

SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2024 (Public)

SBS answers to Questions taken on Notice

THURSDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2024

QUESTION 1:

Chair: As you are the providers of critical emergency information across Australia, I was hoping that you would have an opinion on what the challenges are in terms of emergency services when there is disruption and when there is misinformation and disinformation provided out there?

ANSWER:

Unlike the ABC, SBS does not operate a network of local radio broadcasting services. SBS radio content is national in focus, and most of our language programs do not broadcast 24 hours throughout the day, which restricts our ability to provide timely and evolving emergency information.

SBS Audio's emergency services content is focused on preparation for disasters, and to explain the role and process of engaging with emergency services.

Some examples of SBS content produced in this space:

[Australia Explained Emergency Essentials](#)

[How to prepare for bushfires](#)

QUESTION 2:

Ms O'Neil: The first thing I would say is that all of our news and current affairs products are intended to counter mis- and disinformation. The SBS Examines service is a relatively recently launched project—I think it launched in July—and that is specifically directed to providing explainers, news stories, podcasts and videos that are directed to report factually in relation to areas of mis- and disinformation that we see circulating in communities via social media and other platforms. It's in-depth reporting, particularly for multilingual communities. We've had quite a few publications already. We've hit over a million video views, even just since July, for this service. We've even got one on what freedom of speech is, and I know that has been a hot topic for this hearing. I'm happy to share that with the committee.

Chair: I think that might be a good idea!

ANSWER:

SBS Examines has published the following content regarding freedom of speech:

[Do Australians have freedom of speech?](#) (available in 18 languages)

[Can we fight misinformation without threatening our freedom of speech?](#) (Available in 31 languages)

[Why is freedom of speech important?](#) (Available in 29 languages)

QUESTION 3:

CHAIR: In terms of the journalists that you employ in your services, are you finding that, as things are evolving in the issues around misinformation and disinformation and as the speed of the proliferation of information is becoming more prevalent and more spoken about, do you find that you're looking for journalists who have got more of those misinformation and disinformation analytical skills?

Dr Sutton: I'd have to take that on notice and take that back to our news people, in terms of who they choose to hire and how they're selecting new recruits to our journalists. But it's obviously an increasingly important skill base for journalists to have.

CHAIR: SBS?

Ms O'Neil: Obviously our journalists undergo constant training and updating of their skills as we go forward. Certainly, in the digital environment, as we're heard, things like verification of images are matters that you need to keep regularly up to date on. Like the ABC, I can take on notice any specific changes that have been made to job descriptions or anything like that, but, certainly, it's an issue that all of our teams are alive to.

CHAIR: If you're both going to take that on notice, I might ask you to consider AI in that as well, in terms of new delights that journalists are having to deal with. I'll go to Senator Hanson-Young.

ANSWER:

SBS journalists receive regular training and updates on the risks of misinformation and our obligations to report accurately as part of our ongoing editorial processes. SBS has not changed job descriptions or recruitment processes to specifically address misinformation or Artificial Intelligence, as all our teams incorporate these considerations in their day to day work of delivering accurate news and information.,

Given the highly trusted nature of our services (in 2024, SBS News is the most trusted news brand in Australia)¹, and our extensive and robust editorial standards, the entirety of SBS's journalistic output is effectively a counterweight to misinformation and disinformation.

QUESTION 4

Senator ROBERTS: With regard to your fact-checkers—both SBS and ABC can take this on notice—could you specify the fact-checkers that you use, who else each of them have as clients and where they get their funding?

¹ <https://www.canberra.edu.au/research/faculty-research-centres/nmrc/digital-news-report-australia>

CHAIR: Senator Roberts, if you're talking about a third party that SBS or ABC might use, they would be open to have only certain levels of information.

Senator ROBERTS: Whatever you can answer on that, please: who are your fact-checkers, who else do they have as clients that you know of and that you can find out about, and who else pays them money—educational institutions, political organisations, activist organisations?

Dr Sutton: We can take that on notice.

Senator ROBERTS: Thank you very much. SBS?

Ms O'Neil: We can take that on notice.

ANSWER:

In order to adhere to SBS's very high standards and requirements for accuracy and integrity, fact-checking is a process that is an inherent part of the production of news and current affairs at SBS.

Whilst SBS does not engage external fact-checkers, many of our journalists are trained in fact-checking and the use of verification tools, and our journalists are closely familiar with what is and what isn't a reputable source.