

Premier

Level 11, Executive Building, 15 Murray Street, Hobart Tas
GPO Box 123, Hobart, Tas 7001 Australia
Ph +61 3 6233 3464 Fax +61 3 6234 1572
Email Premier@dpac.tas.gov.au
Web www.premiertas.gov.au



- 9 SEP 2011

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 1600
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Tasmanian Government Submission – Inquiry into recent ABC Programming Decisions

The Tasmanian ABC has had a long and rich history of production activity in Tasmania. The ABC produced many local television shows out of Tasmania in the 1960s, '70s and '80s including *VisyTas*, *For the Juniors*, *Hunter*, *Landscape*, *The Makers*, *Seasons of Splendour*, *The Colonials* and the first Australian current affairs program, *This Day Tonight*. ABC Tasmania kick-started the careers of some of Australia's most successful talent such as McLeod's Daughters Producer Posie Graeme-Evans, Current Affairs journalists Charles Woolley and Peter Thompson, writer John Honey and a field of highly skilled technicians who were sought after nationwide.

Locally based ABC production has diminished in Tasmania over the past few years with the relocation of *Gardening Australia* to the mainland, and the recent announcement that the series *The Collectors* was 'to be shelved' indefinitely.

We recognise that the industry has changed and that the ABC has to tailor its activity and seek cost effective ways to achieve high volumes of content with the three main channels ABC1, 2 and 3 as well as a 24-hour news channel to service.

We also note that the recent announcement to reduce ABC's in-house programming reflects its commitment to working more closely with the independent sector to supply program content for the national broadcaster and we welcome this move.

Tasmania highly values its relationship with the ABC and wishes to continue to work collaboratively with the ABC to ensure local production activity is maintained in order to underpin local business and support locally based employment opportunities.

It is our view that what is more relevant than whether production is produced in-house or not is whether the voices of regional Australia are adequately represented on the nation's public broadcaster in the resulting re-distribution of programming funds.

We believe that diversity of programming is vital to Australia's cultural life and that the ABC does have a remit to show arts programs, for example, that represent perhaps less



mainstream and more 'high-brow' art forms. These programs are unlikely to be found on the commercial networks but are nevertheless of cultural significance and value, and cater for the interests of part of the community who would otherwise be ignored.

While in principle Tasmania supports the continuation of such programming to be undertaken in-house by the ABC, we also acknowledge the importance of a balance between in-house programming and the continued involvement and development of the independent sector.

Of issue for Tasmania is the small levels of production that occur in the state and the traditional role the ABC has played as an employer and trainer of local practitioners in an environment where there are limited training and employment alternatives.

Potential curtailing of ABC production in Tasmania reduces an already minimal industry base. The concern is that when reducing in-house production, there will be no commensurate increase in support in the form of co-productions with the Tasmanian independent sector. Production activity will be even further reduced and a powerful cultural and geographical voice will be lost to ABC audiences.

What Tasmania wishes to see from the national public broadcaster is a commitment to the voices of regional Australia across all its channels and across all genres including drama, documentary, comedy, factual entertainment and arts programming.

We support the ABC's commitment to the independent sector and respect that it is the ABC management's role to decide how content is generated – whether internally or externally.

Our interest is in ensuring that the ABC retains an absolute commitment to regional content, some in-house production and support for independent producers from the regions. Currently the majority of Australian content that is made for the ABC by the independent sector comes from Sydney and Melbourne.

Our concern is that reducing in-house production may have a potential flow-on effect of reducing regionally generated content and make the smaller regions more vulnerable. For decades the ABC has been woven into the fabric of regional screen industries across the country and we would actively seek to ensure that potential damage from management's decisions is not only minimised but that there is also a commitment to generating benefit for the regions.

We would welcome consideration and discussion regarding the formation of a regional content quota thus ensuring that the ABC truly remains our 'national broadcaster'.

Yours sincerely

Lara Giddings MP
Premier
Minister for the Arts)