerous studies highlight the underrepresentation of multicultural identities and perspectives in Australia's media landscape. A 2022 study found that, while 25 per cent of Australians have a non-European background, non-European presenters accounted for only 6 per cent of television appearances³. Multicultural audiences who feel misrepresented or underrepresented in the media are less likely to feel at home in Australia, participate in social and political life⁴.

The senior leadership and executive boards of national broadcasters do not adequately reflect the diverse experiences and backgrounds of the people in our society. The Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) remains the only network with a culturally diverse board of members⁵. Other major broadcast networks, including the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), have disproportionate level of Anglo-Celtic representation at the senior level respective to the cultural composition of Australian society.

The benefits of culturally diverse media

It is widely acknowledged that greater cultural diversity in executive boards leads to better performance and profitability. More diverse boards are more able to represent communities, stakeholders, and businesses themselves, and more effectively respond to the needs of our multicultural nation⁶. There are specific benefits for greater cultural diversity at the senior leadership level. Cultural diversity at the highest levels of company leadership can serve as a signal to employees and other stakeholders that the organisation truly understands and values the community they serve. Furthermore, if a strategy for greater diversity is driven from the top with visible leadership and accountability, it is more likely to permeate through the entire workforce⁷.

Research published by the World Economic Forum clearly indicates that diverse newsrooms are essential for the provision of news content that accurately represents the modern world. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that if the newsroom does not reflect the cultural diversity of society, audiences question the authenticity of the news content delivered⁸. This has important implications for our national media broadcasters, whose main purposes are to inform and educate the Australian community.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The selection criteria for appointments to the ABC and SBS boards should explicitly value lived experience and expertise of people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The selection criteria should more directly acknowledge that individuals with lived experience of intersectional diversity are best placed to represent the needs and interests of their communities. The selection criteria for the SBS board appointment process values candidates with "an *understanding* of Australia's multicultural society and the needs and interests of the SBS's culturally diverse audience"⁹, and should be refined to specify that those with lived experience are best positioned to have this understanding. This will help to ensure that appointed members genuinely represent and understand the diverse needs and experiences of Australia's multicultural communities.

Recommendation 2: The selection criteria for appointments to the ABC and SBS boards should include consideration of intersectional experience, knowledge, and backgrounds of multicultural communities.

Both the ABC and SBS have charters that require them to measure and report cultural diversity. However, the guidelines for appointment to their respective boards lack a specific focus on representing and including the diversity of experiences and backgrounds that exist in multicultural Australia. While the SBS requires that “Directors collectively comprise persons with a diversity of cultural perspectives”¹⁰ and the selection criteria for appointment to the ABC board specifies “cultural or other interests relevant to the oversight of a public organisation engaged in the provision of broadcasting services”, these do not adequately reflect the diversity of multicultural Australia.

The selection criteria for the ABC and SBS boards should be made more specific to acknowledge the experiences and backgrounds that reflect the diversity of Australia’s multicultural society, including, but not limited to age, gender, disability, geographic location, sexual identity, and cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity. The intersectionality of this diversity must also be a primary focus, rather than a homogenous notion of cultural diversity. Through genuine representation and reflection of Australia’s diversity, the ABC and SBS will foster greater and more widespread trust in the informative and educational content they produce.

Recommendation 3: Selection criteria should be established for appointments to the Nomination Panel, which sets specific guidelines to include intersectional experiences, knowledge, and backgrounds.

The Nomination Panel is highly influential in determining appointments to the ABC and SBS boards. Appointment to the Nomination Panel should, similarly, seek to include individuals with the lived experience of intersectional diversity. The inclusion of diverse knowledge, backgrounds, and experiences in the Nomination Panel will result in decision-making that is informed by and includes diverse identities, needs, and interests. It is important that appointment to both the ABC and SBS boards, and the Nomination Panel, is guided by an explicit commitment to reflecting and representing Australia’s diverse communities.

¹Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), [Census of Population and Housing](#)

² Park, S., Griffiths, R., McGuinness, K., Nguyen, T. & Lee, J. (2023). *Sense of Belonging Among Multilingual Audiences in Australia*. Canberra: University of Canberra & Special Broadcasting Service.

³ Media Diversity Australia. (2022) *Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories? 2.0*.

⁴ Park, S., Griffiths, R., McGuinness, K., Nguyen, T. & Lee, J. (2023). *Sense of Belonging Among Multilingual Audiences in Australia*. Canberra: University of Canberra & Special Broadcasting Service.

⁵ Media Diversity Australia. (2022) *Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories? 2.0*.

https://www.mediadiversityaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Who-Gets-to-Tell-Australian-Stories_2.0_FINAL_pdf.pdf

⁶ ‘[Diversifying boards — your cultural advantage](#)’, Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries – Government of Western Australia

⁷ Media Diversity Australia. (2021) *Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories?*

http://www.mediadiversityaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Who-Gets-To-Tell-Australian-Stories_LAUNCH-VERSION.pdf

⁸ World Economic Forum. (2021) *Diversity in the newsroom can build better media. Here's why.*

⁹ 'Information about the merit-based selection process: Appointments to the ABC and SBS boards', Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

¹⁰ 'Information about the merit-based selection process: Appointments to the ABC and SBS boards', Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.