Competitive Neutrality Inquiry Department of Communication and the Arts GPO Box 2154 CANBERRA ACT 2601

Submission re Inquiry into the Competitive Neutrality of the National Broadcasters

I think the first thing to understand is that the ABC is not the competition that is most troublesome to Australia's commercial media. That competition comes from the so-called FANGS – Facebook et al.

We should clearly understand that the commercial media are selling advertising, and that their programmes are only offered to hook in viewers to expose them to the advertising. In contrast, the ABC provides information, informed comment and high quality entertainment. There is an obvious question that, if the ABC is drawing away audiences from the commercials why don't the commercials improve the standard of their programmes?

It is clear to me that the current inquiry is just one more politically-motivated, opportunistic attack on what is clearly the most trusted media organisation in Australia. The fact that politicians of all stripes want to attack the ABC is strong evidence that the ABC is doing its job in letting sunlight shine on matters that politicians and commercial operators want to keep hidden.

As the ABC is not beholden to advertisers it is able to, and does, deal with matters that the commercial media can't or won't deal with. It does not have to slant its reporting so as not to offend advertisers. Repeated attempts by politicians and the commercial media to show it is systematically biased have, on close examination, failed to show the desired result. In comparison the commercial media are free to distort and bias their reporting almost at will – and they do. It is unimaginable that the commercials would run programmes of the quality of, say, Four Corners or Media Watch.

I do not watch the commercials for both push and pull reasons. Principal among the push reasons are the dishonest, deceptive, insulting advertisements, repeated ad nauseum, that take up around one third of the time a programme is on. I happen to believe that advertising is very important means of communication but I despair at the depths to which advertisers sink in their advertising. I have been so offended by their untrustworthiness over many, many years that it is now virtually impossible for them to get a message to me. A second push factor is that I find the programmes on offer by the commercials uninteresting, manipulative, unacceptably biased or puerile. In contrast I am pulled to the ABC and SBS by the quality and interest of their programmes, of their integrity and by the lesser obnoxiousness of their advertising.

ABC programmes of great interest to me that would never be high quality staples on the commercials include The Science Show and Late night Live – both on RN, and Australian Story, Back Roads, Four Corners, Media Watch, The Drum, Matter of Fact, Landline, Catalyst and Foreign Correspondent, along with dramas of the standard of Mystery Road. Having said that, I must note that I do find many of the best programmes are on SBS – and I would not expect those to survive on what we call "the commercials".

I am well aware that we all end up paying for the commercial media by way of advertising costs embedded in the products and services we buy. It is false for the commercials to claim that it is unfair that the ABC is funded via the Government – the commercials are free to raise whatever funds they can, whilst the ABC is constrained by the whims of the Government in power.

