

Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice
Budget Estimates Hearings May 2010
Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy Portfolio
Special Broadcasting Service Corporation

Question No: 1

Hansard Ref: ECA 8

Topic: Analog Switch-off

Senator Cormann asked:

Can you provide a list of the seven sites the Government has agreed to upgrade facilities to digital?

Answer:

New South Wales:	Balranald; Kandos; Khancoban
Queensland:	Springsure
South Australia:	Burra; Quorn
Victoria:	Tawonga South

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Question No: 2

Hansard Ref: ECA 9

Topic: Digital Television Switchover Regional Blackspot Solution

Senator Minchin asked:

The budget measures under Digital Television Switchover Regional Blackspot Solution refer to a provision for SBS for the switch-over but it says that it is not for publication as contracts with satellite service providers are commercial-in-confidence, which is understandable. But, in the PBS, you referred to your revenues for 2010-11 as including \$5.003 million funding for Digital Television Switchover Regional Blackspot Solution. Is that an inadvertent revelation of the not-for-publication figure or is that something entirely different?

Answer:

The SBS budget statements include reference to a figure of \$5.003m for Digital Television Switchover – Regional Blackspot solution.

This figure is comprised of several elements, including:

- a transfer of monies related to Mildura/Sunraysia switchover pilot;
- funding related to Digital Television Switchover - Regional Blackspots Solution measure; and
- funding to upgrade a number of existing regional SBS analog 'self-help' transmission facilities to transmit in digital.

All of these elements contribute to regional blackspot solutions.

The individual cost of each of these elements is not provided in the SBS budget papers. Therefore, no 'commercial in confidence' information relating to the SBS satellite contracts has been released.

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Question No: 3

Hansard Ref: ECA 12

Topic: SBS Equivalent of iView

Senator Ludlam asked:

Can you provide us with an update of your online streaming service, particularly now ABC has begun captioning its iView service? Does SBS have similar intentions and how broad they are?

Answer:

SBS is currently providing about 80 per cent of its prime-time television programming (full program versions) online each week, subject to rights clearance. The SBS website also carries short form video content produced by SBS's news and current affairs and sport staff.

SBS's online video operation consists of a small video team preparing the content each day. SBS's video systems are not currently integrated with SBS's TV broadcast systems (including rights management and captioning), resulting in a heavily manual operation in getting material online.

During 2010/2011 SBS will make small upgrades to its video system to improve the user experience, as well as scoping how to improve and integrate the workflow. This will include investigating an upgrade to SBS's online video systems to enable SBS to convert the closed captions files created for SBS's English language television programs for use online. Non-English language programs made available on the SBS website as part of SBS's catch-up service are transmitted with subtitles (open captions). Transcripts of all SBS-produced news and current affairs programs are also available on the SBS website.

SBS is committed to making its services accessible to all Australians, including making more of its programming available online with closed captions.

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Question No: 4

Hansard Ref: ECA 12

Topic: Online streaming service

Senator Ludlam asked:

Can you provide some sense of audience share, the break-up between your online audience of people who are not browsing but actually watching one of your titles as opposed to those watching on TV?

Answer:

SBS's online video viewers (unique browsers who watch a video) currently number around 342,000 browsers, approximately a third of SBS's overall online audience of 1,086,000 unique browsers (April 2010). Total number of online video views for April 2010 was 2,503,000. (Nielsen NetRatings SiteCensus.)

SBS's total television audience reach (SBS ONE/SBS TWO) in April 2010 was 8.7 million viewers in the metropolitan markets and 976,000 in regional areas. (OzTAM/RegTAM – 24 hour, 5 minute consecutive reach.)

