

I appreciate the opportunity of the Senator, particularly the Hon. Senator Xenaphon for the opportunity to express my opinions and concerns relating to ABC's management decisions to the reduction in internal productions in the ABC.

Although I appreciate that the Senate and the Environment and Communication Reference Committee are limited to the terms of reference. I believe it is important that a broader public inquiry like the Dix review is required in order to clearly understand the ABC's role and purpose in today's media as well as audits of its governance, funding and costs associated with production.

The following is my submissions against each of the terms of reference.

(a) the implications of this decision on the ABC's ability to create, produce and own its television content, particularly in the capital cities of Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart;

It appears to be self evident that the ABC's ability to create and produce its own content will be limited to capital cities.

I understand that there have been major issues with a number of ABC's studios. Recently, the relocation of ABC to new premises in Brisbane, has caused issues with limited space and OB's. For Adelaide and Perth, who have in recent years been a main source of local television production the recent decisions will have a devastating impact on regional TV production in these states.

Although I understand that Tasmania will continue with a current production, there is little confidence in Kim Dalton and Mark Scott's sincerity in maintaining local and internal production in the studio in Hobart.

I also have reservations of the studios in Melbourne and Sydney, with the majority of internal production being cut coming from these main studios, there is no doubt that what follows from here will be further outsourcing of program making and studios across Australian in the ABC will be only a non financial asset to the ABC – for hiring purposes.

(b) the implications of this decision on Australian film and television production in general and potential impact on quality and diversity of programs;

Unlike the commercial sector, a public broadcaster like the ABC is not meant to aim for ratings, but rather its obligation to provided educative, researched, impartial and quality programming that specialises and entertains the Australian public.

Just watching the ABC as it is now, there is a clear decrease in quality. In many cases this appears to be focused in areas such as ABC news where there are incorrect scrolling feeds at the bottom of the screen. Reporters muddling up their words and pictures not in the correct order.

With even more cuts to ABC production and the loss of resources such as skilled program makers, editors and directors, there is only the assumption that quality will continue to decline in the ABC. Without a doubt, ABC is no longer focused on remaining the leader of well resourced, researched, impartial and quality programming.

There is a high turnover of qualified and creative staff, for no other reason than the ABC does not wish to have innovative ideas pitched within. Rather focusing on ideas from commercial private sector producers.

(c) whether a reduction in ABC-produced programs is contrary to the aims of the National Regional Program Initiative;

As there has been no denial or assurance by the ABC that it will continue with broadcasting of local sports, and has not continued internal production in Adelaide, I would submit that the reduction in internal production is in fact contrary to the aims of the National Regional Program Initiative.

There is no longer local content from the ABC from BAPH production which clearly reaches to Regional Australians, doesn't assist or represent the sense of Australian identity. This is even evident in the fact that ABC has cancelled New Inventors, which was a major resource, not just for the Australian Science community but also for regional Australians, who were highly represented in this program.

(d) the implications of these cuts on content ownership and intellectual property;

By reviewing the ABC Annual Reports over the last 10 years, it is evident that the ABC receives more own-sourced income from royalties of its on IP than any other form of income currently. Even with co-productions, the ABC may not necessarily have any IP ownership of the content or material produced.

By reducing internal production the ABC is limiting its available resources content for reuse by other Australian channels as well as international television and will reduce its content ownership. There is little to gain in the way of archives or IP for the ABC by commissioning work solely with private sector producers and even in co-production of programs.

With limited content, archives and IP, ABC will fall further away from its obligations under the Charter in providing content which best represents Australian culture and identity internationally.

(e) the impact of the ABC's decision to end internal production of Bananas in Pyjamas and to outsource the making of a 'Bananas in Pyjamas' animation series to Southern Star Endemol Proprietary Limited; and

There is always a concern with childrens' programs that when created by an external production company that the quality of the program and its educational content will not meet the expectations of parents in Australia.

Banana's in Pyjamas is an iconic Australian children's program and although there may not be financial, IP or political arguments in regards to the impact this decision has had, there is a moral perspective to this decision. There are thousands of Australians who are outraged by the decision to outsource this children's program and their voices are found on social media pages (please refer to Attachment A)

(f) the future potential implications of these cuts on ABC television's capacity to broadcast state

league football and rugby; and

There has been no commitment made by Kim Dalton or Mark Scott that local sports will continue next season. They have already decided to stop broadcasting lawn bowls and this is a clear indication (when reading between their words) that they are not going to continue broadcasting local sport such as SANFL and WANFL.

