

A broader inquiry is required to determine a more effective role of the ABC's New Inventors program

It is with regret I have learned about the sudden decision of the ABC to drop the 'New Inventors' program while on a business trip to Brazil to negotiate the further development of an Australian invention developed by our company Biosystems Engineering in partnership with the Future Farm Industries Cooperative Research Centre (FFICRC).

Our company was established in 1999 with the purpose of inventing technology for the agricultural, forestry and energy industries. During this time we have developed approximately 40 different inventive designs for Australian and International clients. Recently, we have changed our business model to co-invest in the development of technologies, such as the continuous mallee tree harvester in partnership with the FFICRC and co-funded by the WA Governments Low Emissions Energy Development fund.

The news is disappointing as we were going on the New Inventors to feature our new harvesting invention that will form one of the most important technology gaps of a new efficient eucalyptus biomass supply chain for the purpose of renewable energy. Taking away a platform for presenting our invention at a critical time when we are seeking venture capital adds another level of difficulty in the pursuit of a pathway to market.

During my 12 years as Managing Director of Biosystems Engineering, I have witnessed Australian society, helped by programs such as the ABC's New Inventors, develop a culture of awareness and self praise at our ability to invent. While our ability to invent is real, the culture to support and nurture inventions through to commercialisation, especially at a small scale level, is grossly insufficient.

Given this deficiency to nurture good ideas to the finish line, Australia is creating a significant opportunity cost in revenue from the export of intellectually property.

In response to this lack of culture to nurture small scale inventors, our company has been searching around the world for a more proactive environment to invent and commercialise. Given our technology specifically relates to eucalyptus Bioenergy feedstock production and Brazil's aggressive research into such renewable energy programs, Biosystems Engineering has decided to move its operations to Sao Paulo, Brazil and largely close down one of the very few private Agricultural Engineering research businesses in Australia.

Basically, given the poor environment for exposing and supporting small scale intellectual property companies like ours, the decision to leave Australia is an easy one to make. The dumping of the New Inventors program just reaffirms our decision to leave Australia.

As a one-time participant on the New Inventors program, I can say from experience that this program is an important link between inventors like us and the public, including venture capitalists. It provides an important 'low-cost/large audience' platform to pitch our inventions to.

It appears that the decision to remove the show was based on a drop in viewer numbers. It is my view that this senate inquiry should question ABC management on whether they adequately polled

the audience to determine why audience attention has declined and whether they have explored all options regarding format and content of the program in response to such polling.

In my view, the New Inventors program has had a low threshold regarding the novelty and importance of some inventions. As a result, this can lower the overall credibility of the program. While I am not advocating that all less important inventions are screened and made inadmissible during the research phase, I do advocate that those inventions or ideas be presented in a less detailed format to give greater emphasis to those more novel inventions that will profoundly advance humanity.

In a broader sense, the inquiry should examine the mechanisms that would promote and assist the pathway to market for inventions. In this context, a more informed debate can be held on the importance on such shows like the New Inventors as part of a greater strategy for Australia to leverage more from its inventors.

Richard Sulman

Managing Director

Biosystems Engineering Pty Ltd