Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Interim Report to

The Department of Communications

ABC iview Audio Description Trial

November 2015

Interim Report to the Department of Communications on the Trial of Audio Description on ABC iview

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Executive Summary

In April 2015, the ABC commenced a 15 month trial of audio description (AD) on ABC iview. This is an interim report of the trial to November 2015.

The key points of the trial to date are:

- The trial commenced on the iOS platform on 14 April and programs containing AD were made available on the Android platform in May 2015.

- There have been significant technical issues establishing an accessible desktop/web version. This required the project to change its development timeframes, with the Android version being initiated earlier than anticipated and the desktop version launching in November.

- Potential AD users have numerous assistive devices and use various browsers, which increases the complexity of providing a universally desktop accessible platform for AD.

- The ABC has made adjustments to its scheduling and commissioning process to accommodate audio-described programs.

- By the end of October there were 57,000 plays of audio described programs.

- There has been limited public feedback to date, however the ABC will conduct an audience survey early in 2016.

- A full report will be delivered to the Department of Communications after the conclusion of the trial in June 2016.

Background

In late 2014, the then Minister for Communications, the Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, advised the ABC that the government would fund a proposed trial of AD on the ABC's iview service.

This proposal followed an earlier 13 week trial of AD by the ABC on its terrestrial broadcasting television service ABC1 in 2012. The outcome of this trial raised a number of considerations for the delivery of AD by Australian broadcasters. These considerations included but were not limited to:

- The requirement for broadcasters to develop an automated process to deliver AD.
- Selection of appropriate genre content for AD.
- Best practice for commissioning and acquiring AD-ready programs.

The scope of the current digital AD trial includes:

- an extended trial period of 15 months from April 2015 to June 2016
- AD to roll out progressively onto digital platforms, with iOS the first to launch, followed by other platforms (Android, Web, HbbTV).
- An average of 14 hours of AD content to be made available each week.
- AD content to be acquired by the ABC across a range of suitable genres.
- AD will be available on iview as catch-up content.
- AD will not be provided for any live programming, live streams or events.

The scope of this digital AD trial provides the opportunity for the ABC to better understand AD in a digital environment, how best to integrate the AD process into work practices and systems, the costs associated with this practice and to assess audience demand for AD content delivered through the trial.

The iview platform was selected as the first digital AD platform for this trial for a number of reasons. ABC iview is a mature Video On Demand (VOD) service, receiving 40 million program plays across multiple delivery platforms[1]. This provides a stable base on which to compare AD usage and adoption between platforms.

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[1] iview program plays at October 2015

Management and stakeholder liaison

The ABC established an internal working group and steering committee to develop and manage the trial. This group includes a collection of staff with a skills and experience in distribution and broadcast technology, television content creation and procurement, VOD technology, accessibility issues and stakeholder management.

Prior to, and throughout the course of the trial to date, the ABC has met with the relevant stakeholder groups for the blind and sight-impaired to discuss the trial, including representatives from Vision Australia, Blind Citizens Australia, Media Access Australia, The Royal Blind Society, VisAbility and Australian Communications Consumer Action Network.

These meetings have been used as a forum at which to discuss the proposed approach to the trial, platform release, content selection, program plays, popular content, as well as communication with their members. These meetings have also provided the opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback to the ABC on elements of the trial. For example, at one meeting prior to the launch of the trial, the ABC was asked to consider posting a "how to access AD content" clip on its website. Stakeholders also asked the ABC to establish a feedback telephone line. After consideration of these requests, the ABC undertook these actions.

The ABC has also met formally with representatives from the Department of Communications on a number of occasions throughout the trial.

Public communications

Prior to the launch of the trial, the ABC posted an AD trial facts sheet on its website at: http://www.abc.net.au/tv/help/audio_description_trial.htm .

At the launch of the trial, the site was updated to include and a "how to access AD" clip, in order to assist trial participants in accessing the service.

The updated website was communicated to stakeholder groups, who were also asked to then pass to their members at the start of the trial.

Where a participant selects an AD program, an information pre-roll clip is played prior to the program with the following script:

> *The following program is audio described. The ABC is conducting a trial of AD on iview for a period of 15 months from April 2015 with funding provided by the Australian Government. If you have questions or need assistance, please call the iview AD Helpline on 02 8333 3248.*

This clip is also captioned.

