

# Inquiry into the competitive neutrality of Australia’s national broadcasters

## Submission – Marilyn Chalkley (22 June 2018)

### Question 8: Considering the commercial activities of the national broadcasters (e.g. where they are selling or purchasing goods and services), is there evidence that they have taken undue advantage of their government ownership, to the detriment of competitive outcomes?

### Absolutely not. See Q 13

### Question 9: What is the differential impact of regulation on commercial and national broadcasters, and is there evidence of consequent adverse impacts on competition and outcomes?

### No. See below Q 13

### Question 10: Is the reporting and accountability by the national broadcasters on their best endeavours to observe competitive neutrality adequate?

Yes see below Q 13

Question 11: Are you aware of any specific instances where the ABC or SBS may have received any other competitive advantage, due to their public ownership, to the detriment of a private competitor?

### No See Q 13

### Question 12: The SBS Charter requires it to take into account the activities of the ABC and community television on radio and television. In the context of the competitive neutrality principles how in your view, is the SBS complying with this requirement? From your perspective does it adequately cover the activities of the SBS?

### Question 13: From your perspective do the national broadcasters seek a balance between competing in the market and complementing the market? Is that balance the same for traditional broadcasting and for new digital platforms?

### The ABC in its coverage of news and current affairs has, as a public broadcaster, a focus on important issues of substance, and has said that ‘we will always focus on the stories that people need to know about, rather than the trivial or the sensational.’

### This is in strong contrast to the commercial networks, who focus much more on crime and local disasters, as has been found in a review of news coverage conducted by the ABC. The ABC's eight weeks of research determined the commercial news networks had more than twice as much coverage of crime and local disasters than the public broadcasters. It also found the commercial stations ran twice as many "general interest" stories "without strong news value or other editorial significance, which are included primarily because of colourful pictures or lighter subject matter".

### Trust in the public broadcasters is important, and the ABC and SBS TV news rank highest, with 67% of voters saying they have a lot or some trust in the broadcasters, including 20% saying they have a lot of trust in the national broadcasters for political news.

### In other words, The ABC and SBS are an alternative, a trusted source of news based on facts rather than titillation, unlike so many of the commercial broadcasters. In this age of Trump and the issue of fake news, it is in the public interest for Australians to have a service, across all platforms, that they can turn to when they are unsure about the truth of an issue. They know that advertising pays for commercial broadcasters, and that there is always a desperate hunt for ratings to satisfy those accounts, which inevitably leads to the trivialisation of issues, the lowest common denominator. (Local crime, celebrity news, and so on.)

### ABC (and SBS News) do not compete with commercials, rather they provide an alternative for those who don’t like the way the commercials trivialise news. The ABC and SBS provide more international news and more social policy stories. In these days of internet access people are turning to online news, and Australians can read the New York Times, The Washington Post or other overseas media at any time, and should the ABC be abolished, as The Liberal Council has suggested, or changed under a perception of competitive neutrality, it is not commercial channels but overseas media and online newspapers that may be the beneficiaries of this audience. Of course, none of these sources provide the Australian content vital to a healthy democracy.

### In 2017 the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found that 43% of Australians reported online news to be their main source of news. It follows than, that the ABC, to fulfil its charter, (see below) needs to provide its broadcasts in an online forum as well as free to air TV and radio.

### The ABC, in its submission to the ACC digital platform enquiry said:

### ‘The shift of audiences to online content consumption has been more prevalent in younger demographics, for example, 42% of Four Corners’ Engaged Users on Facebook were under 45, compared to 16% of the Four Corners’ broadcast audiences

### ‘Providing a digital service enables the ABC to reach Australians who are not accessing ABC content via the broadcasting service. For example, of metropolitan audiences that watched the first-run broadcast of Four Corners in 2017, only 28% had visited the ABC News website in the previous month and only 15% visited iview in the previous month. This highlights the low level of overlap between ABC broadcast TV and ABC digital audiences.’

### In conclusion it is vital to fulfil its charter that the ABC and SBC create news across all their platforms.

### Question 14: Do you have comment on these guiding principles?

### I think the ABC is fulfilling its charter, as is SBS. As a long time listener to the ABC, it does not compete, it provides the service it is meant to do. The commercials are being squeezed for advertising and are trying to find a scapegoat.