



SBS submission to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Communications Legislation Amendment (Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund) Bill 2017

January 2018

Key Points

- The Special Broadcasting Service Corporation (**SBS**) is one of Australia's most trusted news sources. It has a long-held and well-earned reputation for quality news and analysis on global events, as well as on issues across multicultural and Indigenous Australia.
- Civic journalism, of the sort provided by SBS is essential in a highly concentrated media market like Australia. SBS must be appropriately resourced and supported to continue to provide authoritative information and analysis.
- SBS provides civic journalism to all Australians, including a diverse range of Australian communities not served in this way by anyone else. We do this across television, radio and online platforms, in more than 70 languages—both with locally and internationally-produced journalism.
- SBS tells stories from across Australia, including regional Australia. Many of these stories are not covered by commercial outlets, particularly those relating to multicultural and Indigenous Australia. As a part of SBS, and as the home of Indigenous storytelling, NITV also has a distinct role to play in delivering regional news and current affairs.
- SBS is committed to the development of civic journalism, however this commitment requires sufficient and reliable funding. SBS funding is under pressure following the withdrawal of proposed legislation to allow it to increase advertising.
- Without return of this funding (\$8.7 million for 2018–19), SBS's ability to commit to innovative civic journalism, exploring and reflecting communities throughout Australia, will be limited.
- While the initiative in the Bill has the positive aim to promote and cultivate journalism in regional areas, this gain should not come at the expense of the valued and unique work of public broadcasters.

Introduction

SBS welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Inquiry into the *Communications Legislation Amendment (Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund) Bill 2017* (the **Bill**).

SBS is unique in the Australian media environment. Its function is to provide multilingual, multicultural and Indigenous radio, television and digital media services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians and, in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society.

SBS reaches almost 100 per cent of the population through its free-to-air television services (SBS, SBS HD, SBS VICELAND, SBS VICELAND HD, Food Network and National Indigenous Television (**NITV**)), subscription TV channel World Movies and eight digital (DAB+) radio channels (including SBS Arabic24, SBS PopAsia, SBS Chill, SBS PopDesi and simulcast AM/FM stations).

This reach is being significantly extended through SBS's digital services, including SBS On Demand and portals which make online audio programming and information available in nearly 70 languages other than English.

SBS regional coverage

SBS serves approximately 97% of the Australian population through its terrestrial television services, and almost 100% through the addition of the VAST satellite platform. SBS television is also retransmitted on the cable and satellite subscription services of Foxtel.

SBS also has 15 national analogue radio services which consist of six AM and nine FM services, transmission services for which are provided by Broadcast Australia. There are also 146 re-transmission self-help SBS FM services licensed to local councils and community groups. These analogue radio services cover in total approximately 63% of the Australian population. SBS Radio 1, 2, 3 and SBS Arabic 24, providing access to all language services, are also broadcast on digital television, extending their reach to 97% of the population. There are also currently 7 national DAB services serving approximately 53% of the Australian population. All radio services can also be streamed online.

SBS regional audiences

As the traditional broadcast model is being increasingly challenged by fragmenting audiences and an expanding array of digital (streaming and catch-up) content providers, SBS has continued to evolve its offering to ensure it broadens its availability on new devices and on platforms, such as social media and streaming and catch-up services.

SBS monitors viewing figures from regional areas through RegTAM. SBS television reaches just under 4 million people per month in regional areas and holds over 5% of the free-to-air audience share in regional areas.¹²

As high-speed internet becomes increasingly available in regional Australia, so will opportunities for SBS to provide even more content to these audiences.

SBS regional news and current affairs programming

¹ RegionalTAM, Combined Agg, Mkts (includes WA), 01/01/2017 – 31/12/2017, all day (2am- 2am), total individuals, SBS network, based on Consolidated 28 day data up to and including the 12/12/2017, and Consolidated 7 data from 13/12/2017 – 31/12/2017. Based on 5mins consecutive cumulative monthly reach and 5 station FTA Share.

² Note that ratings are not available for the Northern Territory through OzTAM or RegTAM

Independent, non-partisan public broadcasting delivers significant public benefits, particularly in a highly concentrated media landscape. Together with the ABC, SBS television news and current affairs is the most trusted media source in Australia, according to the latest Essential Media poll.³

SBS *World News* is consistently among the programs with the highest audiences across the SBS network and has seen an increase in audience in 2017. SBS endeavours to ensure that the most important stories have a life beyond a single platform. Key stories, entertainment and investigations are covered across radio, television and online^{4,5}.

