

Submission to Senate Inquiry on The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's commitment to reflecting and representing regional diversity by David Hudspeth. A Personal View.

I am an employed by the ABC in Tasmania as a Cameraman. My wife is losing her job with the Tasmanian Production unit as a result of the closure of the unit. I am making this submission on my own behalf and because I care about the development and opportunities for Film and TV practitioners in Tasmania.

The closure of the ABC's Tasmanian TV Production Unit will mark the end of a long history of ABC production in Tasmania including Gardening Australia, Collectors and Auction Room. In addition the ABC has announced the end of local sports coverage and the decommissioning of the local Outside Broadcast Van. While I am sad to see the local Production unit disbanded after such a long history of serving the Australian Public I accept the ABC has the right to make changes to meet its aims. ABC Radio, TV, online and local News programs do reflect regional diversity. I would however argue that cutting ABC TV production in Tasmania will leave the Tasmanian community poorer and substantially reduce the opportunities for Tasmanians to enter and find ongoing work in the industry. I believe the legacy of the ABC's Tasmanian Production unit is to prove over a long period of time that successful and popular programs can be produced in Tasmania.

My concern is that the Tasmanian Community will end up with less employment in the local industry and that ABC TV now lacks a meaningful ongoing commitment to TV Production aside of News in this State. I would like to see the ABC make that ongoing commitment to support the growth and development of Tasmanian based producers and production companies in a meaningful and ongoing way. Come on ABC, Commission a Drama series set in Tasmania, Provide platforms for regional filmmakers to show their work, have make a public commitment and plan to build the local industry.

I would point out that there are many practitioners and production companies in the Tasmanian community who are capable of delivering quality content to the ABC but they need the opportunity to grow and develop. Where are the opportunities for local writers, directors and producers to have their work screened by the National Broadcaster? Where are the opportunities for local technicians to pursue their occupations?

In the Sunday Tasmanian 4/9/2011 Karena Slaninka, Director of Screen Tasmania, was quoted as saying *"Our big thing is trying to increase production activity in Tasmania -It's one of the key focus areas of the strategic Plan" (Through the Lens to 2016)." only in that way can we build sustainable businesses and offer job opportunities to people."*

Since announcing the closure of the Tasmanian Production Unit the ABC has announced it will put 1.5 Million dollars into independent production over three years as long as the State Government matches the amount. The Premier Lara

Giddings has said the State Government cannot afford to do so when it is short of funds for basic services. No doubt the Tasmanian Government feels ABC TV Production should be a Federal responsibility. If the ABC does put aside a relatively paltry \$500,000 per year for three years will those funds go to supporting local Producers and building the Tasmanian Industry? How many opportunities will be offered to Tasmanians?

Cuts to the Tasmanian Production unit are happening because the ABC is pursuing a policy of outsourcing TV production to the independent production sector and centralising internal production in Melbourne and Sydney with Po's kitchen still produced for the time being in South Australia. The ABC has also cut internal production staff in Sydney and Melbourne. The Cuts do not affect local News and Current Affairs production. Independent Producers are able to get additional funding from state Film bodies and other sources thereby cutting the amount of money the ABC is required to contribute per program.

The ABC has stated the cuts to local sport are happening because they no longer want to support the model of having Outside Broadcast facilities in each State and because they want to put the money towards the Paralympics and Women's Sport and other programming. They were also unable to persuade the AFL and the local League to fund local football broadcasts.

Cuts to internal production free up funds for ABC TV to make programs without having to work within the constraints of keeping internal production teams and facilities busy. The ABC has clearly been putting a lot of money into Australian Drama, the most expensive type of production, with some great results and also new ventures such as News 24 and the expansion of ABC online. They also need to provide enough content to fill the four digital channels. I imagine money is tight.

The cuts in Tasmania involve the loss of some 17 ongoing jobs. The loss of these productions does not only affect permanent ABC employees but also severely curtails the employment opportunities for freelancers who move between private production and the ABC making it harder for people to make a living and stay in the industry. (The ABC operates on a base-staffing model so freelance crews need to be employed when there are production bookings beyond the normal News requirements and to cover staff leave etc.) The cuts also curtail the opportunities for TV Students and others to gain work experience and enter the industry seeking experience and maybe their first chance at employment. In a small market such as Tasmania an ongoing base of work is important to the whole industry. Over the years many have started at the ABC in Tasmania and gone on bigger and better things nationally with the ABC and in the independent sector. I put it to the inquiry that Tasmanians deserve to have at least some opportunities to enter and find ongoing employment in the industry.

The ABC did not commission the Tasmanian Production Unit to produce distinctively Tasmanian programming.

I would put it to the inquiry that the ABC should be encouraging regional producers within the ABC and the local independent sector and commissioning local production to truly reflect the unique qualities of Tasmania and other regional areas. There is no shortage of great stories of national relevance in Tassie.

The ABC TV is on the cusp of a precipice and we will see Television confronting some of the same problems faced by newspapers. The ability to stream whatever you want to watch over the Internet is putting enormous pressure on broadcasters including ABC to compete across the digital platforms and find new ways to reach audiences. This brave new world is creating great challenges but I believe it also creates great opportunities to reach and interact with audiences. I would be disappointed if the ABC does not continue to support production in regional areas at a time when, from a technical point of view, it is so much easier for programs to be made to a high standard anywhere. Opportunities for regional program makers should be pursued on the new platforms.

There is also no reason why all production facilities should be concentrated in the main centres. A program can be edited or have sound post production done anywhere. Animation, online, graphics and post production can be done anywhere. All the ABC jobs do not have to be in the major cities.

It is important that the national broadcaster makes every effort to reflect and represent regional diversity in Australia and it is important that the ABC looks for opportunities to help sustain the industry and practitioners in regional areas or we will all be the poorer for it.

In 2007 ABC Managing Director Mark Scott welcomed the extension of the Regional Program initiative from the Federal Government which funded Collectors, Talking Heads and the Cook and the Chef by saying.....

"It is recognition that these regional and local initiatives are an essential part of the ABC's role, particularly in regional Australia," (ABC Press Release.)

I would ask the senate enquiry to carefully examine how the ABC will fulfill this essential part of the ABC's role.