The current online reporting system does not enable SBS to determine the number of video viewers by program, only video views. Recent figures for program-specific catch-up online viewing are:

Program	Video Views ¹	TV Audience ²
East West 101 (Series 2)	27,000	153,000
The Circuit (Series 2)	28,000	222,000
Italian Food Safari	87,000	319,000
Wilfred	73,000	156,000
Gourmet Farmer	78,000	321,000

1. Nielsen NetRatings SiteCensus.

2 OzTAM 5 City Metro, Avg. Audience, Total People Incl. Guests, Consolidated Viewing.

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Question No: 5

Hansard Ref: ECA 13

Topic: SBS Subtitling

Senator Cormann asked:

How many of your staff are only proficient in one language in terms of subtitling?

Answer:

Four

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Question No: 6

Hansard Ref: ECA 13

Topic: Research on certain ethnic communities

Senator Minchin asked:

Mr Brown cited the Hindi community finding itself relying more on essentially external media rather than the Australian media for its information. Do you have that research in a form that is available either for publication or to this committee?

Answer:

In early 2010 SBS conducted qualitative research with three large language communities: Hindi, Chinese languages and Arabic speakers. The research examined media usage, attitudes to media and engagement with Australian society.

The following findings were common to all groups:

- they do not believe that they are properly represented in Australian media – they do not have a voice;
- where they are portrayed it is in the form of stereotypes;
- the Australian media does not deal with controversial matters affecting their communities in a balanced manner;
- SBS is seen as an exception and is more trusted than other media sources;
- community members receive much of their information and entertainment from foreign media sources via satellite or online; and
- communities are very concerned about this situation as they have a strong desire to participate fully in Australian society.

Particular concerns were raised in the Indian and Arabic groups. For different reasons these communities have come under stress in recent times. They reported that in response to this there was a tendency to look inward to family and community. Where it is also possible to turn to home countries for media this can result in isolation from Australian society and misunderstanding about responses to the issues they face.

The Indian community was facing the issue of attacks on Indian students. Respondents stated that most of the information they received about the issue came from Indian media sources.

Respondents acknowledged that Indian media was biased. However, they believed Australian media was equally biased in a different way i.e. not willing to acknowledge or frankly confront the problem. As a consequence many of the messages of reassurance or advice from police and government did not get through to their intended targets.

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Question No: 7

Hansard Ref: ECA 13

Topic: Self-help sites

Senator Fisher asked:

Could you provide the viewing audiences of essentially the 44 self-help sites that may or may not be on the first bit of the list? What is the SBS viewer audience in those areas?

Answer:

The number of SBS analogue self-help sites for which the Government is considering a digital upgrade is now 36. Of the original list of 44 sites, SBS received some funding in the Budget to convert seven to digital (Balranald, Kandos and Khancoban in NSW; Springsure in Queensland; Burra and Quorn in South Australia; and Tawonga South in Victoria) and another site (Lorne in Victoria) has been flagged for conversion by the commercial broadcasters.

Figures provided indicate the population covered by each transmitter as viewing audience figures for each of the 36 transmitters is not available.

Site	State	Population*
Bourke Town	NSW	2,145
Brewarrina	NSW	1,121
Jabiru	NT	1,135
Blackall	QLD	1,160
Cloncurry	QLD	2,384
Cooktown	QLD	1,336
Cunnamulla	QLD	1,217
Glenden	QLD	1,112
Hughenden	QLD	1,154
Thursday Island	QLD	2,546
Weipa	QLD	2,830
Winton	QLD	980
Cooper Pedy	SA	1,472
Leigh Creek South	SA	549
Derby	TAS	302
Maydena	TAS	245
St Helens	TAS	2,049
Bridgetown	WA	2,324
Dampier	WA	1,370
Fitzroy Crossing	WA	928
Halls Creek	WA	1,211
Kambalda	WA	2,706

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Kojonup	WA	1,122
Kununurra East	WA	500
Meekatharra	WA	798
Merredin	WA	2,550
Moora	WA	1,605
Mount Magnet	WA	424
Mullewa	WA	425
Norseman	WA	857
Pannawonica	WA	686
Paraburdoo	WA	1,607
Pemberton	WA	757
Roebourne	WA	857
Southern Cross	WA	710
Wyndham	WA	669

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census, Urban Centre/Locality (except Derby (State Suburb) and Kununurra – SBS estimate).

