

Senate Inquiry into the ABC

Thank you for holding this Senate Inquiry and for accepting this late public submission.

This inquiry should not be necessary. For the ABC to consider such a fundamental change in its core business the proposal should be made public in a clear and understandable way by the ABC, and the Australian community, including art, cultural, and community bodies, should be invited to comment before such primary policy changes are considered let alone developed and implemented.

That this has not happened, and that there hasn't as yet been widespread public opposition to this stealthy dismantling of ABC internal television production bears testimony to the charm of Mr Mark Scott. However it is clear he smiles and 'murders while he smiles'.

What is being proposed is that the ABC be transformed at its core and fundamentally into a distribution platform. Only news and current affairs will retain any production capacity and this will be greatly reduced, in keeping with the policy of retreat that has seen regional television news and current affairs' coverage near extinguished, and city television news and current affairs' coverage outside of Sydney and Melbourne reduced greatly.

Sport will not be covered by the ABC in any depth, regardless of commercial disinterest in regional and other sporting endeavours such as netball, state AFL codes, and bowls. The tenacity of SBS in supporting soccer has seen the game achieve great strides in Australia. It is now proposed that such support of sporting codes by the ABC end here.

Instead the ABC will compete with such online giants as youtube and facebook to offer internet gateways through which content developed and created by community and audience members can be posted. To this aim the Arts' Gateway and the Online Local sites have been promoted widely by Mr Scott and ABC publicists. Worthy endeavours, but the Arts' Gateway is doomed to being a poor relative of Myspace if the proposal goes ahead to dismantle the specialist ABC arts' unit. And although the ABC has a wide and passionate online audience, most Australians watch television.

Television is the main form of cultural entertainment for most Australians, and cannot be abandoned in this way by the primary national public broadcaster.

A team of specialist arts' programmers is critical to the ABC's ability to create and commission quality arts' programs. Until now the ABC has not only supported the arts through the creation and commissioning of artwork, but dedicated television and radio programs have recorded the cultural life of our nation, across the entire country. To cease this, and to hand over the copyright of content to those with commercial interests is to strike a major blow at the living cultural archive of Australia and the independence at the heart of the ABC's Charter.

Programs like The New Inventors can only be made by the ABC. There is no commercial benefit to the producers of such a series, although there is obvious benefit to Australian manufacturing, design, and other industries and disciplines such as science from such a series. As there is no external funding for such a series and no commercial interest to motivate the production of such a series, under the proposed model the only way for it to be made will be if the ABC commissions an external commercial company to produce the series. This will cost more than the internal production by skilled program makers dedicated to public broadcasting and editorial concerns. Will the ABC do this? Or is such programming now dead in the Australian water? Are we instead doomed only to programming of interest to commercial production companies? Most of these are located in Sydney and Melbourne, so the noose draws ever tighter.

How will the editorial responsibilities of the ABC be met by the ABC when in bed with those serving commercial interests? What editorial power will be signed over when co-producers have the bargaining power of knowing that there is no possibility of the ABC making content itself?

It is more expensive to make programs outside of the ABC. It is less expensive to purchase content made overseas. By dismantling the ABC's ability to create programs internally, with current funding the current management is ensuring that there will be less Australian content on the national public

broadcaster.

I do not believe Mr Scott when he says publicly that these changes are a result of Television executives sitting down and deciding how best to serve and support the arts through ABC Television. Such an untruth is not worthy of the Managing Director of the ABC.

I consider that this proposal by ABC management could be a desperate response to a financial shortfall caused by the ABC having taken on too much with too little.

Without first securing funding the ABC has begun several new stations on radio and television over the past years and I consider that this vaulting ambition is causing the ABC to 'overleap itself and fall'.

Please investigate. If the ABC is mismanaging its funding then please act as responsible elected representatives of the public to stop this. If the ABC requires more funding in order to meet its Charter obligations, then please ensure that such funding is made available.

At any rate, please, please: do not allow the current management to beggar our Aunty.

Thank you.

Yours,
Keith Dalton