

**The decision by the television management of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) to significantly cut the number and amount of ABC-produced programs, jobs (including through forced redundancies) and potentially affect resources, as announced on 2 August 2011, with particular reference to:**

***(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;***

The ABC has entered into an agreement with ScreenWest for a \$1.6million initiative aimed at developing original ideas for a series of factual programs, to be produced out of Western Australia, and to air on ABC1 and ABC2 in prime-time. 16 x half hour programs are to be produced.

This has come at the cost of 40 x half hour ABC Internally produced programs such as "Can We Help". The axing of Can We Help resulted in the loss of ongoing jobs and the cost of processing redundancies for staff.

The WA State Government looks at the benefits of the agreement in terms of creating employment in WA over one year, they are blind to the fact that the agreement has resulted in ABC Staff in WA with ongoing jobs over many years have lost those jobs. This will have a negative effect on the TV Production Industry in Western Australia for many years as those ABC Jobs have been lost forever. The ABC in WA will be less capable to provide skilled and experienced staff to programs as a result.

This scenario can be applied to any such agreement with any state or federal based Film & TV Funding Agency.

Sure the TV Division has leveraged funds to make TV Programs, but what is the real cost?

***(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 is the largest TV Production House in Australia; in the past it was an institution that provided opportunities to learn skills and give up and coming artists a go. From such great shows as the "Big Gig" half a dozen Australian Comedians became household names, since then the opportunities have been gradually reducing.

The financing of Co-Productions and external productions rely on quality scripts, star performers and experienced production staff, if the project is not attractive to overseas sales it will not be granted finance.

The ABC should be providing opportunities for new talent and growing these into great performers and producers, just like they did for Andrew Denton in the 1990's.

Often these talented people move onto the commercial sector and become highly successful, just look at "Kath and Kim".

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

No Comment provided.

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

- The ABC should be seeking to maximise ownership of content and intellectual property. With the expansion of multiple digital channels it is the cheapest way to provide material fill by airing re-runs of popular programs at non peak times.
- By being able to sell the intellectual property the income is available for new productions. In 2001 programs sales by the ABC was \$6.4 million, ten years later and it's only \$6.8 million, yet in 2006 prior to the appointment of the current ABC MD and Director of TV it was \$10.7 million. Obviously there has been a concerted effort to reduce this substantial income in the past five years instead of growing.
- In the past few years the ABC closed down the award winning Natural History Production Unit based on the premise that it was too expensive to produce, in fact the sale of programs and library footage sales produced more income than the costs.

**(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**

No Comment provided.

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

Never mind the State based sports, what about National Based Programs like Lawn Bowls? The ABC has decided to drop the coverage of Lawn Bowls from 2012 onwards; no other Free to Air Broadcaster wants to cover Lawn Bowls. The only opportunity for the 500,000 bowls players and the thousands of other interested viewers to watch bowls in 2012 will be on Pay TV, Foxtel. Lawn Bowls has been on ABC TV for thirty years, why cut it now? Obviously the programmers at the ABC are out of touch with their audience, it's a popular program but they have been airing the program at 5pm Saturdays, most bowlers are still on the green playing bowls at that time. The program is repeated at 3am, how is this going to assist the ABC in its quest to maximise ratings?

**(g) any other related matters.**

- Many of these decisions to make cuts to ABC Programs and to Internal ABC Production are being blamed on a drop in audience ratings and increasing ongoing financial pressure.
  - With the expansion of multiple free to air digital TV channels there has been a dilution of audience ratings for individual programs. There is no reduction of overall number of people watching TV (possibly the reverse) but there are more programs to watch at any given moment in time, the fixed number of viewers is spread over 4 channels and not one. It makes sense that the audience ratings for specific programs are dropping.
  - Audience Ratings are a measure of the popularity of a program, if the ABC set it's sights on producing TV Programs that compete with commercial broadcasters during prime time, we would be reduced to watching USA based forensic dramas, cooking, competition and renovating shows ad nauseam. These shows are already oversaturated on the commercial free to air channels; the ABC should be concentrating on providing content for viewers related to their interests in the Australian culture.
  - If Audience numbers are dropping it would make sense to take a look at the cause before reacting, has anybody looked at the executives calling the shots for Arts Programs at the ABC? Are they out of touch with their audience or subject matter?
  - It should be determined how many extra administrative and in particular Senior Executive staff have been accumulated in the TV Division of the ABC over the past five years during the terms of the current Director of TV and ABC MD? If these staff were not engaged the overheads of that division would be significantly less and the increasing financial pressures would not exist.

**End of Submission.**