

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice
Budget Estimates May 2017
Communications Portfolio
Department of Communications and the Arts

Question No: 20

Program 1.1

Hansard Ref: Page 60, 24/05/2017

Topic: Audio Description Service

Senator Urquhart, Anne asked:

1. I have a few questions around the audio description area. Given the history of bipartisan support for the audio description program, can you tell me the government's current stated position on the provision of audio description, and does it have funds quarantined to increase access to audio description services?
2. Are the terms of reference in the scope?
3. How is the working party funded?
Can you tell me how much funding has been allocated?
4. So, understanding that the ABC has undertaken initial costings associated with a permanent audio description service, and this is seen as commercial-in-confidence, what is the scope of the service within which the costings have been undertaken?

Answer:

1. Please refer to page 59 of the Senate Estimates transcript.
2. See attachment, Terms of Reference – Audio Description Working Group
3. The Working Group is funded out of the existing budget of the Consumer Safeguards Branch of the Department of Communications and the Arts. As of 24 May 2017 (the time of questioning) no funds have been spent and a specific figure has not been allocated. The first Audio Description Working Group meeting has been scheduled for 29 June 2017. Information on the costs of funding the working group can be more accurately provided once it concludes at the end of the year.
4. The costings that have been provided by the ABC are based upon 14 hours per week of audio described content delivered on iview.



Terms of Reference – Audio Description Working Group

The Audio Description Working Group will:

- identify options to sustainably increase access to audio description (AD) services for Australians who are blind or vision impaired and others who may benefit from AD;
- identify any impediments to implementation of such options, including technical, financial, cultural or capability issues;
- bring together industry and consumer stakeholders with relevant expertise and experience to provide advice on these options and impediments; and
- provide a report to the Minister for Communications and the Arts and the Assistant Minister for Social Services and Disability Services on its findings by 31 December 2017.

The Audio Description Working Group will, in performing this role, consider:

- the benefits of AD and the impact of the provision of AD services on consumers who are blind or vision impaired;
- the content best suited to AD and the content users would seek to access with AD;
- the current availability of AD services in Australia;
- the use of AD across different platforms (i.e. terrestrial TV, online platforms, apps);
- learnings from the two AD trials conducted by the ABC in 2012 and 2015-16;
- challenges to accessing and providing AD including technical and compatibility issues, content and copyright issues, and the financial cost of implementation;
- incentives to encourage future provision of AD services in Australia; and
- alternatives to legislated requirements to provide AD services.



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