

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

**Submission – Phil Hunt (20 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?**

With the intense scrutiny on the ABC and SBS, particularly during times of conservative governments, it is difficult to believe these organisations could take unfair advantage of their government ownership, or that management would dare. Repeated claims by some politicians, some media personalities and some Australians that the ABC and SBS are grossly biased towards the left trigger inquiry after inquiry, all resulting in no significant evidence. It would be useful to do an inquiry, for the purposes of balance, into whether commercial broadcasters have taken undue advantage of their influence with politicians and the like and whether they have obtained competitive outcomes, particularly in giving a false impression of the ABC and SBS to the wider public.

**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?**

This inquiry seeks evidence of a nature where most users of the services are not able to provide it. How many organisations can truly be in a position to provide real evidence that they have experienced adverse impacts on competition that are not somehow related to other causes and conditions? Should a struggling commercial broadcaster blame the ABC and SBS for a changing market based on a wide range of factors?

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

This seems to be a question more about inviting general criticism of the national broadcasters than a vehicle for adequately understanding the the adequacy of reporting. There have been many government inquiries into the national broadcasters and there are still no significant issues worthy of mention, other than by the enemies of national broadcasting who will not accept anything different.

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?

### The main competitive advantage that the national broadcasters have is that they provide a much fairer and more balanced news service. People who want to receive balanced, fair and informative news are usually disappointed when using other broadcasters and media because there seem to be much lower standards elsewhere. If you examine different media sources on the same story, it is too often the case that exaggerated or completely untrue stories are provided by some commercial operators. Is it unfair that the national broadcasters retain a loyal fan base because of the quality of their work? Should government artificially diminish the effectiveness of the ABC and SBS by cutting costs, pressuring management to be less balanced merely to prop up commercial broadcasters?

### 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?

### It would appear that SBS is being successful in a role that no large commercial enterprise would want to take on. If aiming content to a broad multi-cultural minority was truly profitable, commercial broadcasters would have tried to market more to that audience before. The SBS should not be attacked for being successful in a market it has largely created by itself.

### 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?

### 13. The national broadcasters seem to be criticised if they do not attract a large enough audience for each program, and criticised if they do. People want to scrap them because they are not used by enough Australians and are thus a waste of money, or because they are too competitive on business that do not get direct government funding in the same way. This is similar for new digital platforms. If the attacks are from both perspectives, then it would appear that the ABC and SBS are keeping exactly the right balance that is expected of them.

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

14. These principles seem to be the opposite of what the Coalition and some media personalities want, which is that the ABC and SBS are taken out of public hands and into the more narrow interests of commercial entities, that they abandon balanced news for more right-wing opinion-driven information, less regional programming, less special needs focused, less transparency, less adaptability to emerging technologies and markets and less ability to provide independent creative and innovative content. The national broadcasters are more important than ever because they are subject standards typical of government departments where public service is still the main aim rather than profit, fame or influence. The best protection the Coalition has of a fairer, more honest future Labor government is an independent, strong ABC and SBS.