

Attachment to Submission

ABC Arts Articles

The Australian 31st August 2011

THE ABC will steer clear of broadcasting reality television and live sport, instead focusing on drama and news, the ABC managing director Mark Scott said today.

In an [address to the National Press Club in Canberra](#), Mr Scott said reality and live sport were best left to commercial TV broadcasters who were pursuing a mass audience.

“Neither of these will be spaces for the ABC,” he said. “For the ABC, the delivery of an outstanding quality news and current affairs service on free-to-air television is a key to our enduring offering.”

“In addition to news and children’s [shows], in the decade ahead I see a commitment to quality Australian content, including drama, and programming of a specialist nature as particular places where the ABC needs to deliver.

Mr Scott mounted a strong defence of outsourcing ABC internal production and elaborated how the corporation set up ABC News 24 without direct government funding.

“At the ABC, we want to reflect the nation to the nation,” Mr Scott said. “But it does not automatically follow that in order to do this, the ABC has to be the creator of that television everywhere. Increasingly, we have found that working with the independent sector allows us to make a range of programs, using outstanding local talent, in a way that helps show the richness of the Australian story.”

Of ABC News 24, Mr Scott said he found efficiencies by reducing the number of people it took to put programs to air; and introducing studio automation, desk-top edit and file-based technology.

“ABC News 24 has been a great success for the ABC—and money has not been taken from elsewhere in the organisation to fund it,” he said.

“We saved the money—making efficiencies and we invested it in something new.”

Mr Scott said some of the broadcaster’s most enduring content did not have big audiences - Radio National and Classic FM, Compass, First Tuesday Book Club and Lateline – but they were engaging and they fulfilled the ABC Charter.

The managing director addressed some of his critics – but not by name.

“Some would put us to the sword,” he said. “You know where to hear them most mornings and to read their columns. There is an assuring predictability about their arguments.

“But I am not sure many Australians really share that view. The Newspan result is remarkably consistent—9 out of 10 think we are good value.”

The Australian 5th September 2011

THE only dedicated arts program on ABC Radio has been targeted for the axe, just weeks after the broadcaster dumped its only TV arts program.

Without Art Nation on ABC TV and Artworks on Radio National, the broadcaster will not have any programs directly covering the arts, despite arts coverage being a key plank of the ABC Charter.

The cancellation of Art Nation is one of the recent ABC cuts under investigation by the Senate.

Independent senator Nick Xenophon won backing for an inquiry into the broadcaster and a report will be delivered by October 12.

Adding to the ABC's woes, the draft schedule for Radio National revealed the weekly hour-long Artworks, hosted by Amanda Smith, will be dropped next year. The half-hour Artworks Feature that follows it on Sunday mornings has also disappeared in the proposed 2012 schedule.

The schedule was released to staff on the same day as managing director Mark Scott delivered an address to the National Press Club, in which he justified axing Art Nation on the grounds there were "rich and layered" arts on ABC radio and online.

"When we announced the end of Art Nation, there were some claims that this showed we were withdrawing from the arts," Mr Scott said on Wednesday.

"Far from it. Not only do we show and will continue to show a wide range of arts programming on ABC television, but we do the same on radio, and on our rich and layered arts portal online." But ABC sources said without programs being produced by the arts units in TV and radio, there would be no content for the portal.

Radio National's popular The Book Show with Ramona Koval will be reworked as Arts and Books, under the proposed schedule. But radio sources say the addition of "art" to the books show is an "afterthought" to deflect criticism that the ABC has abandoned the arts.

There is also no certainty about whether Koval will remain as host and whether the show will continue to cover non-fiction books as well as fiction. The future of presenters Rachel Kohn, Peter Mares and Paul Barclay also remains unclear if their shows are cancelled.

There are grave concerns, too, for the network's only investigative program Background Briefing, which is to be absorbed by a new program, Weekend Extra. Media revealed last week that the ABC will drop Bowls Australia next year and that local football coverage may also be dropped.

The secretary of the ABC section of the Community and Public Sector Union, Graeme Thomson, told Media he believed the axing of the football codes had been delayed until the heat from the Senate inquiry was off the broadcaster.

