

Hobart, 16.1.2013

I joined the ABC Hobart in 2005 as a casual employee. I had just arrived in Australia from overseas and was thrilled to get a job that was close to the work I had done back in Switzerland and Germany.

During the initial months and early years I was told by many employees how proud they are to work for the ABC, the national broadcaster that is so highly regarded nationally, in the community and business sector.

Soon after, around 2006 / 2007 changes came through the ABC's regional branch in Tasmania and the positive tunes got quieter. Redundancy waves rolled through the branch and the ghostly halls of a previously active and vibrant branch are now quite dreary. "Hanging in" has taken the place of pride.

Needless to say that almost all of the colleagues that told me of their pride to work for the ABC are no longer working in this regional branch. They are made redundant or left in disappointment.

I understand that changes are a part of life and necessary. But what I wonder is why all changes that came through this regional branch in those last 6 - 7 prosperous years (for all of Australia) had to be savings and redundancies?

I understand that the ABC has to work to tight funding. But isn't the ABC funded by the government and ultimately the taxpayers and people of all of Australia? Not just Sydney and Melbourne?

If so - than so called "business decisions" are an excuse to drive an agenda through the ABC's rural and regional branches that is probably business driven but not necessarily in the best interest of the government or taxpayer.

If the government and taxpayer had the choice they would probably abandon e.g. a new channel or another online platform that are all very Sydney centric and put more effort into keeping rural and regional jobs, rural institutions and perspective for future generations outside the two main metropolitan areas.

The ABC might save \$1.5 million dollars nationally over 3 years with the current TV cuts in Tasmania. But losing 16 jobs from a small community like Tasmania – or any other regional branch - is a lot worse and costs the taxpayer the same or more in pension, dole, healthcare, counselling etc

If studios and creative jobs are driven out of the rural communities' potential creative young people in regional areas will have no chance but leave their home and home state to go to Sydney or Melbourne to be able to make a living. It is not only jobs that are lost. It is knowledge and future too. An institution like the ABC with technical knowledge and equipment of that standard will not be replaced by any regional co-production that the ABC management seems to think is a better solution.

All the numbers and business cases the ABC puts forward are believable. But the ABC is not a commercial enterprise. It has to work within its budget but decisions need more consideration than just immediate numbers. If an institution is funded by the government than that institution has to make decisions in the government's and taxpayer's best interest. Working together for a prosperous metropolitan and regional Australia rather than short sighted short term money saving.

There is a mentality within the ABC that saving money in a department is worth doing ... even if another department and the ABC as a whole is left worse off. I hope very much that this mentality does not exist in the government and if money needs to be saved within the ABC than the ABC as a

whole must be looked at. Singling out some states or departments especially regional ones makes no sense for overall achievements.

If this government believes in creating a future for its people while not forgetting rural communities than no government funded institution must ever make such a decisions that potentially harms a whole industry in an entire state with generations of young people left without a future in a creative and dynamic industry – and many jobs lost. All this comes at a high cost to the government and ultimately taxpayers and regional communities.

Jens Volkmann