

This Inquiry covers a small part of the ground I would hope will be covered by the Convergence Review, due for release March 2012. I hope the members of these two committees talk to each other, and that their separate recommendations do not conflict.

General comments

I can only assume that the ABC has announced these cuts because it is running out of money. After all, it announced the removal of a popular program, *The Inventors* and within a week started screening a cheap and nasty-looking English production, *The Next Best Thing*, which covers much the same ground – the manufacture of new products. This makes no sense unless they were virtually given *The Next Best Thing* for free. If the ABC is to provide a continuous stream of quality, relevant and appropriate programs on all matters of interest and importance to Australians it must be funded adequately.

Yes, the ABC may have over-reached itself by launching News24 and the various new on-line platforms before getting appropriate funding for these projects. While setting up these new ventures, the staff have been tweeting and blogging and doing all the cutting, pasting and reformatting required for News 24, and doing more with less in overseas postings. Staff must be at breaking point. Yet they are rewarded with sackings! Fund the ABC adequately.

Terms of Reference

(a) Ability to create, produce and own its television content; location of production facilities (separate issues)

The ABC is apparently trying to sell production studios, presumably to make some money. But if productions are out-sourced, I understand the ABC loses its right to royalties. Surely it is better to produce in-house and sell books, CDs and DVDs of programs. To jeopardise this income stream only makes economic sense if the ABC is planning to push the price of commercial productions well below what in-house productions cost. The Committee should consider what happened to the BBC when they went down a similar path before supporting this. For details of the British experience see Georgina Born's *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC (2004)*.

I want the ABC to continue, or rather, return to making high quality programs using staff employed by the ABC. Sacking staff leads to loss of corporate memory and the repetition of old mistakes; temporary staff are often sycophantic, hoping thus to keep their jobs whereas long term employees, if given the freedom to stretch themselves, have huge commitment to the organisation they serve. The quality and output of loyal ABC staff is testament to that.

(b) see above.

© The Regional Development Australia Fund was created to develop localism in Australia. The ABC seems hell-bent on centralising, but maybe they are just trying to balance the books. Could they access funds from the RDAF for some of the excellent new regional initiatives on ABC Open? This would keep jobs in the regions, strengthen regional self confidence and even lead to more jobs and industries.

(d) Other English speaking countries, eg NZ and Canada, are already addressing this very important issue. We can learn from them.

(e) See (a) re outsourcing. Personally, I think the animated Bananas are bland and boring, yet another example of the disneyfication of childhood. Parents will just have to work harder to counter the narrowing of childhood experiences. Animation can be wonderful, but not when it's cheap and nasty.

(f) I am not interested in Roman circus-type sports events, but in principle I think all sports, not just football and rugby, should be covered by the public broadcaster. Then it would be only reasonable for the arts to be given the same amount of time.

Born, Georgina *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC* (2004)

Edgar, David What are We Telling the Nation? [Essay about *Uncertain Vision...*: and *Building Public Value: Renewing the BBC for a Digital World*] **London Review of Books** v27(13) 7 July 2005