The ABC established a feedback telephone line for trial participants to receive assistance on accessing AD on iview and provide feedback to the ABC on the trial. The phone line was publicised on the ABC's AD webpage and, as a result of feedback from stakeholders, and as per above, was included in the pre-roll script.

Technical development

In undertaking a digital AD trial, the ABC was forced to consider the following technical factors:

- the use of various platforms by the vision impaired audience
- platform maturity- in the IPTV space, older platforms have older architecture components that may require re-architecture in order to be accessible.
- iview operates on platforms where there is significant device fragmentation. This fragmentation requires a labour intensive development approach to ensure consistency across devices and their varying capabilities.

In order to enable AD to appear on iview, changes were required at a scheduling level, to indicate that a given scheduled program would also have AD available and allow for recognition by ingestion and publishing systems to ensure that these systems could recognise and associate any ancillary AD files with the main iview program files. Additionally, the Media Operations team needed to be able to monitor and manage AD files independently throughout the media workflow. To enable this, it was important that the ABC modernised and simplified the existing media workflow solution to ensure that it could achieve the desired outcomes.

The media workflow underwent a smooth development process with very few changes encountering significant technical issues. As a result, AD on iOS was released on target on 14 April.

However, significant accessibility issues were encountered when updating the web client interface. As a result, the release of AD on Android was brought forward to May and the web platform was delayed in order to fix these issues. The web version was released on 17 November.\

Technical issues

In the course of the trial to date, the ABC has encountered a number of technological issues. These include as follows:

a) Web player accessibility
   Issue: During testing the level of accessibility of the video player on iview desktop was found by the ABC to be insufficient to allow independent use by users with vision disability.

   The ABC considered that launching AD on desktop without first resolving this issue would omit the key usability requirement that a visually impaired iview user can independently navigate and play iview AD content without impacting the current user experience for sighted users.

   Impact: Timings for delivery of AD on web had been based on an assumption that the ABC iview video player would be sufficiently accessible and little to no work would be required to the player itself. In addition, it was discovered through further technical investigation that Adobe Flash's (iview web player technology) support for assistive technology did not meet the ABC's requirements. Therefore, the time required to deliver AD on web increased significantly due to the increased level of work required to make the iview Flash player accessible. Timelines were further impacted by limited available resources and expertise in Flash development which has been substituted by alternatives.

Resolution: Knowing the inherent accessibility limitations of Flash, ABC focused on ensuring basic player controls could be accessed via a keyboard. A version of AD on desktop was then released to the stakeholder groups for initial feedback to determine whether it could be released publically. Feedback indicated there were still some accessibility issues however the technical constraints created by the flash player, as well as the importance of releasing AD on desktop so that more people could participate in the trial, were acknowledged. It was agreed that additional links on AD pages to instructional information and FAQs would assist the audience in navigating the page and AD on iview desktop was publically launched on 17 November 2015.

b) Web browser and assistive technology combinations
Issue: Not only are there numerous web browsers available, but there are also a number of different assistive technologies utilised by the visually impaired community. As the ABC began improving the accessibility of the web player as noted above, it became apparent that there were significant variations in capability amongst the various combinations. Testing across multiple operating systems and browser combinations is already a significant overhead. The addition of assistive technology as another variable further increased our development and testing effort exponentially.

As much as possible, websites and applications should be accessible across the widest range of devices, browsers and screen sizes available. However, given the range of devices, browsers and technical capabilities available to our audience, it is not practical to test and verify every possible combination.

Resolution: A graded support model was adopted as a benchmark to ensure that development and testing was cost effective and focuses effort on the majority of audience. Similar models are used in international markets. Browser and assistive technology combinations were categorised based on the level of usage within the audience and / or the age of the browser version. The ABC had attempted to include Firefox browser combinations in our partial support plan but discovered, after significant work, that there were widespread issues across the web with the combination of Firefox / NVDA and Flash[2]. As a result, the ABC focused its effort on Windows and IE.

c) **Flash player – issue 1**
Issue: iview utilises a Flash media player for playback of content on the web platform due to cost and content security. However, there are accessibility limitations with Flash when utilised in a full screen mode.

Resolution: Additional time was added to the project schedule in order to work around the accessibility limitations of Flash in a full screen mode.

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[2] Flash crashing on certain websites when using NVDA and Firefox (open) http://community.nvda-project.org/ticket/5367. Adobe Flash Support not working in NVDA 2015.1 (open) http://community.nvda-project.org/ticket/4946

d) **Flash player – issue 2**
Issue: Adobe's newly released Flash version (19) caused the widespread crashing of websites[3].