"Sport helps them prop up the misleading statistic that head of TV Kim Dalton uses that 84 per cent of production is internal," Mr Thomson said. "That figure may have been correct until the recently announced cuts for the simple reason that local sport occupies big chunks of time in the weekend schedule."

A group of prominent Australians have also written an open letter to the ABC calling for arts coverage to be supported.

Last month, Mr Dalton cancelled Art Nation, presented by Fenella Kernebone, and all the internally produced arts documentaries that air under the Artscape banner. Fifteen people were offered redundancies.

According to the ABC website, Radio National's weekly arts and culture program, Artworks, "looks at the big themes, views, issues and events in the arts" and features interviews on current cultural issues and explores historical periods.

My Cup of Tea: if the ABC really cared about the arts ...

Ben Eltham - crickey.com.au

What's happening to the arts on the ABC?

Recent announcements have signalled wholesale cutbacks to cultural programming at the national broadcaster. First, there was a round of cuts in ABC television, with the decision to [cut its dedicated arts program *Art Nation*](#). Then radio joined in, with an announcement that [Radio National's *Artworks* will be cancelled](#).

The arts community is dismayed. A group of prominent Australians -- including Tim Winton, Nick Cave, Betty Churcher, Geoffrey Rush and Elizabeth Ann Macgregor -- have [written a letter](#) to the ABC board claiming the cuts "will diminish the ABC's irreplaceable role as the nation's cultural memory".

"This act of cultural vandalism will also seriously diminish the ABC's role as the nation's cultural archivist," said Michael Shrimpton, a former head of ABC TV Arts and Entertainment. "The ABC is a chronicler of our greatest artistic achievements."

Some may beg to differ with that particular statement, given the indifferent quality of some of the outside productions that have aired lately in the Tuesday night *Artscape* slot on ABC1. But there's no doubt the ABC plays a crucial role in communicating and disseminating the arts in this country. The recent deal to [screen a season of *Opera Australia*](#) will be welcomed by opera fans, but it also replaces dedicated arts journalism and criticism with programming from a single artform, so in that sense the deal represents a loss of diversity.

There's also the rather important issue of the [ABC's charter](#), which lists as one of the corporation's three main functions the aim "to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia".

The charter and the intentions of its framers are often squabbled over, almost in the manner of constitutional law. On a black letter reading, there is arguably no requirement for the ABC's several book shows, literature not being a strictly *performing* art. But, thankfully, this has generally not been the way in which the ABC has interpreted it. Instead, the clause has been taken to mean all the arts, including new and experimental ones.

The charter is also used in elastic ways by the ABC itself. For instance, Triple J has long justified its on-air promotions spruiking for-profit music festivals such as the Big Day Out and Splendour in the Grass on the grounds that it is allowed by the charter. I've been supportive of Triple J's commitment to contemporary music. But it's also the case the network uses the charter as a justification for its promotional tie-ins, [even as it has cancelled](#) its dedicated arts programming.

At its best, for instance on shows such as Radio National's *Artworks*, the ABC has not just encouraged and promoted the arts but taken an active role in the national debate about the arts and culture, including the forthcoming National Cultural Policy and aspects of the ABC's arts coverage itself. This is why the death of *Artworks* will be felt so keenly. Amanda Smith is an outstanding presenter. Given [how few professional arts journalists are left](#) in this country, the decision to cut the program really is vandalism.

Triple J's old *Artery* show, under Fenella Kernebone, was another example where the ABC managed to live up to the best interpretation of its charter. Not only was the program intelligent and insightful, it also presented new ideas and art practices to Triple J's predominantly young audience. And then Triple J cancelled it. Kernebone has now had two arts shows cancelled during her short career at the broadcaster. It's a dismal trend.

So what is the future? At the moment it looks bleak, [whatever Mark Scott says](#). And unnecessarily so. The ABC has the resources to cover the arts intelligently and well if it wants to. Just look at how the

news and current affairs division manages to churn out quality journalism day after day, even while introducing new services and embracing new platforms.

