

Subject: Committee submission
Date: Sunday, 20 January 2013 4:00:23 PM

I wish to make a submission to the Senate committee on:

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's commitment to reflecting and representing regional diversity

The recent clearly apparent trend towards changing the broadcast output of the ABC TV to make it similar to and presumably more competitive with the commercial channels has reduced regional representation and diversity. The repetitive programming of overseas game shows such as QI (on most weeknights on ABC1) and the downgrading of formerly strong current affairs programs such as 7:30 by introducing "Shockjock" style stories has rendered the main ABC channel indistinguishable from the popular commercial channels. While the reporters chasing defaulting land agents or builders might claim their stories are local in character, those stories are not presented in any attempt to reflect or illustrate regional diversity and they could easily have been lifted from any commercial archive footage over the last twenty years with just a few name changes here and there. Panel shows such as The Drum are aimed at the youth humour market that is conventional fodder for commercial TV. Such lowbrow programming might increase viewership but it crowds out proper journalism on important regional issues. The centralising of production away from some state ABC studios means that regional issues such as access to healthcare and services, occupational health and workplace safety and provision of regional infrastructure receive scant attention. Issues such as the impact of mining on farming land only become important enough to mention when they impinge upon the centralised big business of the eastern states. This was seen in the recent fraudulent press release scandal where the protestors were almost never reported on until the scandal broke and affected the share markets. It concerns me that an additional driver for centralisation and limiting the diversity of program sourcing may be political bias in the senior management directed towards maintaining control over coverage of some contentious issues. The recent Ashby/Slipper/Brough case resulted in virtually no coverage of the issue related to the regional electorate concerned and instead focussed on the same "bread and butter" as the highly biased News Ltd press. This can easily have resulted not from overt pressure but simply as a direct follow on from removal of regional ABC staff and production facilities.

I submit that the current management of the ABC is engaged in a process of steadily eroding the abilities of their staff to present high quality TV coverage of current regional issues and in that manner are failing to reflect and represent regional diversity. I do not claim that the same criticism applies to ABC radio where in my opinion local stations still provide adequate representation.

Regards

Peter Haigh