Resolution: Testing upon upgrading became impossible and ABC iview have chosen to not support Flash version 19. This is a strategy that is being supported by browsers such as Mozilla[4].

e) **Media Operations Support**
Issue: The addition of a second file against programs (i.e. one file with and another without AD) adds to the effort required by the Media Operations team to schedule, manage and Quality Control the file through the media workflow.

Resolution: The ABC considers that any increase in the quantity of AD files or for any proposal for AD to be supported on an ongoing basis would require additional staff resources to ensure effective management of the process.

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[3] https://forums.adobe.com/thread/1918110
[4] Mozilla is recommending that users continue to use the more stable Flash 18
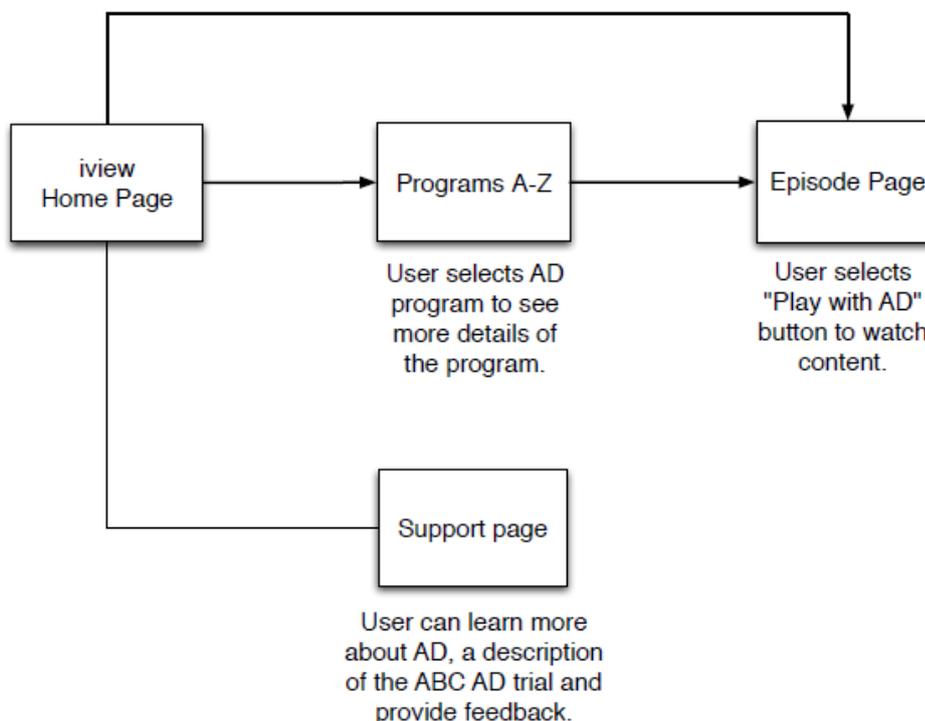
User experience (UX)