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Question No: 8

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: Staffing - SBS

Senator Barnett asked:

How many permanent staff recruited since additional estimates (Feb 2010)?

What level are these staff?

How many temporary positions exist or have been created since additional estimates?

Since additional estimates, how many employees have been employed on contract and what is the average length of their employment period?

Answer:

- (a) Seven
- (b) SBS Band 1 – 1; SBS Band 3 – 2; SBS Band 5 – 2; SBS Band 6 – 1; SBS Band 7 – 1.
- (c) 24
- (d) Five; two years.

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Question No: 9

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: Staffing – efficiency dividend/budget cuts - SBS

Senator Barnett asked:

Have staffing numbers been reduced as a result of the efficiency dividend and/or other budget cuts?

- Since the efficiency dividend was introduced?
- Since additional estimates?

If so, where and at what level?

Are there any plans for staff reduction? If so, please advise details ie. reduction target, how this will be achieved, services/programs to be cut etc.

If your Department/agency has been identified in the budget as delivering further efficiencies (savings), how will these be delivered? (for example, if the budget papers say ‘improvement to strategic work practices’ or similar, what are these and how will they be delivered?

What changes are underway or planned for graduate recruitment, cadetships or similar programs? If reductions or increases are envisaged please explain including reasons, target numbers etc.

Answer:

(a) SBS is not subject to the efficiency dividend and has not had its budget cut.

(b) N/A

(c) Under the SBS Corporate Plan, SBS aims to grow resources available for content and services by increasing efficiencies in all of SBS’s activities. Therefore, from time to time SBS will reduce employee numbers as a result of technological or work practice changes or to match resources with operational requirements.

In line with this objective, SBS recently conducted a review of the SBS Subtitling Unit using external auditors (Deloitte) in order ensure the Unit was operating as efficiently and effectively as possible. The Unit was found to have significant over-capacity, that is, it did not have the right mix of staff languages to meet the programming needs of SBS ONE and SBS TWO. Many highly skilled staff were undertaking duties other than subtitling for the majority of their time (eg closed captioning).

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The recommendation of Deloitte was to introduce efficiencies, some of which had been identified by staff, before progressing to a fully outsourced subtitling service. SBS Management did not adopt the recommendation to fully outsource subtitling but has advised staff of the following:

- SBS will retain a significant, albeit reduced, Subtitling Unit with a reduction of staff numbers of more than ten FTE across the entire Unit, not just those directly engaged in subtitling.
- The recommended efficiencies will be progressively adopted.
- Technology improvements, currently underway, will be completed.
- Excess capacity in the Unit will be reduced, potentially resulting in staff redundancies.
- Staff reductions will occur in all parts of the Unit and not just among subtitling staff. This will include management and video-captioning (a function which will become automated).
- SBS will continue to use a mixed-model to source its subtitles including, as now, from the in-house unit and from freelance staff, when this is necessary, using SBS facilities. It will explore commissioning some subtitles from well-credentialed international subtitling companies and will increase, subject to quality, the use of subtitles which are supplied with some of the programs SBS buys from overseas.

SBS's internal budget planning process for 2010/11 has identified the need to reduce staff numbers in SBS's News and Current Affairs Division. The number of staff affected is very small and has been managed in accordance with staff preferences.

(d) N/A

(e) SBS endeavours to offer a number of cadetship positions which are contingent on available resources and are reviewed annually. In January 2010 the SBS News and Current Affairs journalism cadetship program was reduced from four to two positions due to the effect of the global financial crisis on SBS resources. For several years, one cadetship has been offered to an Indigenous journalist. This position was retained as one of the two available for 2010. From January 2011 it is planned to offer three cadetships, inclusive of the Indigenous cadetship.

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Question No: 10

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: Government Advertising - SBS

Senator Barnett asked:

What communications programs has the Department/Agency undertaken since additional estimates and what communications programs are planned to be undertaken?

