



**AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S
TELEVISION FOUNDATION**

7 January 2015

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Inquiry into the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Local Content) Bill 2104

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your Inquiry Into the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Local Content) Bill 2104

The Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) is a national children's media production and policy hub, committed to providing Australian children with entertaining media especially for them. We are involved in the funding, development, production and distribution of Australian children's programs. The ACTF originally floated the proposal for an Australian public service children's channel, which culminated in the establishment of ABC3 in 2009.

The importance of local content in Australia, and the role the Australian Broadcasting Corporation should play in the provision of such content.

"Local content" in the context of this Bill has at least two distinct meanings.

- "Local content" may mean content that is produced for a very local – regional or state-based – audience.
- "Local content" also refers to Australian content more generally, meaning content which is produced in Australia, as distinct from imported from overseas.

Both types of content are many times more expensive for broadcasters to produce or commission than it is to acquire imported programs from overseas. And both types of

content are expected of public broadcasters by their stakeholders – the Governments and tax payers that fund them.

In our response to this Review, the ACTF is discussing Australian children's content, rather than addressing the question of regional and state-based news and current affairs, or other types of content.

Public broadcasters have an important role in commissioning and broadcasting content that the market will not provide, but which is key to engaging audiences in a national conversation. Commercial broadcasters may be reluctant to invest in innovative and culturally engaging content due to lower commercial returns. Public broadcasters therefore have a key role in ensuring the continued creation of a diverse range of engaging children's content that reflects the unique world that young Australians inhabit. Investment in local children's content production by the ABC mitigates the risk of a failure by the market to provide distinctly Australian content suitable for child audiences.

The recent efficiency savings imposed on the Corporation by Government.

It is not necessary, or efficient, in the area of children's television for the ABC to have internal production facilities in 4 cities outside of Sydney and Melbourne. What is far more important, is that there is enough children's content being commissioned and transmitted, to ensure that a wide mix of programs are offered to ensure that children of different ages are catered for, and that the program offering reflects the diversity of Australia, and its many different regions. This is very difficult to do if you are tied to studio based content.

The centralisation of the Corporation's operations to Sydney

The ABC's Children's Department is based in Sydney. It is a very small team and it would clearly be impractical to spread them around the country. The ABC produces in-house children's programs out of Sydney (most notably *Play School*) and Melbourne (its studio hosted blocks, in particular).

Clearly, the major problem with this arrangement is that producers in Sydney have easier access to the Children's Department than do producers in other States and Territories. It is the ACTF's experience, however, that the Sydney staff are very conscious of their obligation to commission and broadcast projects from all over Australia. They deliberately seek out opportunities to work on a diverse range of productions and make themselves accessible to producers from around the country. Over the last few years, the ACTF has worked with the ABC to support projects that include:

- Two series of the major historical period drama *My Place (NSW)*;
- Three series of the drama *Dance Academy (NSW)*;
- Two series of the drama *Nowhere Boys, (Victoria)*;
- Three series of factual entertainment show *Bushwhacked!* with multiple episodes (filmed in every State and Territory);
- Factual entertainment show *World Animal Championships, (Queensland)*;
- Sitcom *Mal.Com, (Western Australia)*;

- Documentary series *Dancing Down Under*, (Queensland);
 - Documentary series *My24* filmed in Queensland, (NSW and Victoria);
 - Drama series of the drama *Worst Year of My Life, Again!* (Victoria);
 - Animated series *The Flamin Thongs*, (Western Australia);
- Factual entertainment show *Wacky Worldbeaters* (based in Victoria, filmed around the world)
- 2 series of animated short *Horace In Slow Motion*, (South Australia);
 - 3 series of animated short *Dukes of Broxstonia* (NSW);
 - Animated interstitial shorts *Black Knight White Witch*, *My Strange Pet* (Victoria) *Desdemona* (Western Australia,) *Megabites* (Tasmania), *Monsterchef* (Victoria), *Laserbeakman* (Queensland), *Itty Bitty Ditties* (South Australia);
 - 2 series of sketch comedy *You're Skitting Me* (Victoria);
 - Factual entertainment show *Handball Heroes* (based in Queensland, filmed in Queensland, NSW and the Torres Strait).

These series were produced by a range of Australian independent producers. None of them would have been commissioned by an Australian commercial broadcaster. They are all projects that push boundaries, meet much higher expectations than the standard commercial fare dished up to children's audiences, and reflect activity and stories from all across Australia.

They are also series with high production values, which is what modern children's audiences expect. They need funding from a variety of sources, in order to be able to be made. The ABC could not have made these programs internally or fully funded them. The offering to the children's audience would have been significantly impoverished if it had attempted to do so.

When the Commonwealth Government announced additional funding for a Children's Channel in 2009, a number of State Governments suggested that they would like to try and "base the Children's Channel in their State." The reality is, that for the child audience it is more important that what they see on screen reflects as much of Australia as possible. By commissioning a wide range of content from a wide range of production companies, the ABC Children's Department achieves this with very limited resources. They offer the children's audience experiences that they just don't see on international branded children's channels or on commercial free-to-air TV.

Yours sincerely,

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CEO