

Letter to Senate Enquiry on ABC

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Council of Australian Art Museum Directors (CAAMD) is extremely concerned by the ABC's decision to cut its arts programming and its in-house arts production capacity, in particular in regard to Art Nation, The Collectors and Artworks.

Australia's major visual art galleries have developed strong partnerships over the years with the ABC's arts production unit and as a result, artists and audiences have gained immeasurably from ABC coverage of the arts.

In 2010 The Australia Council found in its study *More Than Bums on Seats: Australian Participation in the arts*, that 9 in 10 Australians participate in the arts and 9 in 10 believe arts should be an important part of the education of Australians.

It seems incomprehensible to us that at a time when arts engagement is increasing nationally, the national broadcaster chooses to diminish very significantly its coverage of the arts. There will now be almost no opportunity on television or in dedicated radio programming, for arts organisations such as ours to bring our activities to a keen public.

Why should the ABC, the national broadcaster, move to light entertainment at the expense of the arts, when its charter requires that it produce culturally enriching programs which support diversity, education and engagement?

Surely the difference between the ABC and commercial networks is that the national broadcaster should acknowledge the importance of cultural and arts activities and ensure programming time is dedicated to promoting them?

We are very concerned at both the axing of in-house production capacity, by which the ABC had built up very extensive expertise in the area of arts production; and in the axing of arts program timeslots. In a recent newspaper commentary Mark Scott has argued that the outcome of these axings will be to allow the ABC to "do better" in connecting with arts-engaged audiences. Our sector needs to know what this really means, and what mechanisms will be put in place to ensure this happens in a relevant way, and how the ABC's performance in presenting arts programs will be audited.

The ABC is quite prepared to expand time given to overseas documentaries, such as that on London's Natural History Museum, or the current Fakes or Fortune series, but has contracted to almost nothing the time given to promoting Australia's cultural industry. We find this deeply worrying.

We urge the Committee to insist that the ABC fulfil its Charter with regard to coverage of arts news and activities, and that far from limiting its coverage of the arts, it increase programming which celebrates Australia's strong and vibrant cultural sector.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor

Chair of CAAMD

On behalf of the CAAMD

CAAMD

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Edmund Capon  
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