

SENATE SUBMISSION

My Background:

I joined the ABC in 1983 as a production operations trainee (POT).

In those days the ABC had its own training school in many states. I was trained for three years in every aspect of program making, spending time in areas as diverse as makeup, wardrobe, telecine, film editing, presentation, staging, master control, and my chosen area of expertise, cinecamera. The program was divided between theory and on the job experience, with regular exams. There was no better industry training anywhere and it was in part responsible for the glory days of the national broadcaster.

Thirty years later, many of the staff I started with are still with the ABC, as senior craft specialists.

I have worked my way through news and current affairs, through magazine programs, documentaries, arts and features as a field cameraman, and up until recently thought I was a highly respected, highly skilled, valued member of the ABC.

My position is now under review with the slashing of internal production in favour of outside production. My main concern though is not with the loss of a few jobs, dramatic as that is for the people involved, but for the loss of a major cultural organization in the Australian community.

MY WORK PLACE:

I work in an area called field operations in Melbourne (Ripponlea). There are five crews consisting of a camera man and sound recordist in each. We are booked out to programs other than news/caff such as Catalyst, Australian Story, Inventors, Collectors, Compass, Arts, Gardening, etc. Year by year programs come and go but we are always busy. We are the experts who can light, direct, set up cranes and tracks, hold the hand of inexperienced producers, and always come up with great pictures. We have taken to new technology, modified work practices, become more productive, and are passionate supporters of an independent, creative, vibrant ABC.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

When I started in 1983 the place was humming. Three studios were busy. Staging, workshops, scenic artists, light riggers, maintenance and lineup crews worked round the clock to keep the place running. There were many program units like Natural History, Children's Education, Documentaries, Drama, Comedy, Arts, Entertainment, making programs out of Melbourne.

As a young cameraman I could move between programs gaining experience in studios, outside broadcast, drama, documentaries.

SITUATION 2011.

Now the studios are largely empty, used mostly by SBS and co-productions that may or may not use ABC staff. Workshops consist of 1 person, so sets are bought in. Natural History was closed down, documentaries are made outside as are dramas. The programs I have traditionally worked on are being axed and not replaced. The only major Melbourne prime program unit left is Gardening Australia. The ABC is a shadow of its former self.

ABC 3 is providing some studio work. This I believe is funded separately by the government and as such should not be part of this argument. It is the allocation of resources for prime time ABC 1 programs that is under scrutiny.

Documentaries are no longer made using Melbourne crews. This is not because we are not capable; rather it is a decision by management to source them from outside.

Co productions such as Judith Lucy's Spiritual Journey and Myff's new project, are mostly staffed by outside operators due to deals with the external producers. This is the type of work we would have done in the past.

My impression of the current ABC structure is that there are many more managers and ancillary staff than people actually making programs.

Can the Senate please find out what the staff numbers and their roles are. I suggest a good guide would be to look at staff including executive producers and below as well as resource staff in this tally of program makers.

I believe the term "co production" is applied even when the only ABC personnel involved are a commissioning editor and a production manager. I believe these projects should be called outsourced programs.

Can the Senate please ascertain what criteria are used to delineate a co production as opposed to a buy in.

It seems to me that the ABC is planning to eventually become a broadcaster of bought in programs with the exception of news and current affairs and associated programs.

Can the Senate please find what the current management team propose for the future of ABC TV.

I believe the ABC does not see any value in fostering creative talent within its ranks and the idea of training and leading in the TV industry is a thing of the past.

Can the Senate find out if the ABC has a plan to employ people on a long term basis.

I am concerned that we will no longer have a culture of innovation and experimentation. In the past the ABC has been invaluable in bringing new ideas and talent to the screen. These people and programs often move to the commercial sector who cherry pick the best. Australia needs the ABC to continue in not being afraid fail. The only product to come from outside producers is bound to be safe and formulaic. They cannot financially endure a program that doesn't rate, because they may not get to make another program.

Over the years I have worked on a number of internally made ABC Arts and literary programs. These include Review, Express, Between the Lines, Sunday Afternoon Arts and Music programs such as Countdown, Long Way to the Top, the list is long. To do so I have spent many hours with artists and their communities. One thing they all had in common was an appreciation of the ABC as a cultural entity that gave them a voice. We used to have a weekly program that examined books and writing, it was very popular among the reading public, now we have a studio chat show once a month, one quarter of what we should have. The weeknight art shows like Review and Express were influential and well regarded by their target audience. Surely it doesn't matter if they don't get a million viewers. Those particular viewers are not served well by any other media organization.

Mr. Scott has chosen to run a 24 hour news channel with no extra funding. He has said no money will be taken from other programs to pay for it, yet programs are now being axed because there is no money. Viewers have a huge choice when it comes to news coverage, why not give some choice to viewers interested in other aspects of life.

Can the senate find out how much News 24 is really costing and how many people are watching

In the past the ABC employed a large pool of creative people. The way it is now, numbers are falling below a critical level where ideas and career development will cease so there will be no alternative but to outsource. I believe this to be the endgame of Mr. Scott and Mr. Dalton. As an employee I have no confidence in these men as custodians of the ABC for future generations.