



Office of the Managing Director

8 April 2011

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration

jscm@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia

Thank you for providing SBS with the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry into multiculturalism in Australia.

SBS's submission is attached.

SBS would be pleased to brief the Committee should the opportunity arise.

If you require any further information please contact me (Tel: 02 9430 3813;
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Yours sincerely

Bruce Meagher
Acting Managing Director



SBS SUBMISSION

Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia

Introduction

SBS welcomes this opportunity to provide information to the Committee on multiculturalism in Australia and the role SBS plays.

SBS is Australia's multilingual and multicultural national broadcasting service. Our principal function, as set out in the SBS Charter, is to provide multilingual and multicultural radio and television services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians, and, in doing so, reflect and promote Australia's multicultural society. SBS broadcasts to a national television and radio audience and delivers content online on its website www.sbs.com.au.

Making a success of multiculturalism is vital for Australia today. Contemporary Australia is more culturally and linguistically diverse than ever and, whatever the actual settings of migration policy in the future, that trend is likely to continue. This increased diversity creates many opportunities, but it also introduces stresses and strains: a successful society requires continuous work.

Migrants coming to Australia must be able to participate effectively in Australian civic and economic life, to do so they must feel welcome and understand how to navigate social and governmental structures. Australians who have been here for longer periods must feel comfortable with, even embrace, diversity so that they can welcome and successfully interact with new arrivals. These are preconditions for a cohesive society.

Of course, multiculturalism offers much more than a means to maintain social cohesion. Successful multiculturalism implies a richer culture and a more outward looking society, able to embrace the challenges and opportunities of a globalised world. It offers economic benefits by ensuring migrants participate in the work force, bringing a wealth of cultural and linguistic skills, creating connections to other countries and economies and making Australia more attractive to skilled migrants and international students.

SBS believes that an inclusive and cohesive society requires ongoing work and commitment. These investments must include media which engage with diversity and bring the message of multiculturalism to all Australians. SBS is unique in the world. It has been a key plank in Australia's multicultural policy over 35 years and has strong bi-partisan and community support.



Six Billion Stories and counting...

Properly resourced it can play an even more significant role in building a successful, creative and dynamic society.

This paper responds to the Committee's Terms of Reference. It concludes with a more detailed consideration of the relationship between multiculturalism and social inclusion and SBS's role in and response to the social inclusion agenda.

Recommendations

- Multicultural and multilingual media should be recognised as central to social cohesion and social inclusion.
- SBS should be adequately funded to be able to respond to the increasing cultural and linguistic complexity of Australian society – this implies more services for new and growing language communities, and the ability to assist in language learning, including English for new migrants. The Virtual Community Centre pilot described in this paper is a powerful initiative that should be expanded.
- SBS should be adequately funded to provide local content across a range of platforms which reflects and gives voice to Australian diversity – this must now include online services, but also, critically, more original Australian television content that tells the story of multicultural Australia.
- SBS should be resourced and supported to pursue partnerships across the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) services sector to extend the reach and impact of SBS content and services. Collaborations between sectors with common investments in CALD communities' issues enable partners to achieve more than is possible working alone.

Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation

Cultural diversity is a reality in contemporary Australia. According to the ABS Census (2006), 24 per cent of Australians were born overseas, and more than 16 per cent speak a language other than English in the home. The Government's multicultural policy provides official recognition and assistance in the management and integration of this diversity into Australian civic life.

Multiculturalism provides a framework for service delivery and an endorsement of two-way integration – in which society overall invests in diversity as well as obliging citizens to adapt to overriding values and principles, such as the rule of law. It also describes a set of everyday practices in which Australians engage with diversity in their neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces.

In *The SBS Story* (2008) Ien Ang, Gay Hawkins and Lamia Dabboussy outlined three types or stages of multiculturalism: "ethno-multiculturalism", characterised by political agitation for rights and recognition; "cosmopolitan multiculturalism", encouraging openness to cultural diversity for all Australians; and "popular multiculturalism", diversity as an ordinary part of everyday life. Each of these coexist in contemporary multicultural society – access and equity gains of ethno-multiculturalism and the "celebrating diversity" frameworks of cosmopolitan multiculturalism are preconditions for popular multiculturalism.

