

DEAFNESS COUNCIL WA INC
SUBMISSION
THE SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

We understand that the Federal Government are considering abolishing the requirement that free-to-air television broadcasters complete an annual compliance report.

In its place it is proposed that consumers make their own investigations and complaints about captioning standards and quality.

We wish to voice our strong objection to such a proposal.

BACKGROUND

Our Council has for over 20 years been involved in working to achieve captioned television and movie screening.

Together with Lotterywest and Channel 7 we were responsible for the first commercial captioned news service in Australia. In addition one of our members successfully lobbied the Human Rights Commission resulting in the introduction of captions of pay TV and captioned movies now being screened at major movie theatres around Australia.

We would put to you that neither the television broadcasters nor the movie theatre operators would have introduced these important initiatives without this “outside” lobbying pressure.

IMPORTANCE

Unless you are Deaf or hearing impaired or know someone who is it is unlikely that you would understand how important these captioned programs are to their television viewing experience. Without the captions very little can be understood by these viewers. This can be readily experienced by pressing the mute button and trying to understand the vision without captions.

In addition the majority of Deaf or hearing impaired Australians are elderly and to ask them to be the consumer watchdog on captioning standards is completely unfair and unreasonable. These consumers are just wanting to watch TV with captions, they do not want to be an unofficial regulator, they just want to know that someone is keeping an eye on the broadcasters to make sure that they are complying with their legal requirements.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent that this request for change is not coming from consumers who are more than happy with the present system. The request for change is coming from broadcasters who in most cases resisted the introduction of captioning requirements in the first place. The broadcasters are merely attempting to cut costs and place the onus for regulation on consumers who in many cases will not be able to or understand how to take this action.

The current system also ensures that the system is independently and regularly assessed and all broadcasters know that their competition are having to comply with the rules and not trying to cut corners at the consumer's expense.

We strongly recommend that the proposed change does NOT occur.