

ABC Television Archives
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9th September 2011

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment & Communications
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

We work in the ABC Television Archives in Melbourne. Together we represent numerous voices from within a small but dedicated department at the ABC - ABC Library Sales and ABC Archives & Libraries - and we would like to express our dismay and alarm at movements to destabilise a corporation built on the dedication of its workers and fostered by the passion of all Australians.

As a result of over 50 years of internally produced TV broadcasting, the ABC currently has a rich and diverse archive; the biggest of all the television networks in Australia. This archive is not only used by ABC productions but also by third-party clients. The ABC Archive's importance as a repository of cultural information and of political and social history extends far beyond the demands of the ABC, and is a crucial resource for the entire Australian film and television production community. Being a government organisation, the ABC Archives are subject to stringent archival policies that ensure the content is catalogued appropriately, stored correctly and accessible by the public and private sectors.

A shift away from internal product, as proffered by Kim Dalton, will result in a radical diminishing of the ABC's archival scope, in both size of the collection and its content. What Mr Dalton fails to realise is that the copyright for co-produced footage rests solely with the co-producer; meaning that important content, such as unique camera overlay, rare moments of history, script documentation or exclusive interviews, will no longer be easily accessible to the wider community or the ABC. Independent producers do not necessarily share the same commitment to archiving their footage, scripts, photographs or ancillary documentation as the ABC does, thus making co-produced content inaccessible for future use for all Australians. Co-produced footage no longer has value beyond the few transmissions the ABC purchases; perhaps the very definition of the future of the ABC as a mere transmission tower. Mr Dalton needs to be made aware that taxpayer-funded, internally produced footage has the potential to be reused hundreds of times, for the financial and cultural advantage of the ABC and the nation. Taxpayer-funded co-produced footage may never be used beyond the original production, and the citizens of Australia, as filmmakers or audiences, will be the losers in this equation.

A simple example of why a rich ABC-owned archive is important came to light recently; when painter Margaret Olley died, the Arts production unit was able to produce a wonderful, thoughtful and detailed obituary celebrating the life of Margaret Olley from the more than 50 items we hold of her in our collection. In 30 years, when another beloved Australian identity dies, the ABC will be unable to produce such a moving piece of television because the archives may well be bare.

A larger example of why the ABC Archive is of critical importance is our natural history collection; over the years, we have kept everything that was shot for ABC-produced natural history programs. This includes

footage of rare and endangered species, and has been reused by program-makers and museums from all over the world. With the dismantling of the natural history unit, which occurred by stealth with little regard for its cultural importance to Australia, we are no longer adding to this rich collection; a collection possibly unmatched in Australia.

The ABC Archive has also been a valuable resource for producers outside the ABC, making significant documentaries about resonant social and cultural issues; something the ABC was once renowned for creating internally. Recent non-ABC productions that have licensed footage from our collection include 'Immigration Nation', 'The Forgotten Australians', and 'Murunduk: Songs of Freedom'. International broadcasters such as BBC, ZDF and NHK also licence footage from the ABC's archive, making it invaluable not just to the Australian community but worldwide as well.

ABC-TV offers archival research work and footage to external producers 'in-kind' as part of the ABC's investment in co-production. It is a way for the ABC to invest in a production without having to hand over actual cash; quite an intelligent way of operating, one might think. However, should internal production be reduced, the size of our archive collection will also be reduced. With a depleted archival collection, the ABC Archive will be unable to offer the level of service it offers now. Australian taxpayers will thus be paying for the ABC to fund a co-production as well as paying for a production company to source footage from the commercial sphere. Some examples of Victorian-produced programs that have benefited from these ABC in-kind deals include 'Inside the Firestorm', 'After the Fires', 'Adam Hills In Gordon St Tonight' and 'Judith Lucy's Spiritual Journey', to name a few.

In recent years, we at ABC Archives have been witness to the steady erosion of internal programming. Every time an internally produced program is cut, the defence from management has been to blame a fall in ratings or the need to refresh the schedule. However, each internally produced program is gradually being replaced by a co-production or 'buy-in', which in turn out-sources valuable in-house skills and compromises otherwise high production values and integrity. The ABC, working with the independent production sector in Australia, has a long and rich history and has offered great partnerships with talented craftspeople, on- and off-screen. However, the true definition of what a co-production is, and its effect on the ABC's business going forward, needs to be understood holistically by ABC management.

