



ABC Managing Director, David Anderson, opening statement to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee

15 February 2022

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide some opening remarks. The ABC entered 2022 with the value of its services widely recognised and appreciated across the Australian community. Against the backdrop of a challenging year, the ABC achieved its highest reach in a decade in 2021.

I am proud that the ABC was there when Australians needed it most to stay informed, connected and entertained.

ABC NEWS finished 2021 as the number one digital news brand in Australia with more than 63% of Australians connected with ABC NEWS platforms.

The ABC is the leading Australian radio network with the highest reach and share of listening.

ABC iview was the number one Broadcast Video on Demand Service.

Importantly, 78% of Australians trusted the information provided by the ABC, which is significantly higher than all other media institutions and information providers.

Throughout the difficulties and uncertainties of the pandemic the ABC has continued to deliver quality content and services for Australians. In its 90th year the ABC is more relevant to Australians than ever, which is a testament to the resilience, adaptability, and commitment of all ABC staff.

On top of these very strong audience results, the ABC's commitment to regional and rural Australia has never been stronger.

A range of industry measures and surveys show that the vast majority of people living in regional and rural Australia overwhelmingly support and trust the ABC, and we are delivering on those relationships.

This includes recent research commissioned by the Page Research Centre which found that 76% of people living in regional Australia trust the ABC to deliver balanced, accurate and reliable news. 73% of those surveyed believe the ABC had

a “good and realistic interest in and understanding of, all aspects of regional Australia.”

The completed agreements with Google and Facebook will enable us to take our commitment to regional and rural Australia further and employ even more journalists to add to the 550 content makers that we have outside the capital cities.

By March there will be an additional 50 ABC journalists living, working and reporting in regional and rural Australia; vital growth for the delivery of services at a time when those communities have witnessed the reduction of media services by some commercial outlets. Twenty-six positions have been already appointed in 10 locations. Three of those locations – Carnarvon, Hervey Bay and Victor Harbour – do not currently have ABC reporters.

Now, more than ever, the ABC belongs to all Australians, wherever they live.

An important part of the ABC’s Five Year Plan is to transform from a traditional broadcaster to the nation’s most trusted digital content provider. This means delivering personalised digital experiences that are free, reliable and easy to use.

ABC iview has more than 4500 hours of television shows, live performances and films to enjoy for free - and ad free - in an increasingly crowded market dominated by international streaming services.

There are currently almost six million ABC accounts which allow people to enjoy the benefits of personalised ABC iview services, including program recommendations, watchlists, and the ability to pick up shows across multiple devices.

In a survey of ABC iview users, 95% expressed a strong interest for ABC iview to add personalisation features that would require a login and we are very pleased to be at the stage where we can meet this expectation.

In March, the ABC will follow other commercial and public broadcasters such as SBS by requesting ABC iview users to set up an ABC account to enable them to watch programs and receive the benefits of the ABC’s unrivalled collection of Australian stories, as well as other ABC services.

This move follows extensive consultations with the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, the national regulator for privacy and freedom of information to ensure ABC account holders enjoy greater privacy protections than any other streaming service in the country.

Finally, I do want to acknowledge the government’s recent announcement of the ABC’s funding envelope for the next three years.

The ABC welcomed the certainty provided by this significant commitment.

This triennial funding decision – including the resumption of indexation and continuation of the vital Enhanced News Gathering (ENG) program – is an important recognition of the vital role the ABC plays in our democratic society and our culture.

It says a lot about Australia, too, that there is a bipartisan commitment to, and understanding of, the importance of public broadcasting and increasing investment in it.

A strong national, independent public broadcaster has served this country well over 90 years. It has connected and helped build a cohesive community and enriched our culture by showcasing Australian stories.

At a time when democracy is under threat in some parts of the world due to increasing misinformation, trustworthy sources of news and analysis like the ABC have never been more important.

I would like to thank the Australian community for its support and invite all Australians to help us celebrate 90 years of service to Australia.

Thank you.