

September 13, 2011

Dear Senators

SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY INTO RECENT ABC PROGRAMMING DECISIONS

I am a television producer who has produced a vast array of television programs for the ABC more than 20 year years. The programs that my company and I have produce for ABC range from recent drama series such as ***Rake*** (comedy drama starring Richard Roxburgh) to documentary series covering history, science and the legal system such as ***The Making of Modern Australia (social history series with William McGuinness)***, ***Voyage to the Planets*** and ***On Trial*** (the first criminal trials filmed in Australia). My first "presale" to ABC in 1990 was for a documentary called ***The Serpent and the Cross*** about Aboriginal art and spirituality.

I have never been an employee of the ABC. However, over 20 years I have worked directly with ABC employees or ex-ABC employees. ON programs licenced or commissioned by ABC my various production companies have:

- provided full time work for ABC employees once they took redundancy
- provided project employment work for ABC employees while on leave without pay or long service leave
- engaged ABC employees as part of co-production facilities deals with ABC in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.
- have hired out ABC facilities with and without ABC technical personnel

As can be seen there are a number of ways in which private sector production companies has been able to interface with ABC and the exact nature of the arrangement varies from project to project. In all cases ABC management (commissioning editors, executive producers, legal and business affairs) had oversight and control over the editorial content we produced. The tendency to silo productions between "fully in-house" and "fully out-sourced" doesn't necessarily lead to the best editorial outcome and economic efficiencies. Flexibility – hybrid production models – can leads to better outcomes.

In regard to the specific terms of reference I have the following comments:

(a) the implications of this decision on the ABC's ability to create, produce and own its television content, particularly in the capital cities of Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart;

Owning content is not be not the core business of the national broadcaster. Serving audiences with relevant content is the key business. It is often more efficient in terms of return for ABC's dollar to coproduce content with the private sector which can bring third party funding to the equations through the Federal or State Agencies and Producers Tax Offset all of which are not accessible to ABC. There are plenty of opportunities for ABC to work more flexibly with the private sector in Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart to deliver the best outcomes for audiences by co-creating and co-producing content.

(b) the implications of this decision on Australian film and television production in general and potential impact on quality and diversity of programs;

If the ABC is not appropriately funded or is restrained from spending it's budget in the most efficient way possible then it will have inevitably have an overall impact on levels of film and television production. Having worked so closely with ABC employees over 20 years I know first hand that there are still massive inefficiencies within the ABC in-house program production. These inefficiencies need to be reduced or eliminated as much as possible while also seeking Federal appropriation for new programming initiatives.

Quality and diversity of programs is a very subjective criteria. The ABC has a charter and, with respect, it's the Senates job to judge the ABC by its charter but not to interfere at the level of programming decisions. For example, whether the ***New Inventors*** was becoming a tired format that needed refreshing after being on the air for 40 weeks a year for 7 years (or more) is not something the Senate has the expertise to judge. Clearly the programmers thought it had run it's course and decided to look at fresh way of looking at the same subject. Such decisions are appropriate for management to make without be questioned by Government.

(c) whether a reduction in ABC-produced programs is contrary to the aims of the National Regional Program Initiative;

I don't believe it is. As stated at point (a) above programs can still be produced in regions by co-producing with the private sector. Whether they are "ABC in-house produced" is not relevant to audiences. In terms of employment and skill bases these can be maintained in regional centres under hybrid production models as long as the ABC is funded well enough to be able to commission Australian content. ABC should be in a position to fund the best ideas whether they come form inside or outside.

(d) the implications of these cuts on content ownership and intellectual property;

The insignificant revenues that can be earned from the sale of finished ABC programming or formats to the rest of the world does not justify the ABC paying the full cost of production which it would need to do in order to maintain ownership of IP. ABC should be seen by Government as a "publisher" in the national interest not a "studio".

Yours sincerely

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