

Senate Estimates  
October 2021

### **SBS opening statement**

Thank you, Chair.

As the year draws to a close, SBS continues to deliver trusted multilingual services to keep Australians informed and safe, along with compelling content in multiple languages to reflect the stories of a truly multicultural nation and drive genuine inclusion. We're proud of what we do and how we do it – efficiently and with innovation – recently being recognised as one of Australia's most innovative companies by the AFR for our digital multilingual services.

On top of our ongoing COVID-19 coverage, with resources in 64 languages via the SBS Multilingual Coronavirus portal, we recently delivered live interpreting of the NSW and Victorian Government press conferences - in NSW these ran daily in ten priority languages, to provide communities with access to critical health messages in real time. Our newsroom produced *Vaccine in Focus*, a dedicated site with accurate news and information about the vaccine rollout; and National Indigenous Television has continued to provide critical, community-focused news in addition to First Nations community announcements on vaccinations featuring Nanna from our award-winning animated children's series, *Little J and Big Cuz*.

We remain committed to evolving our offering to meet the needs of contemporary Australia, recently launching our regular Language Services Review – undertaken every five years to ensure SBS's audio and language content reflects our increasingly diverse society.

Public consultation is now open, inviting community feedback on the draft selection criteria, which will be used in conjunction with Census data to inform and shape our language services for the next five years.

And our services are unmatched. SBS has a unique role in providing trusted, accurate and impartial Australian news and information in more than 60 languages, including essential services to multicultural and First Nations Australians. We also play an important role in countering and displacing misinformation – no more clearly demonstrated and needed than throughout the pandemic.

SBS was therefore surprised and disappointed that Facebook declined to enter commercial negotiations with us in relation to our news content.

We are concerned about the impact on our audiences and discoverability of SBS content on the platform, noting many of our audiences access SBS through Facebook.

Facebook declining to negotiate with SBS is particularly concerning from a public policy perspective. The outcome is at odds with the Government's intention of supporting public interest journalism, and the inclusion of the public service broadcasters in the News Media and Digital Platforms Code framework with respect to remuneration. It places SBS at a relative disadvantage, given we are commercially exposed to the advertising market as a hybrid funded public broadcaster.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to mention *New Gold Mountain* - SBS's most ambitious drama series yet, which premiered this month. A murder mystery exploring the Australian gold rush from the perspective of Chinese miners, the series features a talented local and international cast, and is yet another example of SBS telling untold Australian stories that simply can't be seen anywhere else.

The series is supported by teaching resources for schools, mapped against the curriculum, and is also available with subtitles in five languages via SBS On Demand – which just this weekend surpassed 10 million registered users. Shot in regional Victoria with a substantial proportion of dialogue in Cantonese, *New Gold Mountain* is a distinctively Australian story.

We are proud of the content and critical services SBS continues to deliver for all Australians. I look forward to your questions.

*ENDS.*