



Community & Public Sector Union
Michael Tull • National President

18 March 2013

Ms Julia Morris
Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Broadcasting Legislation
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Morris

The CPSU welcomes the establishment of the Joint Select Committee on Broadcasting Legislation, however we are disappointed in the short time frame given to make this submission to address the first term of reference: *the abolition of the 75 per cent rule, particularly in relation to regional and local news.*

The PSU Group of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is an active and progressive union with approximately 60,000 members. The CPSU represents employees in Commonwealth government employment including the Australian Public Service (APS), the ACT Public Service, the Northern Territory Public Service, CSIRO, the telecommunications sector, call centres, employment services and broadcasting.

The CPSU represents staff in both the public and commercial broadcasting. The 75 per cent rule will have no direct role on the Public Broadcasters as the requirements for ABC and SBS are covered by their Acts and Charters.

The Commercial Broadcasters are already facing a harsh environment, due to convergence and a reduction in ad revenue. We have already seen a reduction in some regional services by broadcasters centralising and cutting costs. Examples include:

- Network Ten reduced staff by more than 100 staff late last year.
- Channel 9 are in the process (or just completed) of reducing staff.
- Seven Network are cutting costs, but are currently not making staff redundant. There is concern that this may change.
- WIN have reduced staff numbers in regional centres such as Perth, Tasmania, Townsville, Cairns, and Mt Gambier. They have recently closed down regional news gathering in SA, where there is no local content requirement. This shows that where there is a lack of regulation, the Broadcasters can not be relied on to maintain their presence.

Removing the reach rule, without proper safeguards, could lead to even further concentration of the media in Australia. This will mean less diversification, and less regional presence.

Possible mergers as a result of the abolishment of the reach rule, like the one rumoured between 9 and Southern Cross Austereo, is likely to lead to job losses as the companies will seek to cut costs as part of those mergers. It could also potentially lead to less presence in the regions.

The CPSU understands that in a changing media environment Free to Air networks need to be able to remain competitive, changing the legislative requirements is not something that can be rushed through, as the potential risks are too great. As the Free to Air Networks receive a 50% reduction in their licensing fees, it would still be reasonable to expect them to provide a service across the country.

It has been argued that because of news and content is so readily available online and internationally, it makes little sense for the Free to Air Networks to be restricted by the 75% reach rule. The CPSU does not support this view.

If a change to the 75 per cent rule occurs, and as a result the commercial broadcasters move away from regional news production, regional Australia will be more reliant on the ABC news services than ever before. However, as demonstrated by the recent CPSU submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications Inquiry into the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's commitment to reflecting and representing regional diversity, the ABC is also moving away from local content in radio and television.

Yours sincerely

Michael Tull
CPSU National President