

Committee Secretariat
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
Via e-mail: fadt.sen@aph.gov.au



7 October 2021

Dear Committee Secretariat

SBS submission – Australia's engagement in Afghanistan

SBS appreciates the opportunity to provide its submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee inquiry into Australia's engagement in Afghanistan. SBS's submission focuses on journalism relating to Afghanistan, and services provided for Afghan communities in Australia.

I. SBS provides trusted, balanced, and reliable news and information across Australia

SBS reaches almost 100 percent of the Australian population. Its provision of news and information in relation to Afghanistan is part of its broad range of broadcast and digital media offerings, providing accurate, balanced and impartial content on relevant policy matters (such as immigration and foreign affairs) affecting the Australian community.

Providing Australians with accurate and impartial information contributes to a successful functioning of democracy. According to Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, SBS is the most trusted network when compared to Australia's commercial broadcasters.¹ An SBS-conducted survey in early 2021 also indicated that SBS is the most trusted media organisation amongst Australia's multicultural audiences.²

SBS news and information offerings include the suite of SBS services in more than 60 languages, including the [SBS Dari](#) and [SBS Pashto](#) services, the two most commonly-spoken languages among Afghan communities in Australia. Both can be accessed via live radio broadcast (two hours each per week) and podcasts; online via their dedicated websites³; the [SBS Radio app](#); and social media. In providing these services, bilingual SBS journalists engage with the local communities they serve in Australia, as well as their contacts overseas, including for the provision of news from Afghanistan to the Australian audiences. **Recently, SBS has also increased its investment in both the SBS Dari and SBS Pashto services**, in response to the communities' growing needs (see further below in [IV](#)).

SBS's English language news and current affairs teams also play a distinct role in bringing the biggest global stories to the Australian audience. Relevantly, *SBS World News* has provided extensive coverage of recent events in Afghanistan, including an extended interview⁴ with Taliban spokesperson Ahmadullah Wasiq in September 2021, the result of collaboration with SBS Pashto. *SBS World News* is available via daily national bulletins, and twenty-four hours a day online via its dedicated [website](#), [SBS News mobile app](#), and [SBS On Demand](#) catchup and streaming platform. *SBS Dateline* continues to produce compelling stories with an international affairs focus, such as *Escape from Afghanistan*⁵ in September 2021. *SBS The Feed* regularly

¹ Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021 available here:

https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Digital_News_Report_2021_FINAL.pdf

² SBS information, online survey, 2021, n = 5405, all participants

³ SBS Pashto website: sbs.com.au/dari; SBS Dari website: sbs.com.au/pashto

⁴ Interview by Anna Henderson – SBS Chief Political Correspondent, in cooperation with Abdullah AliKhil – SBS Pashto Executive Producer, available here: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/extended-interview-with-taliban-spokesperson-ahmadullah-wasiq/089d45b0-485d-4ef7-892a-be19bec3fdd6>

⁵ Available at <https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/video/1940648515689/dateline-s2021-ep24-escape-from-afghanistan>

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produces short content series and investigations, such as *Surviving Taliban Ambush: Afghan Interpreter shot alongside Australian Army*⁶ earlier in September 2020.

II. SBS content is also valued overseas, including in Afghanistan

In accordance with the SBS Charter, SBS provides services predominantly for the Australian audiences.

However, some SBS content is accessed through digital platforms overseas, including in Afghanistan⁷, demonstrating the demand for balanced, high quality news and information of editorial quality⁸, and value to audiences. This also demonstrates SBS's strong relationships and trust with the communities—resulting in community members, in Australia and overseas, entrusting SBS to bring their stories to the world, and sharing them with relatives and contacts overseas. Overseas consumption of SBS services is a consequential benefit of its work serving Australian audiences—Australia's reputation is strengthened when these audiences share the trusted information, entertainment and education they have gained from SBS with the world.

A key example is an article *لحظه شماری تا مرگ: ترجمانان رد شده توسط آسترالیا از انتقام طالبان در هراس هستند*⁹ (*Counting down to death: Interpreters rejected by Australia fear Taliban reprisals*¹⁰), in which Afghan interpreters spoke directly of their experiences to the SBS Dari service. This article was SBS Dari's top article by audience consumption, both in Australia and overseas during August and September 2021. In that two-month period, it received more than 23,000 Australian unique visitors (UVs), and more than 28,000 international UVs.