So here's a mud map for the future. If Scott really wants to "do better" for the arts, perhaps he should consider reforming and restructuring the arts division inside the ABC. For a start, he could make arts programming genuinely cross-platform, freeing it up from the current silos to deliver arts content collaboratively across TV, radio and online. Then invest in new programming resources for high-quality arts journalists such as Amanda Smith and Fenella Kernebone. It's madness that Kernebone or Smith could find themselves out of a job.

Thirdly, a strong managing producer needs to be found who would be willing to drive the many synergies available for arts programming across the ABC, including at local radio level and on Triple J. The ABC's under-resourced online presence in arts content should be strengthened. And finally, the ABC should ask Stephen Conroy and the parliament to amend section 1(c) of the charter to include all the arts, not just the performing arts.

That shouldn't be too hard now, should it? As Michael Shrimpton [writes today in *The Australian*](#), "it's about the service, stupid".

Public broadcasting is about service, stupid

Michael Shrimpton – The Australian

AFTER reading Mark Scott's piece on arts programming on ABC television in the Fairfax press this week, I was reminded of the many such missives I have read through the years and, indeed, some I wrote myself in response to the rabbits running around the corporate office and the need for a smother job.

It has always been a running issue for managing directors of the ABC that "the parishes need attention".

And, as Scott asserts, it's impossible for the ABC to please everyone. He is, of course, quite correct. He then proceeds to attempt the impossible, and in so doing lights the touch paper towards a firefight.

The issue here, or one of them, is not so much the cancellation of one program but the revelation that there is no recognisable comprehensive arts policy in play at the ABC. Ad hoc-ery rules.

Former ABC managing director David Hill recognised how the vague nature of the charter, light on detail, helped assist each generation of practitioners shape their output accordingly. But there also had to be a viable policy that spoke to "critical mass".

At the time Hill decreed the critical mass for drama was 100 hours a year. In the arts portfolio, it amounted to a "presence"; a noticeable profile that addressed areas of performance, documentary and magazine output.

There presently appears to be a lack of confidence in the arts or willingness to support it strongly. The "presence" in my case was a five-hour Sunday afternoon display of the best of the best in international documentary, peppered with interviews and arts news.

The issue of an ongoing conversation with arts practitioners across the country was addressed by Review, a half-hour magazine program after Four Corners on Monday nights.

This dialogue with the industry is an important role, given the lack of detailed coverage of the sector in our news bulletins, where they are usually regarded as "soft stories" and bumped with alacrity.

Designated arts magazine programming such as Arts Nation, and Review before it, provided a protective zone and were smack on charter.

The arts unit also produced features across the board throughout the year. For 13 years, in prime time -- 7.30pm on summer Sunday nights -- we had the Summer Season of opera, ballet and symphony performances, local and international.

I welcome the recent announcement that, finally, another agreement has been reached with Opera Australia. Where would the world of opera be now but for the efforts of ABC directors in producing the Joan Sutherland archive?

I list these things to illustrate "presence". It was clear and clearly ABC. I'm wondering if there is a clear understanding of the remit that is public service broadcasting. It's about the service, stupid.

This brings me to the role of the board in all of this. ABC boards exist, principally, to perform two functions. One is fiduciary and the other is the zealous guardianship of the charter, to ensure that its management has its eye on the game and is clear in its functions.

It is my contention that, for possibly as long as 15 years, various boards have dozed at the table. It is true that through time both sides of politics have ratted on their commitments to their national broadcaster, making consistency in programming and thus the servicing of the charter a problematic matter.

But this doesn't alter the need for clear directions. And those must come from the board.

It has always been a mystery to those of us who were brought up on broadcasting that, apart from the staff-elected representative, there has rarely been a broadcaster on the ABC boards. Lots of political stacking, sure, but hardly a member who knew anything about the organisation's core business. This goes also for management. The present managing director is a print journalist with management experience and the director of television is a former film institute bureaucrat.

It's hardly surprising, then, when the decision is made to devote the corporation's only high-definition channel to a 24-hour news outfit. Talking heads, breast-pocket bottom-of-frame presenters, offering news footage shot on mobile phones: it's about the service, stupid.

