

ABC Friends NSW/ACT -

Northern Suburbs of Sydney Branch

Media Reform Green Paper submission

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18 May 2021

THE BROADCASTING SERVICES ACT [1992] NEEDS REFORM

- The Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (BSA) was established almost 30 years ago as a regulatory framework for Free-to-Air (FTA) services in Australia.
- In 2021, the BSA is no longer fit-for-purpose for administering and regulating traditional media and digital platform broadcasting services.
- A major review and reform of the BSA is overdue.

THE MEDIA REFORM GREEN PAPER IS INADEQUATE

The Green Paper seriously fails to identify and address any shortcomings of the BSA. Specifically, provision of a regulatory environment that will facilitate the further development of a broadcasting and datacasting industry in Australia that is efficient, competitive, diverse and responsive to the needs and the expectations of the Australian audience.

MULTIPLEXING

Why should the ABC be forced to join the commercial stations if two commercial stations opt in to multiplexing? This is the government directing how the ABC operates and breaches the independence of the ABC as described in the Act.

ABC services will be closed down with multiplexing, as bandwidth will be decreased. The effect will be felt most severely in rural and regional Australia.

Instead of supplying more TV services to rural and regional Australia there would be less

channels available - absurd.

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BVOD AVOD QUOTAS

There appears to be no appetite from the government for mandating Australian content to be shown on AVOD or BVOD despite other countries mandating quotas.

Claiming that SVOD operators cannot afford to produce local content is nonsense. SVODs operating in the EU are currently required to devote 30% of their catalogue to European produced content. Similarly, France requires that the SVODs spend 16% of revenue earned in France on locally commissioned content whilst Germany requires Netflix and Amazon to invest in the German Federal Film Board.

ABC LOCAL CONTENT

The ABC already produces 1477 hours of local content per year. This is despite having funding reduced by \$783 million since 2014 by the government.

The ABC MD, David Anderson, said in the five years prior to the pandemic, the ABC had commissioned 1,477 hours of local content and invested \$468 million into the independent production sector on productions worth \$971 million. In 2018-19, the ABC invested in more local titles than Seven, Nine, 10 and SBS combined.

Minimum forced local content levels will diminish the independence of the ABC in deciding where they spend their money.

Why mandate certain requirements on the ABC when they are already producing more local content than all other commercial stations combined? This is removing the independence of the ABC to make their own decisions.

Quotas should be placed immediately on commercial stations to increase their local content, especially as their licence fees have been significantly reduced by government. Under this proposal there would be no licence fees.

Free TV are keen to reduce their Australian content for children but insist the ABC produce more Australian content. The ABC now produces about double local content compared with Free TV operators.

Free TV could use some of their profits to produce local content. There can never be too much local content. We already have too much overseas content.

Commercial operators will always take the easy option of imported material over locally produced, expensive, productions if given the option. The ABC is firmly committed to local content.

Emphasis should be on ABC produced programs so that resale and repeat rights will flow back to the ABC rather than independent producers who control all rights.

Why not have quotas for commercials to be the same as ABC local content, eg 1477 hours of local content? This would have a great effect on employment and associated jobs in TV production.

CONCLUSION

Do not interfere with the ABC and SBS. They are producing more local content than all other operators after years of extreme funding cuts.

Allow the ABC to determine how much local content is shown annually.

Abandon multiplexing for the ABC as it means less ABC TV stations for all Australians, particularly regional and rural communities. We need more diversity not less.

Australians want more ABC produced local content.

Reverse ABC funding cuts perpetrated by the government since 2014.