Even though cultural diversity is now an accepted part of everyday life in Australia, we must not assume that social cohesion is a *fait accompli*.



The past decade has been a problematic time for Australian multiculturalism. Australia had no federal multicultural policy and the term “multiculturalism” and its policy frameworks appeared, until very recently, to have gone out of favour. Debates following the Government’s recent multicultural policy announcement (*The People of Australia*) reveal that some Australians now equate multiculturalism with the challenges to it: religious intolerance, concerns about “ghettoised” communities, difficulties in English language learning. These issues are, however, precisely the kinds of social concerns an inclusive policy framework can address.

“We tend to accept the fact of multiculturalism (some of us grudgingly) and yet we are constantly striving and struggling to adapt to its challenges and its opportunities.”

Recent Ipsos MacKay research on attitudes to immigration commissioned by SBS (Immigration Nation research) revealed that 62 per cent of Australians agree or strongly agree that Australia should be a multicultural society and that migrants have added to our society in positive ways (particularly in terms of food and greater cultural and social diversity). However, participants in this study expressed some confusion about the definition of the term. Analysis of the past 30 years of MacKay social research on attitudes to immigration and multiculturalism reveal that, as Australians, *“we tend to accept the fact of multiculturalism (some of us grudgingly) and yet we are constantly striving and struggling to adapt to its challenges and its opportunities”*.

More positively, the report highlighted that the significant concerns about multiculturalism throughout its various stages of development in Australia have not been borne out by history. However, this does not make the present reality of disquiet or uncertainty any less real. There must be constant effort to reinforce the value of diversity and, critically, this involves the creation of positive narratives and of a space for healthy and informed discussion.

SBS as a national public broadcaster has a crucial role in reflecting multicultural Australia: in hosting debates and commissioning and producing content exploring the challenges of diversity as well as showcasing its many benefits. Critically, SBS helps to identify issues and concerns before they become apparent in other media or society more generally.

Settlement and participation

Over the course of its 35 year history SBS has performed a number of inter related tasks in helping to make Australia’s multicultural society work. These have included assistance with settlement and cultural maintenance and providing crucial resources for participation.

Settlement

SBS Radio services offer a trusted, impartial news and information source in 68 community language programs. Recent research with Australia’s largest language communities found that SBS was a trusted source of news and information (SBS Top Six Languages Report 2008). These programs provide important information about local issues, Australian political structures and civic and social forms of engagement: from information on how to vote to coverage of local community events. They create a platform for government and settlement information, providing a crucial foundation for civic engagement, and also encourage interaction via talkback and web or mobile-based services.

Settlement and integration are far easier where culturally and linguistically appropriate services and connections are available in Australia.



SBS Radio's services, in particular, have long provided a significant resource for Australian language communities in settlement – creating links to services, employment, health and education. Programs provide Australian perspectives on local and international news and current affairs. This is a key distinction between SBS Radio and 'transnational' in-language media (satellite services from overseas), in-language community radio services which substantially rebroadcast 'homeland' content and overseas information sources accessed online.

The SBS Ipsos-McKay Immigration Nation research found that settlement and integration were far easier where culturally and linguistically appropriate services and connections were available in Australia. Far from creating distinct and disengaged 'ethnic enclaves', specialised services, media and active communities help migrants to more easily find points of connection into Australian life.

However, the limitations of bandwidth and funding have meant that SBS Radio services have not kept pace with the changing complexion of Australia's multicultural mix. The bandwidth constraints have disappeared with the advent of digital and online technologies. However, the funding limitations remain an obstacle to fully meeting the needs of many of the most needy communities.

Participation

SBS has a strong interest in social and civic participation, as well as mitigating the barriers to these. SBS believes the building blocks of participation – accessible media, relevant information, appropriate services, self-representation, exchange of views and engagement with public life – are crucially important to an inclusive democratic society. SBS notes that the Australian Multicultural Affairs Council's *People of Australia* report included the recommendation: *"That the government encourage participation in community life by all members of Australia's diverse population."* SBS supports this recommendation and emphasises that relevant, trusted and multilingual media are important resources for building participation.

