

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

## Submission – Stuart James Ewings (21 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?

### None whatsoever. The question asks us to consider if it is fair that there is a publicly funded broadcaster that is capable of setting quality standards or whether activity of this type is somehow detrimental to corporate broadcasters. I believe the presence of an adequately funded ABC and SBS sets a standard for broadcasting. I do not believe the the National broadcasters make significant profits from sales but their presence in the market does create benchmarks for the commercials, so it should. I am grateful of this and would hate to see it destroyed.

### 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?

### The regulation and scrutiny applied to the ABC in particular, is not evidently applied similarly to the commercial broadcasters. This is particularly evident with successive government's scrutiny of ABC news and current affairs. It is clear to me that, successive governments have overtly scrutinised and overly chastised the ABC. Whereas, commercial broadcasters and news producers have been allowed to get away with very low standards for neutrality especially in news and current affairs. If viewers prefer the ABC or SBS it is because they present intelligent material and news that is more neutral than any other sources in the country.

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

### The question is a leading question with the underlying assumption that funding public broadcasters somehow ruins the market for commercial broadcasters. This is simply untrue. It is true that commercial and public broadcasters and other traditional media are struggling in a market place that has been radically altered by an influx of online competitors. They have copied the ABC for many years and SBS set the 'bar' even higher when they began broadcasting. I believe that the national broadcasters set better practice standards than the commercial broadcasters and without this Australian media would be of poorer quality.

### 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. However, it is very clear, and has been very clear for many years, that governments do not scrutinise the commercial broadcasters like they scrutinise and chastise the ABC.

### 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?

### Another leading question. Yes, I believe the SBS service provides material that the commercial broadcasters don't. The commercial broadcasters may wish to complain that SBS or ABC is broadcasting material that is in demand. Would the government have them broadcast to a smaller market? The commercial broadcasters could learn from SBS's choice of material. The commercial broadcasters could cater more to a multi-cultural public but they don't, they have chosen not to for commercial reasons. SBS sets a fantastic standard and caters to minority cultural groups.

### 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?

### I believe that the national broadcasters do a fantastic job of complementing the market. The commercial broadcasters in this country lack a great deal when it comes to the material they present. They are of course also subject to the whims of their corporate sponsors but this alone does not fully explain their lack of courage and intelligence, evident in the material they broadcast. The commercial broadcasters, as well as the other traditional, commercial sources of news and current affairs in this country are narrowly focussed on profit, sensationalism, and far-right ideology. The ABC and SBS are national treasures, a hallmark in standard bearers, far more neutral than governments would have us believe. They contribute hugely to the cultural life of this nation and provide the most intelligent and most neutral news services available here. Cutting these services further will only see intelligent consumers go off shore via the internet to get their 'tv' and news. Commercial broadcasting in this country has generally been a low or at best medium quality service. Commercialising the ABC and SBS will create more of the same medium-low quality broadcasting that we have come to expect from commercial broadcasters. When will Australian governments understand the central importance the national broadcasters have played in the cultural life of Australia?

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

The so-called 'guiding principals' offered above here represent little more than thinly disguised attempts to extinguish public broadcasting in this country. Here we have a collection of leading questions that are biased against the presentation of any material that is not tied to far-right ideology. The so-called guiding principles present the covert argument that runs:- 'allowing publicly funded broadcasters to provide quality material to the public makes it too hard for the commercial broadcasters to make money'. I don't believe this at all. I do believe that the presence of properly publicly funded national broadcasters sets a standard, particularly in news and current affairs, that the commercial broadcasters ought to be held accountable to. This inquiry ought better to ask, why are the commercial broadcasters and other traditional sources of news in Australia, able to to get away with heavily biased reporting of news and current affairs and yet, are not subjected to the same scrutiny and accountability as the ABC and the SBS? If any sections of the Australian media need scrutiny it is the sensationalism and far-right bias of the commercial broadcasters and other traditional corporate sponsored news sources. Commercial broadcasters could do better if they ceased to treat their audiences as gullible fools and if they sought to provide more intelligent material and to engage with the challenges of the new digital platforms. If the ABC and SBS are further stifled - Australians will simply continue to seek entertainment and news from elsewhere in the world via the internet. Australian commercial broadcasters are generally, not supplying quality material.