

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

## Submission – Gillian Wells (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?

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### 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?

I understand that the national broadcasters are required (quite rightly) to maintain a balance when presenting news or opinion whereas commercial broadcasters may - and do - present extremely biassed views with no attempt to redress the balance with contrary views.

This highlights the partial irrelevance of the notion of competitive neutrality. The ABC, as a public broadcaster, has several responsibilities that the commercial providers do not.

Australia needs broadcasters who are guided by the need for honesty and integrity in reporting and evaluating news.

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

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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?

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### 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?

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### 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?

### From my perspective, the national broadcasters do manage to provide services that are not provided by the commercial operators. I suppose you could say they complement the market. Obviously they compete in the market and have a loyal following of people who prefer the public broadcasting offering to that offered by the commercial sector.

### I argue that the contribution made by the ABC and SBS is more important than that it offers a section of the consuming public what it prefers. It is important for Australia that there is a source of content that we can trust to be honest - in order to inform public debate and culture.

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

I think the guiding principles have been adopted to placate the commercial operators.

The concept of competition is of limited relevance when the offerings of public and commercial providers are different.

I think that if the survival of one or the other sector were at stake, it would be essential to maintain the existence of the public providers. Commercial broadcasters are businesses and should survive or fall on the strength of the demand for their offerings.