SBS has recently piloted a Virtual Community Centre (VCC) to extend online its work in this area. A VCC is a social networking and news website featuring text, audio and video content. The pilot, launched in February 2011, aggregates SBS's current Mandarin and Cantonese content with new services and user-generated content capabilities. It also hosts *Mandarin News Australia* (also broadcast on SBS TWO),

SBS brings diverse voices together in one environment, with common reference points and clear editorial standards, where they can participate in a shared, trusted public space.

a locally-produced professional news service in Mandarin with an Australian perspective on current events. The VCC provides deeper engagement for audiences with a richer, integrated and interactive content experience and new

opportunities to articulate the concerns of Australian Chinese speaking communities. SBS is planning, pending funding, to roll out VCCs in other languages.

SBS supports social and civic participation in a range of ways: from radio talk-back to online forums; trusted coverage of local and international political issues; and information about community initiatives, cultural events and opportunities to vote, comment and contribute in a range of community languages.



National Productive Capacity

The Government's *People of Australia* policy notes that multiculturalism and cultural diversity give Australia a *"competitive edge in a globalised world"*. Connections between Australia's CALD communities and multiple homelands provide new trade and business opportunities for Australia. Multiculturalism and multilingualism advantage Australia with an essential set of 'soft' skills in a global economy – the cultural and linguistic skills of our population and workforce. SBS has an important role in linguistic and cultural maintenance – as well as keeping Australian communities in touch with the contemporary realities of their homeland cultures and political contexts.

Multiculturalism and multilingualism advantage Australia with an essential set of 'soft' skills in a global economy including cultural and linguistic competencies.

Relevant national multicultural and multilingual services support the geographic spread of migration settlement across Australia, including in smaller communities and towns dependent on migrant labour and skills, by fostering a greater sense of belonging which is inclusive of all Australians.

Furthermore, as Australia competes for skilled migration and for international students SBS is evidence of the inclusive nature of Australian society. Choices about where to migrate or go to university may be influenced by a range of factors including cultural comfort and access to culturally and linguistically appropriate services. This is not only a decision for the migrant or student but is also affected by the needs of partners and families.

The impact on the broader community of multicultural media – ensuring *all* Australians engage with cultural difference – generates acceptance of diversity (including workforce diversity) and makes Australians more open to difference and 'cosmopolitan' in their engagements with international partners.

SBS supports diverse communities to contribute to the local economy by contributing to effective settlement and providing useful resources for participation in the workforce and their own businesses. As well as business and finance information in multiple languages, SBS has ongoing partnerships with Centrelink and the Australian Tax Office (including information in language about the Australian tax system) and supports the Ethnic Business Awards and the Diversity @ Work program. SBS also has a direct sales team working with the Audio and Language Content division who assist ethnic businesses to market to target communities in multilingual services.

The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda

The SBS *Codes of Practice* which set out SBS's programming principles and policies state: *"SBS is for all Australians. Accordingly, SBS is committed to broadcasting programs that reflect a diversity of experiences, lifestyles, beliefs, cultures and languages across Australia."* This recognition and exploration of diversity fosters a more inclusive sense of belonging in Australia. The SBS Corporate Plan 2010-2013, acknowledges that the creation of an inclusive society is at the core of what SBS does. The Corporate Plan states that SBS's Purpose is: *"To inspire all Australians to explore and appreciate our multicultural world and contribute to an inclusive society."*



One of the most important preconditions to a harmonious, inclusive society is a sense of belonging: of feeling welcome and comfortable within our communities and of having a stake in national culture. Discrimination, racism and lack of trust all seriously inhibit the levels of mutual acceptance in society (*Connecting Diversity* 2006). Australians engage with diversity in our communities by building relationships, forging connections and developing an understanding of one another – the everyday ‘work’ of social inclusion. SBS content explores and supports the many ways Australians (particularly culturally and linguistically diverse Australians) find to belong in Australia.