For each program, what is the total spend?

(By 'communications program' it is meant communication of a government message to the public – possibly by advertising (print, television etc), possibly through the erection of signs, plaques etc, or through other mediums. The recent (current) Government TV advertising campaign on health reform and specific health initiatives are examples, BER signage is an example, advertising on the Government's proposed new tax system would be another example.)

A breakdown of how much was spent/is planned to be spent on each program/initiative should be provided.

Answer:

- (a) Nil.
- (b) N/A.

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Question No: 11

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: Government Payment of Accounts - SBS

Senator Barnett asked:

Has the portfolio/agency paid its accounts to contractors/consultants etc in accordance with Government policy in terms of time for payment (ie. within 30 days)? If not, why not, and what has been the timeframe for payment of accounts? Please provide a breakdown, average statistics etc as appropriate to give insight into how this issue is being approached.

For accounts not paid within 30 days, is interest being paid on overdue amounts and if so how much has been paid by the portfolio/department agency for the current financial year and the previous financial year?

Where interest is being paid, what rate of interest is being paid and how is this rate determined?

Answer:

(a) SBS is not subject to Government policy in this respect. SBS's policy in respect of contractors/consultants is generally payment in 14 days. For other payments, SBS's normal payment terms are 30 days. Payments are made in accordance with agreed terms of trade (generally 30 days or less) and SBS policy.

(b) N/A

(c) Accounts are paid within the terms of trade. No interest is payable.

(d) N/A

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Question No: 12

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: Broadcasting and Television

Senator Boswell asked:

There are growing concerns that increasing demand for foreign media, especially among Arabic and Indian communities, is posing a significant risk to Australia's social cohesion. We heard in estimates on Monday 24 May 2010 from the managing director of SBS, Shaun Brown, who warned that some ethnic communities are no longer engaging with the Australian media. Coverage of attacks against Indian students in Australia had prompted the Hindi community to "retreat" to media sources coming out of India.

Shouldn't we be enhancing our multicultural media activity to increase social cohesion?

Answer:

SBS's endurance as a media organisation demonstrates the willingness of the Australian community to embrace diversity. This suggests a positive outlook for social cohesion. However, SBS research suggests there are some emerging issues that need to be addressed.

In early 2010, SBS conducted qualitative research with three large language communities: Hindi, Chinese languages and Arabic speakers. The research examined media usage, attitudes to media and engagement with Australian society.

The following findings were common to all groups:

- they do not believe that they are properly represented in Australian media – they do not have a voice;
- where they are portrayed it is in the form of stereotypes;
- the Australian media does not deal with controversial matters affecting their communities in a balanced manner;
- SBS is seen as an exception and is more trusted than other media sources;
- community members receive much of their information and entertainment from foreign media sources via satellite or online; and
- communities are very concerned about this situation as they have a strong desire to participate fully in Australian society.

Particular concerns were raised in the Indian and Arabic groups. For different reasons these communities have come under stress in recent times. They reported that in response to this, there was a tendency to look inward to family and community. Where it is also possible to turn to home countries for media this can result in isolation from Australian society and misunderstanding about responses to the issues they face.

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The Indian community was facing the issue of attacks on Indian students. Respondents stated that most of the information they received about the issue came from Indian media sources.

Respondents acknowledged that Indian media was biased. However, they believed Australian media was equally biased in a different way i.e. not willing to acknowledge or frankly confront the problem. As a consequence many of the messages of reassurance or advice from police and government did not get through to their intended targets.

In order to address these challenges, SBS will seek to increase the range of culturally and linguistically relevant services that speak directly to communities and help them participate effectively in Australian society. Technology is providing SBS with the capacity to reach out to even larger audiences, and SBS aims to harness that technology to increase its relevance to provide a multi-platform offering now and in the future.

SBS also wants to continue to deliver award-winning, locally produced content that reflects the true multicultural nature of the Australian community such as East West 101, The Circuit, Destination Australia, and My Family Feast.