

Submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications for the inquiry:

**"The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's commitment  
to reflecting and representing regional diversity"**

In relation to the Terms of Reference:

***(a) the commitment by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) to reflecting and representing regional diversity in Australia;***

In the last few years we have seen a dramatic reduction in programs being produced within the ABC at centres other than Sydney and Melbourne. This is in addition to the increase in the number of programs being produced outside the ABC (or, in some cases, co-productions). In Tasmania, specifically, there has been a trend to kill off, or move successful ventures to Sydney or Melbourne. The skilled and creative team that devised and produced *Gardening Australia*, watched that very successful and popular program get removed to Melbourne. After developing another professional and popular venture, *Collectors*, they had to watch as this program was first "rested", then finally put to rest. Again, the team worked hard and created another new program, *Auction Rooms*. Again, the ABC national management has seen fit to kill this program off. It is hard to escape the idea that the management has no interest in seeing any success come from the Tasmanian branch.

While these programs did reflect a national interest, there is no doubt that in being created in Tasmania, these programs reflected the culture of regional Australia---where they were born and nurtured.

These are just a couple of examples of programs that were started here, then killed or relocated---no longer to reflect their regional origins. The importance of reflecting all of Australian culture, by allowing this creativity to spring from all regions, cannot be overestimated. The different experiences that someone in Hobart grows up with, compared to someone in Sydney, enrich the programs that are conceived here. This will be lost forever with the exclusive concentration of creation in Sydney and Melbourne.

***(b) the impact that the increased centralisation of television production in Sydney and Melbourne has had on the ABC's ability to reflect national identity and diversity;***

The comments above relate also to this second item. Additionally, it is important to recognise the consequences of this concentration for the future.

Where are the next generation of creators coming from? If there is no outlet for their energies in the regions, these stories will never be heard. Over time, anyone who wants a career in the ABC will be forced to adapt to life in Sydney and Melbourne. They will be immersed in that culture, and diversity will naturally disappear.

And we should not underestimate the consequences for other areas. If there are no productions in regional Australia, where are the opportunities for the next generation of camera operators, editors, technicians, and so on, to hone their skills? The ABC has nurtured award-winning directors, camera operators, editors, etc. in the regional branches. Again, the loss of local production robs these people of any chance to follow this great tradition.

***(c) any related matters.***

The ABC charter is an important document. It reflects much of the identity of the ABC, and how the population of Australia perceive it. But it is sufficiently vague to allow some disturbing trends to arise.

The ABC receives its funding from the Parliament---and, by extension, the people of Australia. While the ABC certainly has to be responsible for the spending of these funds, it is NOT a commercial organisation. It does NOT have the same goals as a commercial broadcaster. I believe that the movement of ABC management in recent years towards a model based on commercial broadcasting is the cause of much of the upheaval in the ABC.

If the ABC management is not mindful of the fact that, rather than being a commercial entity, the ABC provides a service to the public, it will surely lose its way. AND will fail to meet its responsibilities under the Charter.

The ABC must continue to fund productions in the regions. It must provide stability and continuity in these local production units. In doing so, it reflects the culture and diversity of these regions. And, just as importantly, it continues to provide an avenue for people in the regions to enter the industry. It is a function of the service that the ABC provides, to continue to train and give meaningful experience to coming generations of Australians. A commercial, bottom-line perspective does not do this. Looking for the cheapest option does not value the long term benefit provided to everyone when there is opportunity in the regions to create and grow within the industry. The ability to learn from those who have gone before is lost forever, and our experience of regional Australia is greatly diminished.