With no local sports being broadcasted, there will be little to no need to have functioning studios in SA or WA, other than a handful of staff for news. This is where it is important for a full and broad public inquiry, as the ABC is the only broadcaster of these sports currently on Australian television.

It must be acknowledged that no commercial sector channel will consider the inclusion of local sports as there is no scope for ratings or profit from their broadcast, which identifies the main difference between the ABC and other channels.

Not only will the cuts to production cut local sports from being aired, this will in turn have a devastating effect on the local sports clubs who use the broadcasting of their games as a way of reaching out to, entertaining their local community spirit.

This will be a blow to the Australian culture and identity of local sports in Australia if the ABC is allowed to axe all local sport broadcasts. It will be against the Regional Initiative as well as the ABC Charter.

(g) any other related matters.

Other matters of concern relate the importance of the ABC's independence, transparency in spending and governance.

I have no confidence in the abilities of either Mark Scott or Kim Dalton in the ABC. Both have come from areas where commercial viability, profit and cost savings have been a high agenda and neither party has any clear understanding of the purpose and role of the ABC in the Australian community.

ABC's Purpose and Role

I appreciate that with so many channels available on both free to air and pay per view that the ABC may see itself as a minor player in the National media market. However, the purpose of the ABC, its obligations under its forming legislation clearly envisage a public broadcaster which is not run for profit, ratings or commercial interest.

It is a broadcaster which focuses on the Australian story, our culture, art, sports and drama. All that should be uniquely Australian and content which best represents Australia in the international market.

The ABC's role is not just providing the latest in high cost productions which tailor for all mindless viewing, but specialist programming which educates as well as entertains. Programming like behind the News (BTN) was essential for the education of young Australians. New Inventors gave regional inventors and university students the chance to show their ideas and show that we can have a sense of accomplishment. Arts programming that provide us with awe and interest of the wonders and

beauty which can be found in our back yard. These are the types of programs that made ABC different to any other Channel on television.

Governance

Over the last year with the introduction of ABC News 24, it is clear that there has been an intention of creating the ABC into a news broadcaster rather than a producer of Australian content.

This can be highlighted by the Australian Network fiasco and the actions of Mark Scott. His recent actions which have been headlined in the media, is an indication of the type of General Manager he is. There are no clear or available financial accounts with regards to costs associated with co-productions and external commissioning of material and the fact that he attempted to undermine what is meant to be a public and transparent tender process, raises the questions about other “deals” that have occurred with private production companies.

Conclusion

I do not believe that the inquiry and terms of reference are sufficient to fully understand the current issues in the ABC. But I would like this inquiry to audit the ABC, its funding, use of taxpayer money, governance and generally its current role and purpose in Australia.

I am requesting.

1. An injunction on ABC decision making until a full inquiry has been conducted
2. For the triennial submission to be delayed for 1 year and the ABC provided with a one off annual budget
3. Mark Scott and Kim Dalton to provide the following:
 - a) Costs associated with co-production and outsourced content compared to internal production over the last 3 years (including producer offset rebates associated with these)
 - b) Detailed plan and assurance of continued internal production in VIC, NSW, SA, WA, QLD and TAS
 - c) A detailed plan over to be accomplished over the next 3 years of introduction of internal programming that relates to art, science, sports, children
4. Inquiry into the effective governance of the ABC based on the decisions made by Kim Dalton, Mark Scott and the ABC Board
5. The introduction of a public and transparent tender process for all co-productions and external outsourced productions
6. A detailed inquiry into the ABC's role and purpose today against its Charter.

ATTACHMENT A

Facebook pages against the new Bananas in Pyjamas cartoon (select list)

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/Bananas-in-pyjamas-gone-animated-australia-says-NO/111941255562291> (41322 people like this page)

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/Like-if-you-miss-the-old-bananas-in-pyjamas-not-the-new-animated-shit/148830891857223> (4522 people like this page)

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/NewBananasSuck> (1540 people like this page)

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/Like-if-you-hate-the-new-bananas-in-pyjamas/179967622060758> (205 people like this page)

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/Like-this-page-if-you-think-the-new-bananas-in-pyjamas-is-disgraceful/181523071906506> (128 people like this page)

Attachment B

Other social media pages, with respect to the Australian public's concerns against ABC's decisions

<http://yourabcworthfightingfor.blogspot.com>

<http://www.causes.com/causes/629416>

<http://bringbacktheinventors.blogspot.com>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Save-the-SANFL-on-the-ABC/246488545373214>

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/114507155313667/>

<https://www.facebook.com/ItsYourABC>