

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates May 2017

Communications Portfolio

Special Broadcasting Service

Question No: 70

Special Broadcasting Service

Hansard Ref: Written 29/05/2017

Topic: Support for Marriage Equality

Senator Abetz, Eric asked:

1. Is SBS a corporate supporter of marriage equality?
2. Is it compatible with the SBS Charter for this public broadcaster and its managing director to be campaigning on any cause rather than reporting the range of perspectives in that debate?
3. How are SBS journalists protected so they can act impartially on an issue if their managing director is campaigning on an issue?
4. Have any instructions been given to Journalists that SBS codes of practice must be followed by editorial staff despite the organisations (or Managing Director's) position on an issue?
5. What research has been undertaken by SBS suggesting multicultural audiences value SBS's focus on changing the definition of marriage?

Answer:

1. As an employer, SBS supports diversity in all its forms and the rights of its employees to be treated equally under the law. Editorially, SBS has an obligation to be accurate, impartial and balanced in its news and current affairs content, including coverage of the range of views about marriage equality, which it does.
2. The SBS Charter sets out the principal function of SBS and a number of duties it has to fulfil in performing this function in respect of its media services. In covering issues SBS maintains its editorial independence and integrity, as in line with the SBS Codes of Practice. There is no conflict between views held and expressed by the Managing Director in his personal capacity and SBS's compliance with its Charter.
3. SBS journalists are required under the SBS Code of Conduct to comply with relevant laws and regulations, including the SBS Codes of Practice. Specifically, code 2, deals with the requirements of the News and Current Affairs, which requires accuracy, impartiality and balance.
4. SBS journalists are required at all times, under the SBS Code of Conduct, to comply with relevant laws and regulations, including the SBS Codes of Practice. Views held and expressed by the Managing Director in his personal capacity have no bearing or impact on SBS's compliance with its Charter.
5. SBS has never made such a suggestion.