



9 September 2011

Stephen Palethorpe
Secretary
Senate Environment and Communications References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Palethorpe,

RE: Inquiry into recent ABC programming decisions

I refer to the letter dated 19 August 2011 inviting the Australian Football League (AFL) to make a formal submission regarding the decision by the television management of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) to significantly cut the amount of ABC-produced programs, jobs and the likely affect on resources as announced on 2 August 2011.

The invitation sought comment from the AFL on the implications of these decisions, specifically on the following point:

e) the future potential implications of these cuts on ABC television's capacity to broadcast state league football and rugby

This purpose of this letter is to formally submit a response to this issue on behalf of the AFL.

AFL Background

AFL is a company limited by guarantee and a not for profit organisation. Its members are persons appointed by each of the clubs competing in the Australian Football Competition conducted throughout Australia by AFL ("AFL Competition").

AFL and the AFL Competition are grown out of domestic State football leagues, and AFL has more than 100 years of history. Australian football is a clear leader among sports in Australia and is its only indigenous national game.

AFL's charter is:

Australian Football League



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- to manage the national Australian football competition;
- to act as steward to the game and to ensure the future welfare of Australian Football;
- to maximise the economic and social benefits of Australian football to AFL clubs, the players, the football fraternity and the community at large.

AFL's objectives are not just strictly business or even strictly sporting. Australian football is a national pastime and a passionate component of the lives and lifestyles of a large number of Australians. Part of the AFL's charter is maximising the social benefits of Australian football and accordingly fostering good citizenship both on and off the playing field.

e) the future potential implications of these cuts on ABC television's capacity to broadcast state league football and rugby

AFL's charter recognises its overarching responsibility as steward of the game and the fact that it is grown out of domestic State Football Leagues. Accordingly, whilst the ABC does not broadcast matches of the AFL Competition, there are significant implications to Australian football as a whole if the ABC were to reduce its current support and broadcast coverage of the various state league competitions that it currently broadcasts in Tasmania, Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria.

Each of the respective State Leagues will be making their own specific submissions on this matter which will include detail on the effect that any reduction in ABC's current broadcasting commitments will have on their competition and football from the community level right through to the elite level in that state/territory.

The AFL supports the submissions made by each State body and would also like to reinforce the effect that any cuts to these broadcasts will have on Australian football as a whole. These are (amongst others) as follows:

- State Leagues provide a crucial talent pathway for the elite competition and a representation of the football community (both players and supporters) of a state/territory – the legitimacy and recognition that a free to air broadcast of these competitions provides is immeasurable and a critical element in attracting the best talent to local and state level competitive sport and to exposing this talent to AFL Clubs
- State League broadcasts provide a targeted audience for community messages
- State League broadcasts educate the public on the pathway from community to elite football and inspires participation. Accordingly, there will be a negative effect on participation should there be reduced promotion and exposure of State League competitions.
- State League broadcasts provide many regional football supporters with the ability to watch State League football on free to air television where the opportunity may not be possible to attend of watch a match live.

- There is a strong tradition in each State of the broadcast of State League competitions – this tradition has been built up over many years.
- There are other flow-on effects that will also drastically affect the viability of State League clubs and competitions, including a reduction in club revenue for jumper sponsorship and general brand promotion, that effect the ability of a club to survive
- Reduction of venue revenue such as naming rights and fence signage

The AFL fully supports the submissions of all of its State Leagues and trusts that each submission will be considered during the inquiry with this support in mind and in the knowledge that any cut in the current broadcasting commitments of the ABC to State League competitions will result in a significant impact on Australian Football, most particularly in relation to participation levels and the existence of credible second-tier pathways.

Kind regards

Gillon McLachlan
Chief Operating Officer