

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees
on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

8 September 2011



PUBLIC GALLERIES ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia
Federation Square
PO Box 7259, Melbourne Vic 8004
T +61 3 8662 1585
F +61 3 8662 1575
W www.pgav.org.au

Dear Committee Secretary

As President of the Public Galleries Association of Victoria (PGAV), I am writing in relation to the inquiry into recent ABC programming decisions – specifically the decision to axe *Art Nation* and the specialist ABC TV Arts Unit.

The PGAV is the peak body representing fifty public galleries across metropolitan and regional Victoria. Our members include such flagship institutions as the National Gallery of Victoria, Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), Bendigo Art Gallery and Heide Museum of Modern Art. Last year **over 4.5 million people attended public galleries across Victoria**. These high visitation numbers demonstrate a strong interest in the visual arts amongst the Australian community.

In an interview with Fairfax media on 2 August 2011, Kim Dalton, Director of Television at ABC cited the reasons for his decision to axe *Art Nation* as “falling audiences” and a need for ABC TV to “focus its limited financial resources on prime-time programming”.

The high visitation numbers at PGAV public galleries directly challenges the ABC’s decision to axe *Art Nation* and its specialist Arts Unit. The PGAV believes “falling audiences” are a reflection of the ABC’s lack of commitment to arts programming rather than any decline in interest in the Australian community.

ABC Charter - Presenting Australian Stories

The PGAV believes the ABC has a responsibility under its Charter to present Australian art to the Australian community. *Art Nation* and the specialist Arts Unit produced and presented 350 stories about Australian art last year, with numerous stories, previews, blogs and extras delivered online. These stories play a critical role in the ABC achieving its Charter of contributing to a sense of national identity and reflecting cultural diversity; transmitting Australian culture; and encouraging and promoting the arts in Australia.

Commitment to Presenting Regional Stories

Many PGAV member galleries in regional Victoria regularly feature on *Art Nation* and the ABC website. *Art Nation* provides national awareness of arts in regional Australia. This is largely due to the commitment of the specialist Arts Unit to fulfilling the ABC’s Charter by representing the diversity of Australian art to ABC audiences.

Recommendation 1: Maintain the specialist Arts Unit

We believe the ABC's decision to cut the specialist Arts Unit and replace it with outsourced production and overseas programming will not address "falling audiences" nor is there clear evidence it will result in real cost savings. The Director of ABC TV Kim Dalton is cited in *The Australian* on 5 August 2011 as having said the rising costs of acquisitions is hurting ABC budgets.

Above all, the PGAV believes the decision to dismantle the Arts Unit will result in less Australian art content on the ABC, making it difficult for the ABC to fulfil its Charter.

Considered within the context of the recently released National Cultural Policy discussion paper the ABC's decision undermines the core principles and vision outlined; "...ensuring that Australia embeds its creative skills and talent, not just at the heart of cultural life, but at the heart of our technological development and national economic growth".

We strongly recommend the ABC maintain its specialist Arts Unit.

Recommendation 2: Consult with Arts Industry to Review Arts Programming on the ABC

The PGAV has written to Kim Dalton welcoming the opportunity to meet with him to discuss the reasons for *Art Nation's* declining audiences. We recommend that the ABC consult with the arts industry in Australia to review the time-slot, content and format of *Art Nation* rather than to axe the show and close the specialist Arts Unit.

In making this submission on behalf of the fifty public galleries across Victoria and the significant audiences they attract, the PGAV anticipates the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications bringing about positive change which ensures Australian art content continues to be produced by the specialist Arts Unit and presented on the ABC for the enjoyment of the large and diverse audiences here and overseas.

Yours Sincerely

Julie Adams
President, PGAV