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Submission to Inquiry re Competitive Neutrality of OUR ABC and SBS

As an Australian I proudly support public broadcasting. Indeed I regard OUR ABC and SBS as crucial to our culture with its rich inheritance of Western democracy and values. In fact, in any culture where truth and a regard for citizen's rights are important, public broadcasting is vital to a healthy society.

I value OUR public broadcasting because I want trustworthy and independent access to news and current affairs. I do not want large corporate interests to completely dominate my access to information about areas of public interest because the interests of such corporations are about maximizing profits. They are not primarily concerned with informing the citizenry about issues vital to the understanding and awareness of society (and it's functioning in the best interests of the many) but to making money.

Indeed FoxNews in the USA demonstrates how corporate interests can be shown to have often published biased and inaccurate news reports (the fake news of modern parlance). While some inaccuracies are inevitable in all news reporting, the continual striving for truth and fairness in reporting does not seem to be a major focus in many corporate news publishers. In fact such large companies often seem intent only on maximizing their profits and protecting the interests of the mega-rich (frequently themselves). There is now a long history of the privatization of taxpayer assets both in Australia and the rest of the world. The empirical evidence strongly indicates that privatization is not in the best interests of the consumer (i.e. the general public) but does benefit the businesses that gain the 'assets' and the profits. This should not occur with the delivery of news and current affairs: if democracy is to be maintained, then digital access by the electorate to unbiased and fair reporting is crucial.

In fact, like many others, I am concerned that this inquiry itself is somewhat politically driven. Whilst, hopefully, a sense of justice and truth always prevails within the commission

and it is described as independent, yet some within the inquiry board have a strong record of supporting free market economics and this might be somewhat limiting when evaluating the community services of public broadcasters. Social benefits cannot always be quantified only by money and it is crucial that OUR public broadcasters continue to supply the electorate with digital news and current events. Democracy cannot function without news and current affairs reporting – reporting that operates “without fear or favour”.

Moreover the effects of the free market ideology over the last few decades have not apparently resulted in a more equal and contented society and, instead, polarization of wealth and an increase in poverty levels has been displayed. Privatization has not always delivered the social benefits it promised. Hence it is vital that relevant **public broadcasting** continues to be available to the public. The Coalition Government (and probably the ALP as well) may not always appear to value the electorate’s desire that the ABC operate as a fair and independent news organization (witness the relatively recent editing and removal of items concerning corporations and tax payments) but the electorate is well aware of the necessity for public broadcasting.

Unfortunately this inquiry itself could possibly be interpreted, however inaccurately, as a government response to Pauline Hanson’s dislike of the ABC news reporting, and Rupert Murdoch’s desire to emasculate the ABC so that his media empire has an unfettered ability to control the ‘news’ available to watchers. It is concerning that the inquiry seems to be focusing almost entirely on the digital news output of the ABC despite the fact that its large portfolio contains many other areas of information and entertainment delivery. Nor does the need to recover the ground of the Productivity Report of 18 years ago seem necessary, especially given the extremely limited time made available for this inquiry, and the consequent likelihood that any responses made by big players in the corporate world (filed to the inquiry) shall not be fully analyzed (with further input and discussion occurring as a result). Concerns about possible government bias operating through indirect means (a possibly unnecessary inquiry limited in focus, time and resources) are not alleviated by the knowledge that ongoing and draconic funding cuts to the ABC are already impacting upon its ability to function as well as before. This is especially the case in contexts such as \$50 million being made available by the government for the Captain Cook aquatic memorial at Botany Bay. Despite my strong admiration for Cook, I consider the money would have been better given

to the ABC! While such events are not within the scope of this inquiry they do display a possibly relevant and undesirable context. The inquiry seems too limited in scope and resources to be very extensive or encompassing in nature yet the wider ramifications of public broadcasting are highly important to our society.

In fact democracy ultimately depends upon the social contract between government and its citizenry not being entirely broken. If society is to function in an efficient and beneficial way, then citizens like myself need access to fair, independent and appropriate news and current affairs. Indeed I consider that when respect for the social contract fails, and the citizenry of a country loses both faith and its access to true and necessary information, the rise of people like Donald Trump becomes inevitable. This is not the path down which I wish my country to go.

In summary: Like the majority of the electorate (witness the outcry when the ABC undergoes attack after attack) I desire OUR PUBLIC BROADCASTING to be maintained and even extended, and this particularly applies to its digital news and current affairs reporting.