As part of the overall design of the AD functionality, user experience recommendations were produced by the ABC for all platforms (desktop, Android, iOS & HbbTV). The following items were considered:
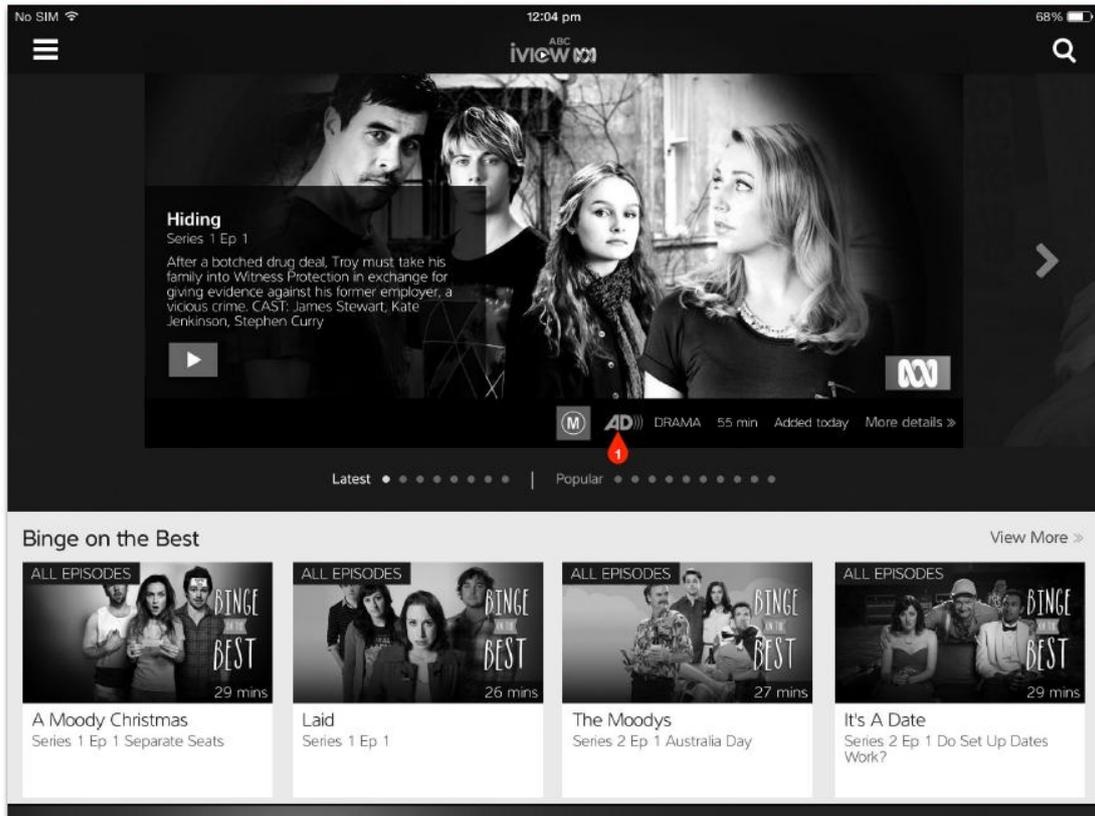
- Range of platforms and devices
- Landscape and portrait layouts
- Screen reader order (vital for logical comprehension of content)
- Appropriate places for promotion of the content (homepage, A-Z list, episode detail pages)

Upon arriving at the iview homepage, users could access AD content in a number of ways:

- Visiting the episode detail page of a program displaying the AD logo
  - Visiting the Programs A-Z listing on the platform

The following screen shots are indicative of the recommendations made for ensuring a positive user experiences for AD trial participants using iOS tablet devices:

IOS Tablet - Programs A-Z (Landscape) - Audio Described v2.0   N.B. Not final visual designs

IOS Tablet - Support menu - What is Audio Description? (Landscape) v1.0   N.B. Not final visual designs
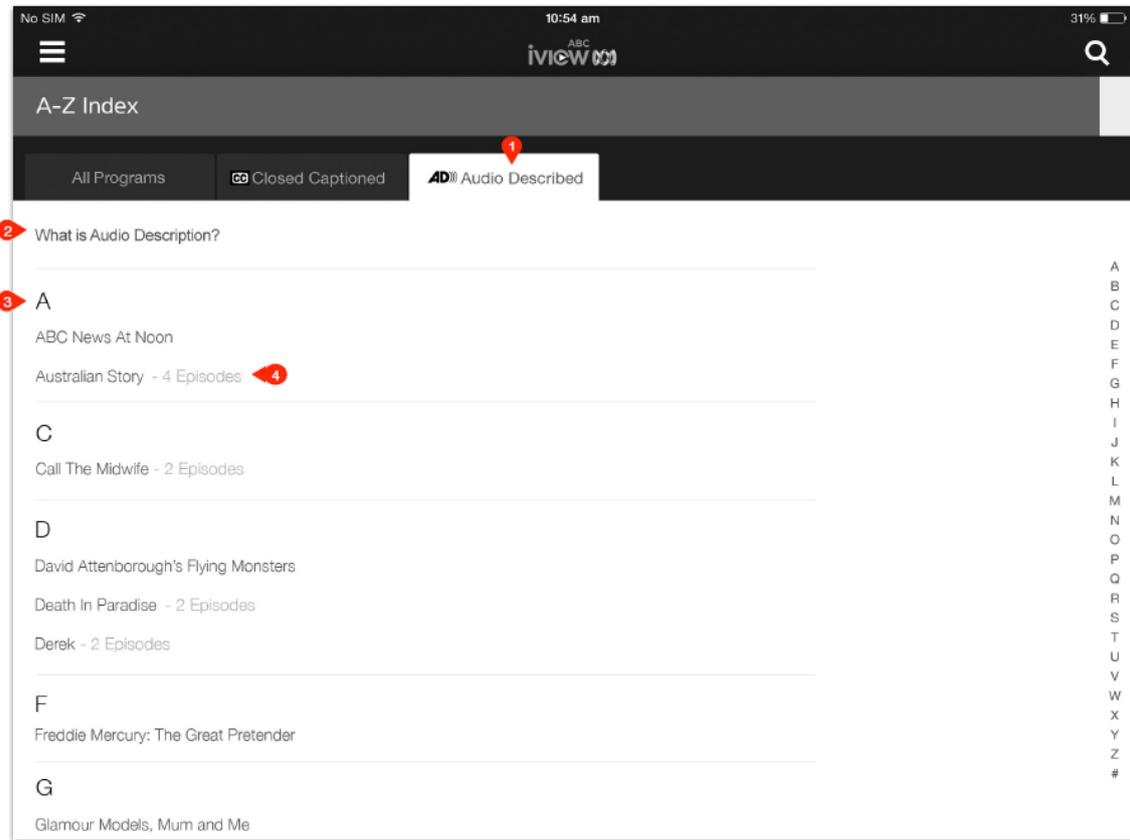
Review by Vision Australia

