

Australian Greens' Dissenting Report

1.1 The Australian Greens believe the Government has missed an important opportunity to progress meaningful reform of the Australian media landscape, and has instead settled on a simplistic deregulatory approach that will do nothing to improve media diversity.

1.2 All witnesses to both iterations of this inquiry, in May and October 2016, agreed that the media landscape is changing rapidly, and that online delivery of content is one of the key drivers of change. Media regulations drafted in the pre-internet age have not kept up with the pace of technological innovation or changing habits of content consumption and creation by the public. Australia also has one of the most highly concentrated media ownership structures in the world, which makes support for public, community and independent broadcasters and publishers all the more important.

1.3 Instead of grappling with these complex issues in a meaningful way, after nearly three years of consideration the Government has done nothing more than taken the path of least political resistance, the bare minimum that the handful of commercial broadcasters and publishers could agree on, to propose the abolition of two regulations originally intended to protect media diversity.

1.4 Despite the emergence of online content and news delivery forming the basis of the Government's rationale for this bill, nowhere does the bill provide any form of support for these emerging sources of diversity. The Government's attacks on the funding and independence of respected public broadcasters ABC and SBS have been subjected to sustained criticism. Ongoing neglect and crippling funding shortfalls for community radio and television broadcasters have severely limited the potential of these important sources of media diversity. In addition, responses to the large-scale structural changes to the global media environment canvassed in the 2011 Convergence Review remain entirely unaddressed in this legislation.

1.5 Lastly, a number of submitters made the self-evident assertion that access to fast broadband services to deliver new sources of on-demand content remains dramatically uneven across the country. If anything, the 'digital divide' between those with access to rapid telecommunications services has worsened under the Abbott-Turnbull Government's hopelessly incompetent handling of the National Broadband Network. This has put fast broadband out of reach for millions of Australian households; even if a flourishing mix of local and international content were being produced for consumption, access for millions of Australian households will be out of the question for the foreseeable future.

1.6 It is therefore the view of the Australian Greens that the bill should not pass in its current form, and that the 2/3 rule should remain at the bare minimum. Until such time as the above preconditions for healthy media diversity have been met, the

2/3 rule provides a flawed but necessary bulwark against further consolidation of media ownership in Australia.

1.7 The Greens do agree that the abolition of the reach rule and marginal improvements to local content rules could be supported under the condition that the 2/3 rule remains in place, but contend that until such time as the Government is prepared to directly engage with the larger issues at play, the bill as a whole represents a step backwards. It exemplifies the approach of this Government more broadly: upholding the interests of commercial actors at the expense of the broader public interest, dressing up a counterproductive deregulatory agenda as though it represents genuine reform. It is our view that the bill should not pass the Parliament unless the schedule abolishing the 2/3 rule is removed from the legislation.

Senator Larissa Waters
Deputy Leader of the Australian Greens
Senator for Queensland