While the *Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991* (the **SBS Act**) requires that SBS provides its services to all Australians, SBS noted in a public submission¹¹ in October 2018 to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's *Soft Power Review* that there was scope to provide bespoke services to overseas audiences.

'While SBS is not required by its Charter to provide services internationally, SBS would welcome the opportunity to provide additional services outside Australia.'¹²

III. For more than 45 years, SBS has served Australian communities in their preferred languages, including in relation to supporting successful settlement

Further to the SBS Pashto and SBS Dari services, SBS also provides services in other languages spoken by Afghan communities in Australia, including [SBS Persian](#), [SBS Urdu](#) and [SBS Hindi](#) services.

Through these services, SBS supports new arrivals from Afghanistan as well as established communities, second and third generation migrants, and the elderly—by providing services that help enable social, civic and economic participation and build social cohesion.

⁶ Available at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=790390668384310>

⁷ According to SBS's internal audience analyses.

⁸ SBS has robust editorial standards and controls in place, including the SBS Code of Practice (the **SBS Code**, available [here](#)), and the SBS Editorial Guidelines (the **Guidelines**, available [here](#)). All SBS staff receive regular training on their obligations. Information about the SBS Code is publicly available in a range of languages to ensure that audiences are aware of the standards and the complaints processes. Complaints relevant to the SBS Code are independently investigated by the SBS Ombudsman, and complainants dissatisfied with the SBS Ombudsman's decisions can apply to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (the **ACMA**), for further investigation.

⁹ (in Dari language) at <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/dari/counting-down-to-death-interpreters-rejected-by-australia-fear-taliban-reprisals>

¹⁰ (in English language) at <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/counting-down-to-death-interpreters-rejected-by-australia-fear-taliban-reprisals>

¹¹ SBS submission to *Soft Power Review* available at <https://www.sbs.com.au/aboutus/soft-power-review>

¹² As above

All of the abovementioned language services provide content for the [SBS Settlement Guide](#)¹³, which now includes 51 content packages—on topics ranging from navigating the Australian healthcare system, job-searching, to finding support services, among many other settlement topics. This content is available in 55 languages, in the form of more than 1,500 articles, radio segments, and podcasts.

For example, the Summer Safety series offers crucially important information about staying safe amid typical Australian hazards and crises, covering everything from bushfires to water safety, and is available in Pashto language [here](#), and in Dari language [here](#).

Moreover, there are ten settlement topics produced in video format, available in more than 20 languages. The first videos were published to accompany the premiere of SBS series *See What You Made Me Do* in mid-2021, explaining the issues of domestic abuse and coercive control. These videos in the [Dari](#)¹⁴ and [Pashto](#)¹⁵ languages have received high numbers of views¹⁶, of more than 14,000 and 4,000 respectively.

IV. SBS has increased its investment in content that assists new arrivals from Afghanistan and their families

SBS is in regular contact with settlement agencies and services across Australia who have recently re-confirmed to SBS that information in-language for new arrivals from Afghanistan is critically important. Through these settlement services, SBS has provided induction packs to new migrants, with information on how to listen to and engage with SBS's services, including the Settlement Guide, in their language.

Since August 2021, SBS has increased its investment in the SBS Dari and SBS Pashto services in response to recent arrivals and the communities' growing needs. This includes the following.

Phase I (commenced since the seizure of Kabul in August – through to 4 October 2021):

- Additional 30 hours of content production for more updates on developing situations in Afghanistan, in both languages; these are of immediate importance to new the arrivals, families, friends, and loved ones.

Phase II (4 October 2021 – 27 December 2021, 12 weeks):

- Additional 16 hours of Settlement Guide content production per week, for specific content curated for new arrivals from Afghanistan, in both languages.
- Topics include jobs, housing, schools, religious freedom, Australia's political system, how to buy a car, and many more.

SBS would be interested in exploring opportunities to play an even greater role in supporting Afghan communities in Australia, and increasing awareness of the services it currently provides. Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

James Taylor
Managing Director

¹³ SBS Settlement Guide available at <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/settlement-guide>

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/SBSDari/videos/316576323217129/>

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/PashtoSBS/videos/527392008277985/>

¹⁶ When compared to the number of speakers of these languages in Australia, last recorded officially in the 2016 Australian Census—Dari speakers = 30,437; Pashto speakers = 9,233.