SBS plays a vital role by providing credible, trustworthy, inclusive, balanced and independent services which meet the communication needs of Australia's multicultural community.

SBS journalists regularly travel to regional areas to report from these communities. SBS also has strong links with Indigenous communities and community broadcasting in remote areas through NITV, which also had a successful community contributor model established to support the *Around the Traps* program⁶. Contributors were trained and equipped to gather and deliver stories using new digital technologies.

In 2017 NITV News and Current Affairs produced over 106 stories from remote and regional locations where a journalist was physically in the regional location to produce the story. News and current affairs program, *The Point*, produced the majority (57%) of its feature stories in regional areas demonstrating NITV's ongoing commitment to covering stories from remote and regional communities, not covered by other broadcasters. NITV also provides live broadcasts from regional locations and in 2017 broadcast from Arnhem Land (NT), Uluru (NT), Mer Island (QLD), Cairns (QLD), Brewarrina (NSW).

SBS is committed to training and employment pathways for journalists. NITV provides an important training and employment platform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from regional areas, promoting pathways for some of Australia's best known Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media talent.

The content of SBS radio programs is national and broadcasters are encouraged to broadly represent communities across the country. Daily programs (language programs that are broadcast every day) have correspondents in most states providing regional and state-based reports.

While SBS Radio does not have the capacity for dedicated rural producers or journalists, these correspondents cover the issues most important to language communities throughout Australia. In addition, SBS Radio shares reports from television and digital producers around stories relevant to these areas.

SBS also addresses issues from regional and remote communities through its portfolio of current affairs programming. This includes:

- *Small Business Secrets* – a magazine style program which shines a light on the small business owners and innovators, many from migrant and refugee backgrounds, playing a vital role in Australia's economic growth

³ <http://www.essentialvision.com.au/trust-in-media-12>.

⁴ For example, in late 2017, an investigation led by SBS Radio's Punjabi program revealed visa scams targeting migrants. This story was covered across the network, including on SBS World News and online.

⁵ <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/thefeed/article/2017/11/13/million-dollar-jobs-and-visa-scam-leaves-migrants-50000-out-pocket-boss-drives>

⁶ <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/around-the-traps>

- *Insight* – Australia's leading forum for debate and powerful first person stories. Each week, host Jenny Brockie guides a lively debate on a single topic
- *The Point* – investigating cultural, political and social issues with a distinctive Indigenous approach.
- *Where Are You Really From?* – exploring the stories of migrants in regional communities. This will be broadcast in 2018.

Fund should not undermine existing commitment to public broadcasters

The services provided by SBS deliver the Australian community quality and diversity in news and current affairs, with highly valued and trusted programming that cannot be found in other Australian media outlets. However, these activities cannot be sustained unless there are robust funding arrangements in place.

SBS's funding was cut by \$65.7 million over the five-year period 2014–15 to 2018–19:

- \$25.2 million at MYEFO 2014–15;
- \$28.5 million associated with the expected passage of legislation to increase the maximum number of minutes of advertising permitted on SBS broadcast services⁷; and
- \$12 million given reduced reinstatement of a triennial funding terminating measure for 2017–19.

SBS has been grateful to have had the funding shortfall reinstated for two years (\$6.9 million in 2016–17 and \$8.8 million in 2017–18). However, SBS is still awaiting a Government decision on reinstatement of \$8.7 million for 2018–19 to make up the shortfall from the withdrawn *Communications Legislation Amendment (SBS Advertising Flexibility) Bill 2017*. Unless this funding is returned, SBS will be forced to make cuts to programs and services that will impact the Australian community.

SBS supports the expansion of civic journalism, and a strong, diverse news media – particularly in regional Australia. However, this should not come at the expense of the important services provided by SBS to the Australian community, which build cultural understanding and social cohesion.

⁷ The *Communications Legislation Amendment (SBS Advertising Flexibility and Other Measures) Bill 2015* was defeated in the Senate and the *Communications Legislation Amendment (SBS Advertising Flexibility) Bill 2017* was withdrawn by the Government, resulting in an ongoing shortfall to SBS base funding.