Echoing the calls of many writing to this standing committee, we ask that a commitment to a mixed model of internal and external production be made now. Co-productions previously employed ABC facilities, edit suites, editors, production staff and studio crew, however modern co-productions merely hire out ABC studio and/or office space and have only one or two ABC contributors, usually in the form of an executive producer or production manager. Rarely does the ABC gain access and own or even co-own the rights of the visual content of these productions; meaning that as we head further down the path of 100% co-productions, our collection is rendered a static fossil, capturing the diversity and beauty of this country and its people...up until the year 2011.

Kim Dalton, Director of Television, has stated publicly that the ABC internally commissions 84% of its content.¹ We would like this figure to be vigorously challenged, as "internal commissioning" is *not* the same as "internal producing". Giving ABC commissioning editors permission to rubber-stamp external productions is *not* the same as giving voice to the many creative ideas and skills that internal ABC staff and production units have to offer. We are concerned that Mr Dalton's push for more outsourcing of production, whether scrutinised economically or ethically, seeks only to waste the ABC's cultural heritage, its integrity and its pool of talented and passionate employees.

Mr Dalton's cavalier dismantling of internal production is not a responsible use of taxpayers' money when in fact the ABC facilities, studio and staff alike are utilised effectively and efficiently, this is clearly the more cost-effective method of television production. The ABC is taxpayer funded and outsourcing to private companies allows the ABC to access tax rebates, which only increases the amount of taxpayer's money being spent!

Furthermore, by eroding the pool of in-house staff and in-house ideas you also erode a commitment to on-going employment, leaving only a skeleton staff of contractors and casuals who have no loyalty or connection to the National Broadcaster. The National Broadcaster needs to be an organisation that has the very best full-time employees, the most talented and energised on-going staff, and it needs to foster creative and ingenious thinking in order to converse with as much of its audience as possible across a variety of platforms. By fostering external production, Mr Dalton is destabilising the future of the ABC. To quote ABC director Ted Robinson, when talking about on-staff producer Maurice Murphy in the early 1970s,

*"People like me were able to learn their craft 'on-air' in those days, which meant that we were able to make mistakes or even fail completely with programs and still have a job. Maurice encouraged us to take risks and experiment with comedy and I believe this resulted in some of the best and most innovative comedy ever seen on Australian television."*²

Internal production units need to be funded properly and promoted as the flagship programs that they are. The presenters of much-loved internally made programs such as Catalyst, Gardening Australia, Art Nation, New Inventors, Compass, Message Stick and so on, have barely, if at all, been included in the 2010/2011 promos on ABC1. These programs intrinsically reflect a diversity of Australian talent and ideas that the ABC's charter seeks to represent and foster. Which outside production company can afford to make, and is even interested in, producing in-depth, intelligent Australian content that is not only broadcast on the ABC but is 100% owned and archived by the ABC?

The ABC seeks to continue building its strong news archive, but the beauty of internal television production within the ABC is that the archive is able to draw its contents from beyond the news scope; to document our social and cultural identity in a way no other television network does in Australia. Arts, science, natural history and religion are not covered in-depth in news programs the way they are in television productions. It is a simple equation; the fewer programs the ABC produces, the less content we have, and the less viable it is for more programs to be produced internally.

I leave you with words from a diverse group of prominent Australians who are just as concerned as we are about the cuts to ABC Arts programming. In a letter to the ABC Board, that eloquently reflects what so many Australians think about the threat to our National Broadcaster, they state;

*"And sadly, [the cuts] will reflect no glory whatsoever on what was once considered the single greatest achievement of Australia's intellectual and artistic life: the ABC itself."*³

Sincerely,

Sally Moore
Claire Barrett
Anne Gilbee

Television Archive Researchers

¹ 'Late Night Live' with Phillip Adams, ABC Radio National, 31 August 2011

² Wikipedia entry, 'The Aunty Jack Show' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Aunty_Jack_Show

³ Age Newspaper, 2 September 2011 <http://www.theage.com.au/national/carey-cave-and-co-hit-abc-arts-cuts-20110902-1iq98.html#ixzz1Wwi1xh87>¹