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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment,
Communications and the Arts

eca.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary

Inquiry into the provisions of the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Television) Bill 2010

SBS appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry.

As Australia's multilingual and multicultural national public broadcaster, SBS is a highly valued media service, particularly for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. SBS currently provides two national television services: SBS ONE – in analogue and digital (SD and HD); and SBS TWO – SBS's digital (SD) multi-channel. Both services provide a balance of programming – commissioned and acquired – in English and languages other than English.

SBS welcomes the proposed satellite solution to facilitate the delivery of commercial and national digital television services to households that cannot receive an adequate terrestrial signal for the digital services available in their area. Enabling under-served communities to access more services is crucial to achieving the objectives of Australia's broadcasting policy.

However SBS has identified at least 88 sites (see attachment) where the ABC and commercial broadcasters will be available as a digital terrestrial service but SBS will not be. Approximately 44 of these sites currently have self-help facilities which provide an analogue retransmission of SBS but for which there is no plan for a digital upgrade. Areas affected include Balranald and Brewarrina (NSW), Coober Pedy (SA), St Helens (Tas), Lorne (Vic), Cloncurry, Weipa and Thursday Island (Qld), and

Our story: When we began in 1975, there were only a handful of languages broadcast on Australian media. Now there are more than 68 languages broadcast by SBS, which makes us the world's most multicultural broadcaster.

Six Billion Stories and counting...

Kambalda and Merredin (WA). The other 44 carry the ABC and at least two commercial broadcasting services, but have no SBS service at all. Areas affected include Kyogle (NSW), Murgon (Qld), Bordertown (SA), King Island (Tas), Orbost (Vic), and Kalbarri (WA).

In many of these locations SBS may therefore be the only service that viewers will need to access by satellite. This will have cost and logistical (e.g. two remote controls) implications for households in those locations and will be a disincentive for viewers to access SBS's services. As a national broadcasting service that operates to fulfil the important functions set out in its Charter, SBS considers that this would be inequitable and will disenfranchise many citizens. SBS estimates that around 100,000 people may be disadvantaged as a result of these circumstances.

Whatever solution is preferred for those sites it should be on the basis that all services are available to all households from the same platform, either terrestrial or satellite. The conditional access scheme set out in the Bill depends on adequate access to a digital terrestrial signal for the *commercial* broadcasting television services. Therefore SBS considers that additional transmitters, funded by the Government, will need to be rolled out to support the provision of SBS services in those areas where SBS is the only service that cannot be accessed terrestrially.

SBS also welcomes the initiative of the regional commercial television broadcasters to fund the conversion of analogue terrestrial self-help retransmission facilities to digital for some communities. However, it may be the case that other communities may wish to implement digital self-help retransmission rather than satellite services. Where this is feasible the Government should at least explore the option.

In conclusion, SBS considers that all services should be available to all households in each relevant area from the same platform, either terrestrial or satellite.

SBS would be pleased to brief the Committee should the opportunity arise.

If you require any further information please contact me (Tel: 02 9430 3812; bruce.meagher@sbs.com.au).

Yours sincerely

Bruce Meagher
Director, Strategy and Communications



Attachment

Sites* with self-help facilities providing an analogue retransmission of SBS for which there is no plan for a digital upgrade

NSW

Balranald
Bourke Town
Brewarrina
Kandos
Khancoban

Northern Territory

Jabiru

Queensland

Blackall
Cloncurry
Cooktown
Cunnamulla
Glenden
Hughenden
Springsure
Thursday Island
Weipa
Winton

South Australia

Burra
Coober Pedy
Leigh Creek South
Quorn

Tasmania

Derby
Maydena
St Helens

Victoria

Lorne
Tawonga South

Western Australia

Bridgetown
Dampier
Fitzroy Crossing
Halls Creek
Kambalda
Kojonup
Kununurra East
Meekatharra
Merredin
Moora
Mount Magnet
Mullewa
Norseman
Pannawonica
Paraburdoo
Pemberton
Roebourne
Southern Cross
Wyndham

* The ABC and at least two commercial television broadcasting services are available at these locations as terrestrial services.

Digital terrestrial transmission sites with ABC and at least two commercial broadcasting services, but no SBS service

NSW

Bombala
Bonalbo
Cooma/Monaro
Jingellic/Walwa (NSW/Vic)
Kyogle
Lightning Ridge
Merriwa
Murrurundi
Quirindi
Walcha
Walgett
Wilcannia

Queensland

Miles
Mitchell
Murgon
Tara

South Australia

Bordertown
Coffin Bay
Keith
Lameroo
Pinnaroo

Tasmania

Bicheno
Binalong Bay
King Island
Rosebery
Savage River
St Marys
Strahan
Strathgordon
Swansea
Waratah

Victoria

Cann River
Casterton
Corryong
Genoa
Halls Gap
Hopetoun
Kiewa Valley
Mallacoota
Orbost
Walwa/Jingellic (Vic/NSW)

Western Australia

Kalbarri
Koolyanobbing
Morawa
Nannup