



South Australian Film Corporation

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
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Parliament House ACT 2600
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Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: INQUIRY INTO RECENT ABC PROGRAMMING DECISIONS

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on behalf of the South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC).

The SAFC is the lead screen agency in South Australia. Since its inception in 1972, the SAFC has supported hundreds of hours of feature film, documentary, TV drama and digital media production – first as a producer in its own right and more recently as an investor and facilitator.

The current mission of the SAFC is to empower the South Australian production industry to achieve success. The SAFC views itself as a partner with the local independent filmmaking sector, supporting the development of local creative talent, as well as investing in production that brings both creative and economic outcomes to the state.

The SAFC regards the ABC as a vital production partner, both in terms of its role as a commissioner and broadcaster, but also as a co-producing investor. In recent years, the SAFC has invested in numerous projects that have either been co-productions with the ABC or have been produced independently and subsequently screened on the national broadcaster.

These include documentaries such as *What the Future Sounded Like*, *Connected by Light*, *Casualties of War*, as well as Gillian Armstrong's recent acclaimed feature film *Love Lust and Lies*. Over the past few weeks SAFC-supported 2011 Sydney Film Festival Best Documentary, *Life in Movement*, which traces the life and work of dancer Tanja Liedtke, has been acquired by ABC.

The SAFC has also recently entered into a dedicated joint production initiative with the ABC, the FACTory. This initiative is designed to not only create an engaging factual entertainment series, but to develop a number of local South Australian production companies, and provide important professional development opportunities for independent film practitioners that they would otherwise not have access to without having to leave the state.

Finally, the SAFC and ABC have recently partnered on children's television, including the award-winning animations *Figaro Pho* and *Horace in Slow Motion*. In August, the SAFC

announced that the first series of the ABC-supported teen program *Resistance* would shoot in Adelaide from late 2011.

At a fundamental level, this represents a dramatic increase in the ABC's involvement with the state's local production sector which has been extremely welcome. The increased engagement of the ABC, along with other public and commercial television entities, is vital to continue the development of South Australian screen practitioners, from crew to key creative levels – and to ensure that the state continues to contribute to the national cultural conversation. What is equally important to note, however, is the diversity and quality of this slate of productions, and the extent to which they all contribute in a positive way to the ABC's charter.

In regards to the specific terms of reference of the review the SAFC would like to make the following points:

- It is important that the ABC maintains a national production presence throughout Australia, in order to ensure that there is the greatest possible diversity of creative ideas being generated, produced and ultimately viewed by Australian audiences, and that new generations of creative talent from across the country have opportunities for professional development;
- The ABC must ensure that it makes the appropriate internal resourcing decisions to ensure that the maximum amount, be it in-house or external, is spent on the development and production of this national programming slate;
- While there is a valid argument that certain content, such as news and current affairs, must be produced in-house to ensure its integrity and independence, this is not the case for a range of other programming types that comprise the ABC's television schedule. This includes programs from children's drama through to factual and documentary, entertainment, arts and variety, through to comedy and high end drama.
- Forty years ago, there was a legitimate view that the independent sector did not have the capacity to produce a high quantity of programs at the appropriate standard for the ABC. However, the scale and capacity of the independent sector has dramatically increased since this time. Australian independent production companies have proved that they have both the creative and technical capacity to produce such programming for the ABC;
- The ABC's core business is broadcasting – rather than those activities that have *supported* its broadcasting role (such as internal production and the provision of production facilities) – and it has a responsibility to maximise its resources to ensure that it is able to broadcast the greatest quantity of quality Australian programs that fit its charter. Working with the independent sector creates an opportunity for the ABC to leverage significant external funding to achieve this;
- The ABC does not necessarily need to make programs in-house in order to guarantee their creative, editorial and technical integrity. ABC management has an integral editorial role to play to ensure that its programs meet its charter, and this need not be compromised by commissioning from the independent sector. It would be difficult to argue against the contention that most of the ABC's best Australian programs made over the past twenty years have been generated and commissioned from the independent sector;
- The ABC does not need to create and produce programs internally to retain a share in the intellectual property rights of the programs that it commissions. As mentioned previously, the core role of the ABC is to broadcast programs that meet its charter, rather than to generate intellectual property from its programs for ongoing

commercial exploitation. Nonetheless, the ABC is always able to negotiate rights returns from any program that it invests in, and does so as normal practice;

- It is worth noting that the BBC has moved increasingly towards the commissioning model, and has developed a charter that in fact enshrines a minimum level of independent production through the public broadcaster. This has been done for not only budget reasons, but also because of an understanding that this could foster diversity in ideas and program creation as well as help sustain and build the independent sector. It is important to recognise that this has in no way been seen to have undermined the independence or the integrity of the BBC.

The ABC is a leading player in Australia's media landscape, and plays a central role in both our democratic debate as well as our national cultural conversation. It is important that the ABC remains a strong and robust broadcaster in what is a rapidly changing communications environment;

The ABC will continually be grappling with its limited resources to determine how to best meet its charter and continue to be relevant and resonant in an increasingly crowded media space. However, within this changing world, it is even more important that the national broadcaster focuses on its core obligations as a broadcaster, and maximizes its resources to ensure that Australian audiences can access the highest quality programming across its schedules that inform, educate and entertain. Whether this means that programs should be made internally or in co-production with the independent sector is a matter for ABC management to determine.

The SAFC looks forward to partnering with the ABC in the future, and to further developing the South Australian production sector, so that our state's creative talent can continue to be showcased on a national stage.

I trust that this submission proves useful to your thinking. I would be more than willing to discuss this submission in person with your committee.

Yours sincerely

Richard Harris
Chief Executive Officer