The ABC sought input on the Corporation's user experience considerations from Vision Australia in February 2015 to ensure it had ad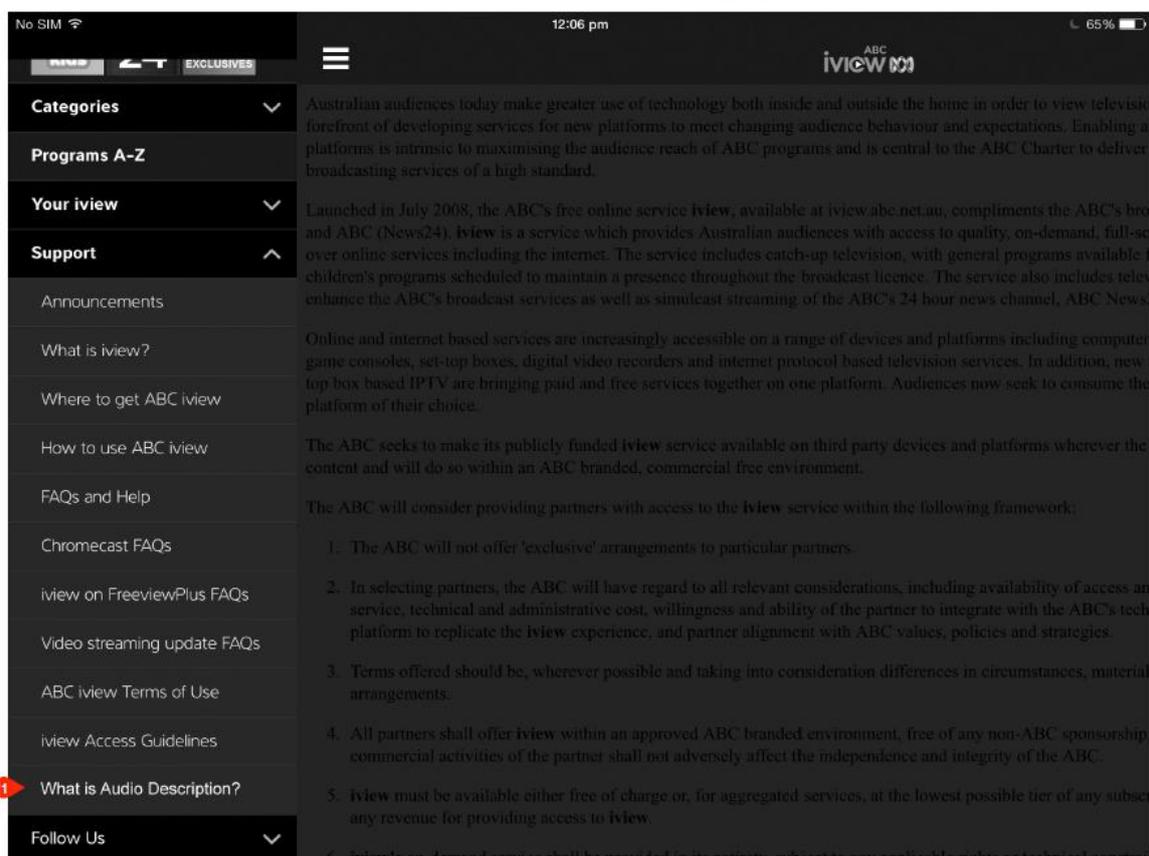equately assessed potential barriers the proposed design may pose to users with a disability early the design process. The review procedure included:

