

Australian Greens' dissenting report

1.1 This bill seeks to amend the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983* to increase the extent to which the ABC services the needs of rural and regional Australia.

1.2 It is a solution in search of a problem.

1.3 There appears to be taken as read that the ABC is failing to service the needs of rural and regional Australians, as no reasonable or persuasive evidence is provided to substantiate that such a failure exists or has existed.

1.4 Instead it is simply assumed that the ABC is deficient in its service and that the solution to this deficiency is more red tape and bureaucracy for an organisation that is frequently criticized for its current levels of red tape and bureaucracy.

1.5 Many of the submissions to this inquiry were made by those seeking less to strengthen the provision of services by the ABC and more to isolate them into rural and regional silos, leaving commercial competitors greater capacity to service more profitable markets.

1.6 The Australian Greens take seriously the need for the ABC to be representative of its audience, both at an executive and managerial level as well as with its on-air talent. It is in the service of the public interest for the national broadcaster to display a commitment to diversity in line with its charter obligations.

1.7 If there is a need for the ABC to do more to meet the particular needs of rural and regional audiences, then perhaps there is a need for the ABC to be funded to provide more.

1.8 Arguments that the content service of the ABC should be zero-sum, where more content is provided to rural and regional audiences at the cost of content to inner-city and urban audiences, represent a false dichotomy of choices. If we need the ABC to do more we should be willing to fund it adequately, so that it can do more.

1.9 It is a political decision to allocate resources to the ABC and if we are to make the political decision that we the public require more from the ABC it is entirely appropriate that the ABC respond by saying, to honour that requirement, it also requires more from the public.

1.10 The ABC is unique in the Australian media landscape and its role is of utmost importance. It remains a highly-trusted source of news and current affairs and it has maintained a commitment to journalism beyond the confines of city centres.

1.11 Rural and regional audiences deserve a high-quality product from their national broadcaster as much as any other audience does. The ABC should be supported in providing it to all, regardless of their location. Depriving it of the

resources to do so, including by requiring it to commit additional resources to overcoming bureaucratic red tape and administrative procedures that are of questionable value, bears an opportunity cost that weakens the effectiveness of the ABC to do the job we need it to do.

1.12 It is because of our support for the ABC, its audience and its function in the Australian media landscape that the Australian Greens recommend the Bill not proceed.

Senator Janet Rice
Senator for Victoria

Senator Sarah Hanson-Young
Senator for South Australia