

To the Senate Inquiry into recent ABC programming decisions.

(a) the implications of this decision on the ABC's ability to create, produce and own its television content, particularly in the capital cities of Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart;

There has been a steady brain drain through all the years of the cuts at the ABC. Redundancies have been paid out at expense to taxpayer over and over again to arrive at a position where the ABC sources its programs from the external sector at greater cost to taxpayers than if they were produced in house. Is that value for money?

(b) the implications of this decision on Australian film and television production in general and potential impact on quality and diversity of programs;

The ABC has become more dry and boring with the drift toward cheaper programming and away from in house quality drama. We are subjected to more news and current affairs: News, 730, Lateline, Lateline Business, Business Today, Q&A, Insiders, News Breakfast, News 24, BTN, BTN news on 3, BTN extra, The Consumer Quarter, The Food Quarter, The Drum, Newline with Jim Middleton, live news crosses that interrupt the regular schedule at whim. The innovative and entertaining shows of the past belong to a bygone era now.

With its off the shelf purchased programmes the characteristics that differentiated their own from the commercials' fare are now indistinguishable. After all, an independent producer still needs to think about other markets for these programs that the ABC buys such as Foxtel etc. and so, during their production, gear them towards commercial sale - not just towards an ABC audience.

I am concerned that my future ABC viewing will contain more bought in programs from the BBC and Thames Television starring Stephen Fry, Graham Norton and Steven Ross. And if I miss them I can always catch them again on ABC 2. I can feel myself glazing over at the thought. Perhaps I can find a repackaged program on Compass that might be interesting but it's probably only a 50-50 chance.

The ABC seems to be terrified to take a risk and try and produce another SeaChange. After making numerous dodgy programs such as Dog's Head Bay they would rather not take the risk and if some medium level quality drama like Crownies doesn't quite hit the mark then they can blame the independent producer and move on.

(c) whether a reduction in ABC-produced programs is contrary to the aims of the National Regional Program Initiative;

I don't have any issue with the ABC axing programs for renewal. Nor can I have any problem with them axing staff for budgetary reasons. But to use the one as a smokescreen for the other smacks of disingenuousness. Also, it treats its viewers as fools. As the ABC continues to get increased funding on a regular basis the real purpose of retrenching staff is obvious - it is a philosophical belief of the ABC to close down internal production. In the regions outside Melbourne and Sydney all other networks have closed down all their production except news. The ABC is heading in the same direction even though they currently have staff whose talents could be utilised at lower cost and better value than could be obtained outside.

(d) the implications of these cuts on content ownership and intellectual property;

It would seem obvious that the ABC can not capitalise on valuable secondary markets for their programs if they don't own the rights. That seems to be insane in the media hungry world of multiple television channel markets worldwide.

(e) the impact of the ABC's decision to end internal production of Bananas in Pyjamas and to outsource the making of a 'Bananas in Pyjamas' animation series to Southern Star Endemol Proprietary Limited; and

Maybe the Bananas have reached their expiry date?

(f) the future potential implications of these cuts on ABC television's capacity to broadcast state league football and rugby; and

Sports broadcasting is relatively cheap coverage given the number of hours of air time a live game can fill. It is also the only outlet for fans of their local sporting code. I do not wish to watch rugby league games any more than New South Welshmen and Queenslanders want to watch Australian rules football.

(g) any other related matters.

The Charter should be examined and the ABC's activities should be compared to the expectations contained in the charter.

People outside the organisation should be called to give evidence as to whether the ABC is meeting its charter obligations or not rather than accepting the word of the ABC Managing Director and his Managers.

The ABC should be audited and compared to other successful public broadcaster models. The BBC would logically be a similar and successful organisation. How do they do it? How much internal production do they commission? What ratio do they set of internal and external production? Should the ABC be made to set a fixed level of internal production based around the country so that a transparency test can be applied to the ABC's activities? At present that would seem not to be the case.

Should the ABC be concerned with ratings? Perhaps there should be some other measure. These days it wouldn't be hard to use social media and/or web based surveys to determine the actual perceived quality of programs rather than numbers of an audience. Perhaps it is time to be innovative in how we define the ABC's success. Maybe the results would be surprising.