- Indentifying significant potential accessibility problems with screen designs; any aspects of the design or functionality that cannot be implemented in an accessible manner.
- Inspecting designs to highlight accessibility requirements to achieve Level AA conformance against WCAG 2.0.
- Inspecting the designs to highlight accessibility best practice requirements to meeting the W3C Mobile Web Best Practices and the BBC Mobile Accessibility Standards.
- Establishing design and functional recommendations for accessibility problems identified during the review, including where a particular technique will need to be applied to ensure the functionality is accessible.

No critical issues were identified in the UX review by Vision Australia. Best practice recommendations were provided, including colour contrast, A-Z indexing, tabbed content and reading order.

Visual design

The visual design of the elements of the AD trial were undertaken in February 2015 and focused on AD logo alignment, button styles and tabbed content styles.

Content

In the period from 14 April to 31 August 2015, the ABC published 320 hours of AD content on iview. This is an average of 16 hours of AD content on iview per week. Of the 320 hours published, drama and comedy programs represented the vast majority of programs as it is most suitable to be audio described.

Genre	Number of Programs	Content Duration (Programs Rounded-up to 15 mins)	% (Based on Duration)
Arts/Culture	4	6:30:00	2.03%
Children's	114	59:30:00	18.55%
Children's Pre-school	89	23:45:00	7.40%
Current Affairs	18	12:45:00	3.98%
Documentary	51	50:45:00	15.82%
Drama/Comedy	173	164:00:00	51.13%
Entertainment	7	3:30:00	1.09%
Grand Total	**456**	**320:45:00**	**100.00%**

A full list of programs published on iview with AD can be found at in the Appendix.

Planning and scheduling AD content

The programming genres which are most appropriate for AD are drama and documentary programs. This is because programs in these genres contain the highest proportion of visual imagery not accompanied by audio content. This provides content for the AD track to describe and the necessary gaps in the primary audio to allow for the AD commentary to be included. Program genres such as sport, news, entertainment (such as the ABC's *Gruen* or *Q&A*) are commentary heavy and do not allow for additional audio or the additional audio is rendered unnecessary.

Appropriate programs to be audio described for iview are chosen from the broadcast schedules of ABC main channel, ABC2, ABC Kids and ABC3.

Priority is given to programs that are suitable to be audio described, Australian premiere programs and popular programs, as well as including children's programs, which were not included in the trial on broadcast television and then to international programs or high profile repeat programs. For example, during the month of October there were many high-profile Australian premiere programs - The Beautiful Lie, The Ex-PM, Please Like Me, Randy and Sammy J at Rickett's Lane - that were selected to be audio described and available on iview.

Programs to be audio described are selected to include content for adults, children and pre-school viewers. Selected programs are assessed for suitability, taking into account if AD can be subtly inserted into the soundtrack without diminishing the existing soundtrack. The ABC has sought to select programs from all genres so as to include a broad, interesting and appropriate selection of content. While drama programming is generally the genre to benefit most from an audio described track, occasionally other programs such as arts documentaries have been selected. It is an example of while the subject matter may not necessarily have a broad audience appeal, it is vital to have a selection for all tastes.

The selection of AD programming is also made after consideration of how many views it received on iview to determine whether there is a requisite audience for this particular content. The ABC sought feedback from stakeholders on the genre selection and feedback throughout on the quality of the descriptions themselves. Genres and programs with more views steer the programming team to choose more programs of that genre in the future.

In the process of developing a workflow for the selection, production and evaluation of programs to be audio described, the ABC experienced the following improvements in its processes:

- At the commencement of the trial, the ABC commissioned the AD track for programs six weeks in advance of broadcast, however it was determined that this did not adequately allow for schedule changes and so the ABC changed the AD commissioning process to between three to four weeks prior to broadcast, which allows for greater synergy between broadcast and the program being available on iview.

- Initially, ABC Television commissioned AD content in batches of series rather than episode by episode. However, it was determined that this did not adequately allow for schedule changes and so the ABC now commissions content on an episode by episode basis.

- The AD providers have varied considerably in the pricing models proposed and also have deployed "rounding-up" to 15 minute segments. ABC considers this requires close management.

