

SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE ABC'S COMMITMENT TO REFLECTING AND REPRESENTING REGIONAL DIVERSITY

Supplementary submission from Bobbie Mackley, President, FABC-WA
10/03/2013

I'd like to add a few comments relating to the ABC's submission to this Inquiry, #34. I have copied extracts from the submission, highlighted the relevant parts, and made comment (in blue) as follows:

Page 2, Para 3

"The ABC's response to these pressures has been to transform itself into an innovative, audience-focussed media organisation, expanding its services and delivering them across multiple platforms, including analog and digital television and radio, online, on mobile phones and via social media."

In relation to the new ABC Radio mobile App, Western Australian listeners using the App actually get a feed of whatever programming is going to air in Sydney 2 or 3 hours (depending on time of year) ahead of WA. It is therefore not possible, for example, to begin listening to a program at home on the radio and then continue to listen on your smart phone when you go out. This would be the same for any place around the country that is in a different time zone to NSW. I wonder if national time differences were considered by ABC developers when setting up this App, or whether there's a technical or some other reason why it is not possible to make the App reflect real time throughout the country.

Page 5, Para 6

"Local Radio is the primary analog outlet for radio sports coverage through *ABC Grandstand* which has increased its coverage of regional sport in Australia significantly, on radio and online, through dedicated cross media sports reporters in Townsville, Wagga Wagga and Ballarat. The coverage is also available on ABC Grandstand digital radio, which is also streamed online."

Any "dedicated cross media sports reporters" anywhere else in Australia, or just in these 3 towns in Qld, NSW & Victoria respectively?

Page 7, middle of page

"The ABC also produces key national programming and content outside of Sydney to ensure a broad balance around the country. Examples of key programming and output produced outside Sydney and Melbourne are:

- News Online, which is based in Brisbane
- *Landline*, the Corporation's national rural and regional program, which is produced out of Brisbane
- *Australian Story*, which is based in Brisbane
- *Behind the News* and *News on 3*, from the children's news unit, which is based in Adelaide.

The ABC's ongoing commitment to providing regional audiences with high-quality, highly local news and information is unique in the Australian media environment."

The ABC cites these as "examples", but outside Sydney & Melbourne that is pretty much it. There is no "key national programming & content" allocated to Perth, or Hobart, or Darwin.

Cont.

Bottom of page 9 & top of page 10

"Whilst there has been some decline in the number of hours of production in Tasmania and Queensland, this is primarily due to the cessation of local football coverage, resulting from the decisions by Queensland Rugby League and AFL Tasmania to pursue coverage agreements with commercial broadcasters.

I'd like to refer the committee back to the Senate *Inquiry into recent programming decisions* at the end of 2011. In their submission to that Inquiry, #130 dated 9 Sept 2011, AFL Tasmania said that it:

"... believes the [ABC] broadcasts are essential to the future success and growth of the TSL as well as for the growth of the game below the State level."

and:

"AFL Tasmania remains committed to its on-going investment in the ABC into the future".

Likewise, the Queensland Rugby League submission to the Senate *Inquiry into recent ABC programming decisions* (sub#195, dated 7 Sept 2011) states:

"... future growth would be jeopardized without the support of the ABC as a valued partner"

and:

"... would like the partnership to continue well into the future".

These submissions to the earlier Inquiry appear to indicate that at the time it was not the preference of these codes to end their agreements with the ABC. I can only suppose that their subsequent decisions to do so would have been taken after a failure to come to an agreement with the ABC. The ABC is only telling half the story here, in my opinion.

Page 13, Para 3

"A mixed model of production allows the ABC to leverage more funding for its productions and to be more flexible in the allocation of its resources. It also allows the ABC to develop and commission stories or programs about specific geographical regions and locale-based issues in partnership with local film makers.

This in turn encourages those businesses to grow."

It should *not* be one of the ABC's objectives to encourage the growth of private businesses.

Page 17, Para 5

"The ABC is committed to maintaining a significant capacity to internally produce quality programming across the regions in addition to news, sport and current affairs.

It's hard to see how the ABC will be able to produce this quality internally-produced programming in, for example, Perth & Hobart, where internal production units have been virtually disbanded?

Appendix 1 - Pages 24 – 28 (incl.)

The ABC includes a 5-page list of ‘ABC Regional Community Events 2011-2012’. This list of events breaks down, state by state, as follows (4 trans-state events are not included):-

Tasmania	39 events
New South Wales	32 “
Victoria	23 “
Queensland	9 “
Northern Territory	9 “
South Australia	5 “
Western Australia	5 “

These are not credible statistics in my opinion. Why would Tasmania have so many, and the NT, SA & WA so few, events? Why do the more densely populated states have relatively few? Any regular listener to 720 ABC Perth will tell you that Local Radio has outside broadcasts and a presence at community events probably at least once a week. Listing only 5 events for WA over two years is frankly laughable. One can only wonder whether the statistics were gathered more assiduously in some places than in others.

Appendix 2 - Pages 21-23 (incl.)

“Examples of programs produced outside of NSW and Victoria”

Some, I’d suggest many, of the programs on this list were made prior to the decisions to close down production in the smaller state capitals, and some are quite old. I think there are quite a few co-productions. So they are mostly examples of what was *once* produced and does not reflect current reality, though the ABC does not actually state this.

The big question in 2013 is whether the ABC still has the in-house capacity to be able to produce programs, bearing in mind the decreased numbers of TV production staff nationally over the last two years. Certainly in the smaller capital city centres this capacity is gone, and is less than it used to be even in Sydney & Melbourne. That’s not say it couldn’t be resurrected (being an optimist).

Appendix 4 - Bottom of Page 29

“A mixed production model:

- Provides the ABC with the flexibility to better manage the allocation of its limited resources. This includes allowing the ABC to leverage funding from additional sources
- Allows the ABC to access the best ideas and talent from within the ABC and from the independent production sector
- Ensures the ABC is able to contribute more broadly to the development of a sustainable local content creation industry”

During my evidence I spoke about the program *Who’s Been Sleeping In My House*, how the Perth TV EP listened to the advice of Kim Dalton, then ABC D.Tel., left the ABC and set up a production house to make a program series which he couldn’t ‘get up’ while at the ABC. This is hardly an example of “.. access[ing] the best ideas and talent from within the ABC”, in my opinion.