



Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck
Chair, Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: fpa.sen@aph.gov.au

24 April 2023

Dear Chair,

Inquiry into the administration of the referendum into an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice

SBS welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee's Inquiry into the administration of the referendum into an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice (the **Inquiry**).

This submission sets out the ways in which SBS will support the administration of the referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution through an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice (the **Referendum**).

SBS's unique role in supporting civic participation in the Referendum

As Australia's multicultural, multilingual and Indigenous free-to-air broadcaster, SBS is uniquely placed to provide credible, trustworthy, inclusive, balanced and independent news and information services which meet the communications needs of Australia's First Nations and multicultural communities.

On the Road to Referendum, SBS will be an invaluable source of accurate news and information about the issues—reaching Australian audiences in more than 60 languages.

Coverage will encompass three main elements – the **news of the day**, ensuring an **array of perspectives**, and providing **explainers** to ensure that all Australians can understand and participate in the Referendum in an informed way. As a public broadcaster, SBS will not be taking an editorial position on the Referendum, in line with our obligations to provide balanced and impartial coverage.

SBS is the home of National Indigenous Television (**NITV**), the only national multiplatform media service made by, for, and about First Nations peoples. No other news outlet will provide the same breadth of perspectives on the Referendum from an Indigenous point of view. Solidifying its unique position in the Australian media landscape, NITV reaches close to 2 million people a month on TV,¹ has growing prime-time audiences, and is investing in its digital offerings with impressive growth in traffic to its website. This performance is driven by an NITV team which includes around 80 per cent Indigenous staff—representing Nations from across the continent—led by an all-Indigenous senior editorial leadership team.

NITV News: Nula coverage and *Living Black* will be prominent among NITV's cross-platform offerings. *Living Black* premiered its 20th season on air on 17 April 2023 with a program covering a range of perspectives on the Referendum from prominent First Nations peoples, and as set out below, panel discussions on *The Point* will be destination viewing.

***The Point's* Road to Referendum content strategy**

- NITV's current affairs program, *The Point*, will be completely focussed on the Referendum this year.

¹ 1.8m; source: OzTAM + RegTAM FTA Database, NITV, 13/12/2020-30/06/2021 + 12/12/2021-30/06/2022, Combined Average Audiences, Sun-Sat, 1800-2400, Total Individuals, Consolidated.

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- The program will be the destination for First Nations perspectives, providing analysis and facilitating debates from all sides of the national conversation.
- The program returns Tuesday May 30th at 7:30 pm on NITV (10:30pm on SBS) and will be on air every Tuesday until the Referendum. *The Point* will broadcast a special program on the evening of the vote, and a number of Referendum-themed programs following announcement of the result.
- Importantly, in the lead-up to the vote, *The Point* will be taking the conversation out of Canberra and into our communities, taking the show on the road to **every state and territory** with outside broadcasts of the program.
- NITV is working through community consultations on the locations of the outside broadcasts and expects to broadcast from **more than 10 locations across the country** before Referendum day.

One of SBS's strengths is its ability to connect the world's oldest living continuous culture with our newest Australians. In the lead-up to the Referendum, *SBS World News*, *SBS News In Arabic* and *SBS News In Mandarin* will provide nightly television news coverage and explainers; and SBS Audio will provide audio news and explainers in multiple languages.

In more than 60 languages, SBS Audio's dedicated news and information services (via broadcast radio, the SBS Audio app, websites, and social media) are highly trusted among multilingual and multicultural communities in Australia. The services have close relationships with, and high awareness among the communities they serve (up to 96 per cent, in the case of Italian speakers surveyed²). The [SBS Settlement Guide](#) supports civic, economic, and social participation—from providing new arrivals with essential information such as how to participate in referenda and elections, to providing established communities with need-to-know information.

Coverage will include article, audio, and visual content across SBS Audio platforms to ensure multilingual audiences understand how referenda in Australia work, how they can participate in the vote if eligible, and help them make sense of the national conversation in their preferred language.

SBS will also consolidating this comprehensive coverage with an audience facing web portal housing a rotating selection of Referendum articles and links to SBS On Demand, and a hand-curated shelf of Indigenous and Referendum related content hosted by SBS On Demand.

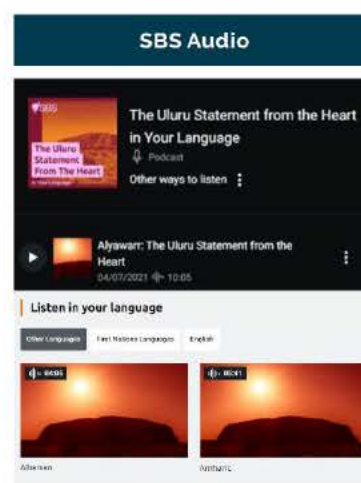
Referendum coverage is a priority across the SBS network



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² SBS's annual commissioning of McNair audience research.



Countering misinformation and disinformation

The Inquiry is considering protections against both foreign actors seeking to influence the outcome or public debate on the referendum question, and misinformation and disinformation.

SBS's provision of high-quality news and information in English and more than 60 languages, including through its significant online and social media presence, is extremely important in countering misinformation and disinformation—including from foreign actors.

SBS is a key online publisher across its suite of websites and apps, and on multiple social media platforms, with more than 120 active accounts. The quality of SBS content, distributed under the trusted SBS brand, ensures that Australian audiences have access and choice in relation to news, information and analysis of current events. This includes content in relation to critical matters such as our democratic processes and referenda. Distribution of this trusted content is vital to mitigating the risk posed by disinformation and misinformation also distributed by others on social media.

All SBS content, including content produced in languages other than English by our team of bilingual journalists, is subject to the SBS Code of Practice, which commits to strong editorial standards in relation to matters such as accuracy, impartiality and balance.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit to the Inquiry. If you would like any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Clare O'Neil
Director, Corporate Affairs