- The ABC has experienced variance in the quality of AD content provided. The ABC has worked with providers to ensure that the AD scripts have been developed to be more descriptive.

- Some contracts with program suppliers exclude the publication of that content on iview for any broadcasts outside of the 1st broadcast. An example of this was Poldark, which was very well received within the AD community but unfortunately could not be published on iview when it was repeated several months later.

Audience feedback

To date the ABC has received eight emails from the public about the trial and there have been no calls to the ABC helpline, despite the number being made available prior to the screening of every program with AD. The eight emails included two appreciations, two requests for additional information, one request for additional children's content with AD and three contacts from members of the public who do not require AD and inadvertently selected the 'play with AD' button.

The ABC intends to undertake a public survey of the AD trial early in 2016. The form and method of the survey is being done in consultation with the stakeholder groups. It is likely that the methodology will include stakeholder groups distributing the survey to their members.

At the end of October there were 57,000 plays of audio described programs. This represents 0.5% of the total number of plays of programs available with AD from the commencement of the trial in April 2015.

Programs that proved popular with audiences include Australian drama and comedy programs such as *Glitch, Australian Story, The Beautiful Lie, The Secret River, Top of the Lake, Utopia*, and *Miss Fisher Murder Mysteries*, as well as international dramas such as *Doctor Who, Humans, The Honourable Woman, Father Brown, Line of Duty, Our Girl* and *Poldark*.

In the documentary category *The Killing Season* was popular with AD audiences as well as general audiences. Children's programs *Hoopla Doopla* and *Octonauts* were the top viewed kids programs with AD on iview.

Conclusion

The ABC's iview AD trial is only half way through and will conclude in June 2016. The ABC will provide a comprehensive report to the Minister following the conclusion of the trial.

Appendix

AD Content Published by Genre and Program Title (1st run AD Content) in Reporting Period (14 April to 31 August 2015).

Genre	Number of Programs	Content Duration (Programs Rounded-up to 15 mins)	% (Based on Duration)
Arts/Culture	**4**	**6:30:00**	**2.03%**
Born to Fly: Elizabeth Streb Vs Gravity (2014)	1	1:00:00	0.31%
First Position (2011)	1	1:45:00	0.55%
London: The Modern Babylon (2012)	1	2:15:00	0.70%
Showrunners (2014)	1	1:30:00	0.47%
Childrens C	**114**	**59:30:00**	**18.55%**
Bushwhacked! (2)	1	0:30:00	0.16%
Bushwhacked! (3)	13	6:30:00	2.03%
Deadly 60 On A Mission: Pole To Pole (3)	3	1:30:00	0.47%
Degrassi (11)	45	22:30:00	7.01%
Degrassi: The Next Generation (10)	4	2:00:00	0.62%
Gangsta Granny (2013)	1	1:15:00	0.39%
Horrible Histories: Frightful First World War (2013)	1	0:30:00	0.16%
Merlin (5)	13	10:00:00	3.12%
Open Heart (1)	12	6:00:00	1.87%
Same But Different (1)	7	1:45:00	0.55%
Spectacular Spider-Man (1)	3	1:30:00	0.47%
The Haunting Hour (1)	1	0:30:00	0.16%
Worst Year of My Life, Again (1)	10	5:00:00	1.56%
Children's Pre-school	**89**	**23:45:00**	**7.40%**
Bubble Bath Bay (1)	18	4:30:00	1.40%

Charlie And Lola (1)	1	0:15:00	0.08%
Charlie And Lola (3)	4	1:00:00	0.31%
hoopla doopla (1)	22	5:30:00	1.71%
Octonauts (1)	10	2:30:00	0.78%
Octonauts (2)	7	1:45:00	0.55%
Octonauts (3)	3	0:45:00	0.23%
Olivia (1)	9	2:15:00	0.70%
Peter Rabbit (1)	9	2:15:00	0.70%
Peter Rabbit: The Tale Of The Missing Egg (2012)	1	0:30:00	0.16%
Room On The Broom (2012)	1	0:30:00	0.16%
Tree Fu Tom (1)	4	2:00:00	0.62%
Current Affairs	**18**	**12:45:00**	**3.98%**
Arthur Phillip: Governor, Sailor, Spy (2015)	1	1:30:00	0.47%
Australian Story (2015)	14	7:15:00	2.26%
The Killing Season (1)	3	4:00:00	1.25%
Documentary	**51**	**50:45:00**	**15.82%**
7/7: One Day In London (2012)	1	1:30:00	0.47%
Animal Super Senses (1)	3	3:00:00	0.94%
Between A Frock And A Hard Place	1	1:00:00	0.31%
Blood + Thunder: The Sound Of Alberts (1)	3	3:00:00	0.94%
Bowling for Columbine (2002)	1	2:00:00	0.62%
Bully (2011)	1	1:45:00	0.55%
Drug Runners: The Peruvian Connection (2014)	1	1:00:00	0.31%
Extreme Brat Camp (2014)	1	1:00:00	0.31%
Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004)	1	2:00:00	0.62%
Finding Vivian Maier (2013)	1	1:30:00	0.47%
High Class Call Girls (2015)	1	1:00:00	0.31%

