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Blind Citizens Australia

Blind Citizens Australia submission: Comments to the Senate Inquiry into the BSA (Improved Access to TV services) Bill



About Blind Citizens Australia: Who we are and why we say what we say

Blind Citizens Australia is unique in that our organisation is solely made up of and represents people who are blind or vision impaired. All of our Board of Directors, our committees and our Executive Officer are required by our Constitution to be a person who is blind or vision impaired. Many of our staff are also vision impaired. We have over 3000 members around Australia who are all people who experience blindness – whether they be a parent, professional, job seeker, volunteer or student. This is why we are best placed to comment on the specialist needs of people who are blind or vision impaired.

We are driven by our mission to achieve equity and equality by our empowerment, by promoting positive community attitudes and by striving for high quality and accessible services which meet our needs.

Comments to the Inquiry

Blind Citizens Australia welcomes the opportunity to make comment to the Senate Inquiry to the Broadcasting Services Act (Improved Access to TV Services) draft Bill. We do however note that the turnaround for comments has been extremely short which may limit the capacity of small organisations and disability consumer groups like our own to provide significant comment on the content of the draft Bill.

As the Bill relates predominantly to captioning standards for people who are deaf or hearing impaired, Blind Citizens Australia is not in a position to make comment on the specific recommendations relating to captioning. Blind Citizens Australia would however like to make the following observations and comments:

Blind Citizens Australia is very supportive of the recognition and inclusion of access services, such as captioning, within the Broadcasting Services Act. We believe that this is an important inclusion which recognises the diverse needs of users of broadcasting services.

As Committee members of the Inquiry may be aware, the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy announced a technical trial of audio description which will commence in August 2012 on ABC1. Audio description provides a narrative of important visual information to television viewers who are blind or vision

impaired. Audio description is used to provide important information such as scenery, costuming and action in addition to reading on-screen printed information out loud.

Blind Citizens Australia is hopeful that the outcomes of the ABC1 technical trial will lead to the greater provision of audio description on commercial television and the development of standards and guidelines, similar to those proposed for captioning within the BSA, to ensure greater access to broadcasting by people who are blind or vision impaired.

Blind Citizens Australia is also optimistic that the draft Bill, if adopted, will provide a good foundation for similar quotas to be prescribed for the provision of audio description in the future. Blind Citizens Australia views the inclusion of minimum requirements, with measurable targets that are strictly regulated, within the BSA as a positive move forward.

For further information about broadcasting access for people who are blind or vision impaired, including our submissions to numerous media related reviews, please visit: www.bca.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=46&Itemid=50 in the section titled 'Recent Submissions'.

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This submission is available in large print, audio, Braille and in electronic formats for access by people who are blind or vision impaired.