

18 January 2013

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600, Australia

SENATE INQUIRY: THE AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION'S COMMITMENT TO REFLECTING AND REPRESENTING REGIONAL DIVERSITY

I would like to make the following submission in relation to the abovementioned Inquiry.

I have been employed by the ABC in Tasmania as a television production researcher for over 18 years having worked on such nationally popular programs such as **Gardening Australia** (10 years), **Second Opinion** which was about alternative therapies to medicine based healing (1 year) and a prime-time program **Collectors** (6 years) and **Auction Room** (1.5 years).

On all these programs our production unit strived to include stories from Tasmania and regional parts of the mainland where it was possible from a time and budgetary perspective. We believed that it was important that national programs such as ours be truly representative of all Australians in the genre we were focussing on, whether we did this directly or indirectly.

The highly popular program, **Collectors** covered a huge range of collections and the variety of personalities of collectors with some people admitting to being bipolar, others to autism and chronic depression and still others who were grateful that we helped them to feel "normal". Our program didn't focus on their illnesses, but on their collections. It was such a joy to be involved with a program that was so inclusive of such people who would not normally have been represented on television; I felt proud to be involved with these trusting and beautiful people and to have satisfied that part of ABC's charter.

Our unit has recently been informed that our production unit in Hobart will be closed due for budgetary reasons – too costly seemed to be the bottom line, although we were also told that the ratings for Auction Room, which went to air on Sunday at 6 pm were not "good enough" for management. We're not sure which is the true statement.

Unfortunately the closure of the television production unit impacts negatively on a number of people and situations: -

- Television production staff will lose their jobs (16 of us). As there is very little or no television production available in the state, no television schools or few screen organisations staff will either have to move to the mainland where jobs might be more available or re-educate themselves
- Freelancers – camera and soundmen won't have casual employment any more
- University and college students studying media will have reduced chances of mentored work experience.
- Production of footage for archives will be severely reduced
- Indigenous students will have a reduced range of work experience available to them.

With the reduction of locally produced programs we have seen and will continue to see a glut of cheap BBC productions and repeats. Management continually tell us that ratings weren't important because the ABC's charter was to provide television programs for minority groups. However it was frequently reiterated from management that if our ratings for **Auction Room** weren't high enough, we wouldn't be recommissioned; we weren't sure what ratings would be acceptable, and our ratings were higher than the previously televised program.

The staff that was employed on **Auction Room** could easily have produced two national programs; this possibility wasn't put to us.

It was suggested by management that we forward television program ideas to them. As a group we put forward many ideas but on each account management gave us a reason for declining them and gave reasons that that it would be too expensive, not the right genre for what management wanted or it's similar to what has been done before. We were never told what genre was acceptable or that it had to be for prime time until a short time ago. Why was it necessary to produce television for prime time only...there are many potential timeslots a Tasmanian-based program could have fitted into.

Our fear for the closure of our production unit is that the ABC will lose an incredible skill base which has been honed over two decades. As well, ABC viewers will probably see less and less regionally based stories as the ABC becomes more and more centralised to Sydney and Melbourne. Once the staff has left the ABC in Tasmania there will be no turning back when management may realise that centralisation retards regional story telling.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry.

With regards,
Diana Forsyth