

Submission to Parliament of Australian Senate Review

Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to make a submission. I have employment experience in public broadcasting. My submission is made by me as an individual and does not in any way and is not intended to suggest the views or opinions of my employer, any past employer, or any individual or group with whom I am associated or have had association with in the past.

Australia is a large continent and includes a vast array of different communities, the members of whom all deserve to see themselves reflected positively in their broader culture: that of the Australian community. Each person in Australia deserves to be able to connect to and be exposed to and share the best ideas between and from others in Australia, and our global neighbours.

The *Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Charter* states that the functions of the Corporation include to “provide within Australia innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard...to reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community”.

As an individual who has lived in Western Australia, Queensland, and New South Wales, I do not consider that it is necessary to live in more than one state to recognise the difficulty in reflecting the cultural diversity of the Australian community comprehensively from Sydney and Melbourne. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) as the public broadcaster in Australia with the largest audience has the opportunity and has made historic use of the opportunity to produce content from all over Australia to share with the rest of the

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country. From the Tiwi Islands' Grand Final match to a tribute to the contribution made by Bill Hunter to Australian cinema.

I appreciate that with the rapid technological changes experienced over the last decades that now all audience members, potentially, can produce their own content and publish the same globally. It is exciting and appropriate that the ABC is part of this and other developments, and offers audience members amazing tools and sites to showcase such content, often alongside content produced for television, via areas on the ABC website such as *ABC's Gateway to the Arts* and *ABC Local*.

However, the Screen Australia research *Beyond the Box Office: Understanding Audiences in a Multi-Screen World* states that, "The proportion of people watching free-to-air and subscription television has remained steady over the last five years". Although the technological changes of the last decade have been considerable, "Television remains the leading method of viewing screen content." As such, Australian audiences deserve continued commitment from the ABC to create arts' and entertainment content of a high standard for television that reflects the cultural diversity of the Australian community and that meets the Charter obligation of encouraging and promoting the musical, dramatic, and other performing arts in Australia.

I am concerned that making such content internally is less expensive than making such content in co-productions. There are funding opportunities in Australia for production companies outside of the ABC to make television documentaries in co-production with the ABC, but I am unaware of external funding opportunities to produce long-running arts' and entertainment television series, such as 'Art Nation'. This would mean that the funding source for such content would be the ABC. If such content is produced internally less expensively then there are more resources available to the ABC to produce other content if

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the ABC produces such content internally. I am concerned that the additional expense of producing such content externally will dissuade the ABC from commissioning the production of such series.

The production of such content over many years by the ABC internally has accumulated a rich archive for present and future generations who own the copyright to this material. If internal production of such content ceases, then this archive ends with our generation.

This is a tremendous loss.

The high quality television series *The New Inventors* draws together Australians from every walk of life, and every State and Territory, to tell a tale each week of determination, ingenuity, and creativity. I don't know if the series creates much revenue for the ABC: this doesn't seem likely. The worth of the program though when considering the effect on audience members and inventors is unimaginable. I don't understand how such a long-running and corker of a series can be made less expensively outside of the ABC, or the appeal to co-producers in making a series with so little ancillary revenue potential, and am concerned that such content in the future will not be made. The lack of similar content on commercial broadcasters indicates that such programming is not perceived as serving commercial interests. Such content serves the ABC's Charter well.

I am concerned also at the tension between commercial interests and the editorial obligations of the ABC.

It is clear that those who work at the ABC including those who are making these decisions are committed to excellence in public broadcasting, and the ABC is broadcasting and will continue to broadcast brilliant and challenging content. Once internal production

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ceases at the ABC however it will be difficult to develop again such a valuable national resource, and it is appropriate and timely to review this decision.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Rachel Williams

31 August 2011

Works Cited

The ABC Charter. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2011.

<http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/ABCcharter.htm>. 31 August 2011.

Beyond the Box Office: Understanding Audiences in a Multi-Screen World. Screen Australia, 2011.

http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/documents/SA_publications/Rpt_BeyondBoxOffice.pdf.

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