Michael Shrimpton was head of arts and entertainment at the ABC from 1981 to 1988 and from 1995 to 1998. Is also one of the signatories on the Open Letter to the ABC Board dated 3/09/2011

The Australian - 31st August 2011

THAT staple of Saturday afternoon TV viewing, lawn bowls on Aunty, has been cancelled by the ABC after 30 years on air.

Every Saturday at 5pm, more than 200,000 people in the five mainland capitals (regional viewing figures were unavailable) watch the broadcast of the bowls, one of the few sports remaining on the national broadcaster.

But bowls has fallen victim to an ABC strategy to slash much of its internal production. ABC-produced programs Arts Nation and The New Inventors have already gone, and 100 TV production and technical services staff across the country have been made redundant. Without dedicated outside-broadcast vans, camera crews and production staff in each state, covering sport is impossible.

The head of TV sport and events, Justin Holdforth, told The Australian the ABC had decided not to renew its agreement with Bowls Australia after this season.

"From 2012, ABC Television Sport has decided to redirect its very limited resources into alternate programming," Mr Holdforth said.

"ABC television will fulfil its commitment to the final two bowls events for 2011 in Tweed Heads and Moonta."

Donald Beard, a member of the Adelaide Oval Bowling Club, was very unhappy to hear the bowls program had been cancelled. Dr Beard, 86, plays bowls all year and loves the Saturday program. "It's a terrific program; good comperes and good bowlers, of course," Dr Beard said. "It's one of the highlights of the sporting week. I played cricket for 50 years and when I retired from cricket I took up bowls at 68. I've found it to be a fascinating game."

The ABC has also axed local sport in the Northern Territory -- The NT Sport Awards, The NT rugby union finals and the Tiwi Islands grand final. Mr Holdforth refused to confirm or deny if local football in other states was at risk. "No decision has been made regarding the broadcast of other local football codes in 2012," he said.

Bowls Australia chief executive Neil Dalrymple said the decision was "disappointing". According to Bowls Australia, over the past five years 350 hours of women's or mixed bowls have screened on the ABC and Fox Sports, which rebroadcasts the matches on pay-TV.

Mr Dalrymple said it was a setback for a key women's sport -- consistently ranked in the top five in Australia for hours broadcast.

Bowls Australia hopes to renew its agreement with Fox Sports.

The Australian - 1st September 2011

FEDERAL Sports Minister Mark Arbib says the ABC's move to cancel its lawn bowls coverage is a bad decision.

The national broadcaster today announced it was discontinuing its coverage after 30 years. ABC managing director Mark Scott said the bowls audience was "quite small" and it cost \$1.3 million a year to cover the sport. Senator Arbib said he would meet Mr Scott next week to discuss the matter.

"For the ABC to be moving away from bowls I think is a bad decision," he told Macquarie Radio today.

"We need to make sure that the smaller sports like bowls have a place on public television." Bowls was an important part of Australia's social fabric, with about 800,000 people playing it each year, Senator Arbib said.

The West Australian - 2nd September 2011

Mark Scott still can't decide what to do with sport!

ABC managing director Mark Scott has given WAFL fans hope that telecasts of the State league will continue next season.

But it is possible that live coverage will be replaced by matches on delay and the ABC will only cover games at a limited number of grounds.

There has been speculation for the past month that budget cutbacks and a change of program focus meant the ABC would abandon coverage of State football leagues around the country.

But Scott said yesterday that no decision had been made and that while the ABC might step away from covering some live sport, it was more likely to axe elite events rather than grassroots sports.

He said no decision has been reached about WAFL or SANFL coverage or other local sports. "I said we won't be competing with commercials for prime-time sport," he said.

The ABC's WAFL coverage is estimated to cost \$800,000-a-year or about \$15,000-an-hour. It is the league's greatest marketing asset.

While the WAFL itself has said virtually nothing about the potential loss of the coverage, observers in the sports marketing industry believe it could be retained at much lower cost.

"Delaying coverage by 30 minutes so that you could do away with things like the half-time packages could save thousands of dollars a season," a WAFL marketing expert said.

"And given one of the biggest costs is using outside broadcast vans, why not hardwire one or two grounds like Medibank Stadium and Fremantle Oval so that they are television-ready and only games played there are televised?"