

Submission to the Senate inquiry into recent ABC program decisions.

#### Implications of this decision on the ABC's ability to create television content in Perth

I do not have a vested interest in the employment of ABC staff in Perth but I do know that it is important for job opportunities in television to be retained in Perth. The ABC must continue to maintain a strong presence in Perth, including in live television. Apart from the news and the local 7.30 program, the WAFL telecast is one of the few live television programs produced by the ABC in Perth. This is particularly so following the ABC ending production of "Can We Help" from Perth. This decision, as with the decision relating to other state-produced programs, depletes the ABC so it becomes merely a station that shows television but no longer makes anything beyond the most simple of television shows (ie news) outside of Sydney and Melbourne.

If the ABC make a decision to end live telecasting of WAFL football from Perth it will restrict job opportunities for people involved in the television industry in Perth. At present, the telecasts provide opportunities for Perth-based camera operators, technicians and on-screen presenters to learn and utilise their skills in Perth. If the ABC takes away these jobs, they will not be replaced by jobs in the private sector. Training opportunities will also be lost. The role of the ABC in telecasting WAFL matches is not just about the football but is about the personnel involved in the telecasts. People in Perth should continue to have the opportunity to be involved in live televised sporting events.

There are implications for the football-viewing public which may be outside this committee's terms of reference. However, the WAFL telecasts are popular in regional WA and to lose the telecasts would be another slap in the face for people outside of metropolitan Perth by decision makers on the eastern coast.

#### Implications for diversity

The loss of locally-produced shows does have the potential to reduce diversity in the ABC as the programs cut seem to have all had more of an "arts" profile.

The loss of local sport would diminish this diversity further. While live sport is well catered for on pay television and, to a lesser extent, on free-to-air television, smaller scale events that do not attract the advertising dollar are not at all well represented. It is important for the ABC to ensure it plays a role in the diversity of sport available for viewing across all media as well as to maintain a diversity in its own programming. Indeed, apart from the WAFL (and other states' leagues) there is now almost no sport on ABC TV.

Maintaining the WAFL telecasts ensures diversity within the ABC itself but also assists in the diversity across all of the television media.

#### Implications for National Regional Program Incentive

I am unsure of this program and could not find a reference to it on the internet. However, if the program's aims can be gleaned from its name, the recent ABC decisions do run contrary to this program. It is hard to imagine any other statutory body treating Brisbane, Hobart, Adelaide and Perth with such disdain. By concentrating television making in Melbourne and Sydney, the message to everyone else is, in essence, "you don't matter." The content of the locally produced programs was not state-centric but its production in these

“regional” centres (would any other Australian organisation call these cities regional?) was important for the local television industries.

Removing these programs, and the threatened withdrawal of telecasts of state league football competitions, is simply a sign that the ABC has lost its way as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

#### Future implications for the broadcast of state league football

As stated above, there are serious implications for the ABC’s capacity to telecast local league football if it continues unchecked in its deletion of locally-produced content. Once the skills involved in outside broadcasting are lost from Perth, they will be lost forever. Opportunities for young people in Perth to be involved in the television industry will be so limited as to no longer have any viability as a career path.

While the ABC is always going to have funding constraints and is going to have to make choices, these choices are never made in a vacuum. Perth residents already feel isolated from decision making within the ABC (and more generally within Government and non-government organisations). Not recognising the importance of our local league to Perth-based and WA regional-based viewers is simply short-sighted and to take any step that would further deplete the local television industry cannot be taken lightly.

There has been discussion in the print media about changing the broadcasts so they are shown on delay (removing the need for half time “gap” programming) and this may be a sensible solution. However, talk of “hard-wiring” one or two grounds so that each week’s telecast can only come from the hard-wired grounds would place limits on the potential for regional WA viewers to see their team each season. If this was the only way the broadcasts could continue, we would have to live with it but it is certainly an imperfect solution.

I am a footy fan and I loved being able to see my team play in Perth via the ABC telecasts when I lived 1600km away from Perth. I remember writing to the ABC at that time urging the ABC to maintain the telecasts. Merely a decade later, and we are having the same debate. In the overall scheme of things, maybe the WAFL does not matter that much, but it is easy for large organisations to overlook the little things that can give enormous pleasure to the very individuals on whom that organisation actually depends.