In Bob We Trust (2013)	1	1:45:00	0.55%
Joanna Lumley's Trans-Siberian Adventure (1)	3	3:00:00	0.94%
Kevin McCloud's Escape To The Wild (1)	4	4:00:00	1.25%
March Of The Penguins (2006)	1	1:30:00	0.47%
Point and Shoot (2013)	1	1:30:00	0.47%
Redesign My Brain With Todd Sampson (2)	3	3:00:00	0.94%
Ross Kemp: Extreme World (4)	7	5:15:00	1.64%
Sperm Donors Anonymous (2015)	1	1:00:00	0.31%
Tattoo Tales (1)	8	4:00:00	1.25%
The Crater: A Vietnam War Story (2014)	1	1:00:00	0.31%
The Mega Brothel (2014)	1	1:00:00	0.31%
The Waler: Australia's Great War Horse	1	1:00:00	0.31%
The War That Changed Us (1)	4	4:00:00	1.25%
Drama	**173**	**164:00:00**	**51.13%**
8MMM (1)	6	3:00:00	0.94%
Agatha Raisin: The Quiche Of Death (2014)	1	1:45:00	0.55%
Arthur And George (1)	3	3:00:00	0.94%
Catastrophe (1)	2	1:00:00	0.31%
DCI Banks (3)	6	5:30:00	1.71%
Doctor Who: A Christmas Carol (2010)	1	1:15:00	0.39%
Esio Trot (2014)	1	1:30:00	0.47%
Father Brown (3)	15	11:15:00	3.51%
Fortitude (1)	5	5:00:00	1.56%
Glitch (1)	6	6:00:00	1.87%
Grantchester (1)	1	1:00:00	0.31%
Humans (1)	5	5:00:00	1.56%
Inspector George Gently (3)	1	1:30:00	0.47%

Inspector George Gently (7)	4	6:00:00	1.87%
Jack Irish (1)	2	3:30:00	1.09%
Jack Irish: Dead Point (2013)	1	1:30:00	0.47%
Last Tango In Halifax (3)	3	3:00:00	0.94%
Line Of Duty (1)	1	1:00:00	0.31%
Line Of Duty (2)	6	6:00:00	1.87%
Mapp And Lucia (1)	3	3:00:00	0.94%
Midsomer Murders (14)	8	12:00:00	3.74%
Midsomer Murders (17)	4	6:00:00	1.87%
Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries (3)	8	8:00:00	2.49%
New Tricks (11)	3	3:00:00	0.94%
Old School (1)	4	4:00:00	1.25%
Our Girl (1)	6	6:30:00	2.03%
Poldark (1)	8	8:00:00	2.49%
Redfern Now: The Telemovie (2014)	1	1:30:00	0.47%
Scott And Bailey (2)	8	7:45:00	2.42%
Still Open All Hours	7	3:45:00	1.17%
The Bletchley Circle (2)	4	3:45:00	1.17%
The Honourable Woman (1)	2	2:00:00	0.62%
The IT Crowd (1)	6	3:00:00	0.94%
The IT Crowd (2)	6	3:00:00	0.94%
The IT Crowd (3)	3	1:30:00	0.47%
The Politician's Husband (1)	3	3:00:00	0.94%
The Secret River (1)	2	3:00:00	0.94%
Top Of The Lake (1)	6	6:00:00	1.87%
Upper Middle Bogan (2)	7	3:30:00	1.09%
Utopia (2)	2	1:00:00	0.31%

Vera (3)	2	3:00:00	0.94%
Entertainment	**7**	**3:30:00**	**1.09%**
How Not To Behave (1)	7	3:30:00	1.09%
Grand Total	**456**	**320:45:00**	**100.00%**