

SBS Senate Estimates – October 2015

- Once again, it's been a busy period for SBS since I last presented to the Committee and if you will allow me, I'd like to draw the Committee's attention to a few highlights.
- I'm pleased to report that SBS ended the financial year in good shape, notwithstanding ongoing budgetary pressures since the Budget cuts and the Senate voted down our ad legislation in June.
- We continue to review our budgetary circumstances and consider next steps, whilst at the same time looking for new strategic opportunities to be even more relevant to our audiences.
- In 2014-15, over 12.7 million Australians watched and engaged with SBS each month, roughly a 2% increase in our year on year reach. This calendar 'year to date' has been particularly pleasing, with audiences up across our TV channels by 10% per cent year-on-year, in what has been a tough market with audiences fragmenting. We have also seen a 50% increase year on year for our SBS On Demand growth, a 36% increase in SBS News Online, and a 50% increase in Radio Podcasts of our 74 Language programs.
- I hope some Committee members had a chance to watch our first drama series in two years - The Principal, a 4 part series which aired this month.
- I believe it makes a real and meaningful contribution to the national discussion about what it means to be Australian - in contemporary multicultural Australia today, as we navigate the complexities of multiculturalism and the serious issues and challenges of cohesion.
- This unique multicultural Drama reached 1.8 million TV viewers, which is fantastic, and did well On Demand as well – with about 400,000 video views. It is where Senators can of course watch it if you missed it on TV.
- Many of the top TV critics highly praised the series, with many calling it the top drama of the year - an edgy, provocative portrayal of contemporary Australia. So naturally we are incredibly proud of The Principal.
- We wished we could tell more multicultural stories like this, but the reality is we can only afford to make one Drama every few years.

- In September, I announced our plans to launch a new FTA channel dedicated to exploring Food & Culture from across the world, which resulted from extensive research.
- Australian audiences have been coming to SBS for years to discover and explore the world and its cultures through our distinctive food programming. We've established a real point of difference in our food programming from the commercial networks, and there is an opportunity to build on that strong foundation, with a dedicated channel.
- We've entered into a special output & licensing agreement with Scripps Networks International (SNI) for the majority of the content.

- Scripps is the world's leading producer of quality lifestyle content. This will give Australian audiences a chance to engage with some of the highest performing shows from Scripps globally as well as some locally made SBS favourites and of course some content will be in language too.
 - Importantly, the Commercial returns from the new channel will - in time - be able to help us offset the expected revenue declines in advertising across our sector, as audiences fragment. As we know, the market is expecting slow decline in coming years, and this will hopefully allow SBS to maintain modest investment in Australian commissioned content.
-

- Finally, can I thank Screen Australia and our Minister for hosting a special preview screening at Parliament House last week, of our upcoming series - The Family Law.

- The Family Law is great new comedy series, with an ALL Australian-Asian cast, a first for SBS, which tells a story of millions of Australian families who have had to navigate multiple cultures and growing up in our country.

- It touches on important issues of racism, acceptance and exclusion, cross-cultural communication and identity. At its heart, it is a story of family and love – which we can all relate to.

- As I'm sure you are aware, SBS is marking 40 years this year. The organisation has evolved enormously over that time and we are working hard to consider how we make an even more meaningful contribution to Australian society in the digital age - as we develop our Triennial Funding submission due later this year.

- I hope that gives you a sense of the breadth and diversity of the activities and achievements SBS has accomplished over the last few months. I look forward to your questions.