

Dear Senators on the Environment and Communications Reference Committee,

Regarding the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's cuts to internal television production

We love our ABC because it is distinctive to all the commercial television channels. We do not want our family to have to suffer the inane dröss conceived by commercial channels and their programming for the lowest common denominator. Our lives are dedicated to raising thinking and understanding children who ask questions of their society – Independent institutions, such as the ABC, help us do that.

In our opinion the ABC's decision to shift the balance of internal and external production of its television programming away from internally produced material weakens the ABC's delivery of its Charter obligations (in particular in the area of informational documentaries, the arts, independent broadcasting and specialized programs), limits the future capacity of internal production (potentially to an unsustainable level), further curtails the traditional industry training and development role the public broadcaster has provided, and undermines the true value of the ABC's independence and the credibility we should be able to trust.

There is nothing wrong in principle with a mixed model of production between internal production and external producers who provide fresh and innovative ideas or specialist subject matter expertise to the project. Traditionally this has been joint ventures between small independent producers with ideas and the ABC with the capacity to produce programs which has provided a voice to genuinely talented local people who would not otherwise have been heard.

However over the last decade the mixed model has shifted to a financial imperative where the ABC has partnered increasingly with large commercial production houses on the basis that they can significantly fund the production. Not only has this financially driven ideology marginalised the internal ABC production capacity, it has equally marginalised the genuinely creative independent producers who are left with no voice. Additionally it has resulted in a significant change of content from interesting, informative, specialized programs to commercially viable, mass appeal, light entertainment programming that is no different to material available from commercial broadcasters. (In fact the commercial broadcasters use these same large commercial production houses.) The commercial imperative for the commercial co-production partners also severely weakens the production's independence, freedom from potential product placement arrangements, and future availability and ownership by the ABC.

As part of this shift in the balance of the mixed model, subject matter expertise as well as television production expertise within the ABC has been diminished and marginalised. Even if the ABC wanted to produce a major internal documentary it will no longer have the internal capability to do so, and has become dependent on the large commercial production houses to provide the basic industry skills that once were the strength of the ABC.

We implore you to encourage the National Broadcaster to return to the role of the industry leader of the media industry and in the Television space that includes setting the bar in regards to quality production, providing distinctive programs without from the necessity of chasing ratings, and pioneering new and innovative uses of the medium. This cannot be done in the current climate which emphasises quantity over quality, external co-funding over creative/editorial control/direction, and ratings over distinctiveness. It requires internal industry skills as well as subject matter expertise to be a pioneering and innovative industry leader. *In particular there should be strict regulation of the use of ABC funds in joint ventures requiring a minimum share of final ownership and control of the intellectual property being retained by the ABC (on behalf of the Australian public).* This would curtail the financial driven joint ventures in favour of ideas driven co-productions where the ABC's industry skills and creative expertise would complement the external independent creative producers.

Yours sincerely,

Sophie and Lars Norved