

- Further cuts to ABC internal television production in WA threatens to reduce television output from the West to News & Current Affairs only
- The ABC has invested in its facilities and staff – this investment will be wasted.
- Regional and minority group voices need a supported outlet now more than ever.
- Distinctive, independent, challenging content needs a supported outlet now more than ever.

Staff numbers in Perth overall have been steadily declining in recent years. Due to the scaling back of television programme production in Perth (the de-commissioning of 'Rollercoaster' in 2009, 'The Hopman Cup' in 2010 and 'Can We Help?' as of June this year), numbers of programme makers and operational TV staff are likely to decrease further this year and next year.

The series 'Rollercoaster' was decommissioned in 2009. It was a very tight and cost-effective internal ABC production with a huge following (Viewer emails averaged 400 per day. Yes, per day). Since it ended, there has been no work involving comparable skill levels and providing comparable experience available to the staff who made it. With this the ABC lost a wealth of talent and experience.

The decision not to recommission the last remaining production, *Can We Help?* was widely anticipated after the announcement of the Screenwest deal. This arrangement is not a 50-50 partnership or a genuine co-production because there is no obligation or even encouragement to external producers to use ABC staff or resources.

Programmes such as Rollercoaster and Can We Help? provided opportunities for direct interaction between ABC productions and their audiences. Hosts and guests of these programmes made public appearances at ABC events, and tours of the ABC would include a visit to Rollercoaster's studio set-up. This local television connection fostered a sense of ownership and support of our public broadcaster with West Australian audiences. This has now been lost.

The ABC in Perth is losing more and more talented and skilled staff, in some cases caused by the relocation of functions to other centres (eg: Graphics), or simply because of a lack of meaningful work or the possibility of career progression. Many highly skilled people with numerous years of experience will be leaving the industry permanently without having the opportunity to mentor others and pass on their knowledge. This is a waste of the ABC's investment in training and development.

The ABC is a national broadcaster and as such it has a responsibility to reflect voices from all regions and states in Australia. The concentration of production functions and program-makers in Sydney and Melbourne (either directly through the

centralisation of internal production, or indirectly through the outsourcing of production) weakens the national broadcaster and endangers public support.

Ten years ago planning started on the move of the ABC to its current premises in East Perth. The move brought with it hopes that the ABC would regain confidence in internal production and use our new and improved studios to build programmes that brought a voice from the West to the national broadcaster.

The recent agenda to dismantle our production capacity and to outsource production to the private sector has destroyed this vision.

In Western Australia in particular, this is a real and present threat. The next target for cuts is believed to be local sport. For many years ABC coverage of the WAFL at metropolitan venues and in regional centres has been crewed by a skilled and efficient workforce of Perth-based staff. The loss of this programming would lead to many more redundancies and, with the skills lost, the end of any viability for TV production of any sort in Perth. There would be no-one left to produce television content outside of News and Current Affairs.

Who then would crew the next Perth ANZAC Day March television broadcast? Who would film Western Australian segments for Compass or Gardening Australia? Will any other organisation televise WASO performances to regional Western Australia or host special events for the local Arts Community? Supposedly State Election coverage would have to be staffed by Eastern States crews because, without the ABC, there are likely to be far fewer skilled casual operators in the local market. Presumably this would be the same for events of national significance (CHOGM, World Hockey & Swimming Championships etc). There would not even be staff left to work on genuine co-productions or to supply supplementary staff to the private sector. With the television commercial sector also shrinking locally, the cultural identity of Western Australia will have minimal representation on our screens.

Creative independence will no longer be fostered, and the diversity and innovation nurtured through the ABC as a training ground for the industry beyond News & Current Affairs production will no longer exist.

The integrity of the ABC, and the public trust it instils, is based on it being free of commercial influences. This independence is potentially jeopardised by the ABC's diminished editorial control over out-sourced programs. The imperative of private sector programme production is commercial. With this inevitably comes caution, editorial manipulation and restriction.

ABC content will become indistinguishable from the mass audience-driven content that prevails in today's media landscape. The voices of minorities and from remote areas will find it harder to reach a national audience.