SBS understands that there are many ways of belonging in Australia – a sense of belonging can be forged through social networks, religious communities, sporting clubs or other cultural affinities and can shift and change in different contexts. SBS explores and reflects many of these connections and relationships through a range of content, including locally produced drama such as *East West 101* and *The Circuit*, lighter programming such as *Nerds FC* and *My Family Feast* and, increasingly, through online engagement. Research into SBS drama with respondents from a range of cultural backgrounds found that audiences use SBS to negotiate their responses to cultural difference and learn more about other cultural groups (Entertainment Insights 2008). The report stated:

SBS’s Purpose is: *“To inspire all Australians to explore and appreciate our multicultural world and contribute to an inclusive society.”*

The cultural diversity messages of the case study programs, *East West 101* and *The Circuit*, were seen as potent and necessary. The stories and the multicultural content were key elements in capturing many of the participants’ engagement with the program. Both programs were recognised as presenting a different and more balanced perspective on Muslim and Indigenous issues, perspectives perceived to be largely absent from our commercial screens. People reported that the programs made them think about issues more deeply than they did previously. They believe SBS programs such as *East West 101* and *The Circuit* are vital in promoting a more culturally inclusive Australian society. By imbuing TV content with the same cultural diversity we see when we walk in our own neighbourhoods, our focus group participants told us this definitely had the potential to become a force for social change – it could achieve awareness, acceptance and tolerance of cultural diversity if that cultural diversity was part of our daily viewing consumption.

SBS believes a greater emphasis on the relationship between cultural diversity and social inclusion is essential to the impact of the Government’s Social Inclusion Agenda. The relevance of multiculturalism to the Social Inclusion Agenda’s key principles is outlined below, along with SBS’s priorities and strategies in each of these areas:

- **Building on individual and community strengths:** The Government’s social inclusion principles endorse *“recognising the varied and positive contributions of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds”* as an important feature of the social inclusion approach. SBS’s Charter obliges SBS to be a key catalyst for this recognition via a remit to *“increase awareness of the contribution of a diversity of cultures to the continuing development of Australian society”* – a priority for SBS content on all platforms.
- **Building partnerships with key stakeholders:** Organisations engaged with the CALD sector in Australia require effective collaboration between local communities, state and federal agencies and relevant like-minded organisations to promote effective outcomes. SBS has initiated a new Outreach program working with relevant partners with a common investment in themes of major SBS content initiatives. These include, for example, partnerships with the Refugee Council and Amnesty International on resources for



schools tied into the broadcast of the innovative experiential documentary *Go Back to Where You Came From* and Refugee Week; and partnerships with Relationships Australia and FECCA to create and distribute resources on family and cross-generational relationships issues relevant to CALD communities tied into the broadcast of fly-on-the-wall series *The Family*.

- **Developing tailored services:** The new multicultural agenda includes an onus on Government to “provide equitable services to Australians from all backgrounds” and commits to an inquiry on cultural and linguistic disadvantage. SBS has 35 years of expertise in targeting relevant and informative services to Australia’s diverse communities, including via 68 community language programs on SBS Radio.
- **High priority to early intervention and prevention:** Many social problems including mental illness, ageing, carers’ needs, socio-economic disadvantage and social isolation can be exacerbated by CALD status, particularly where communities are uninformed about accessible services. SBS runs information campaigns relevant to all of these areas in multiple languages on radio and television content exploring these issues, often directing audiences to relevant services and the websites of key organisations for support.
- **Building joined up services and whole of government(s) solutions:** Whole of government solutions to issues of social disadvantage need to engage with multicultural programs, including access and equity frameworks. SBS provides an important example of an organisational model which privileges cultural diversity as central to its decision making and plays an important role in communicating new policy outcomes to CALD Australians and the broader community.
- **Using evidence and integrated data to inform policy:** The complex and changing nature of Australian cultural diversity should be part of the data and research used to inform decision making about policy initiatives, especially those intended to address social disadvantage. As well as an ongoing engagement with external data from the ABS, universities and research agencies, SBS has invested in independent commissioned research about trends in multicultural Australia to better fulfil our obligation to “reflect Australia’s multicultural society.” These have included: *Living Diversity: Australia’s multicultural future (2002)*, *Connecting Diversity: Paradoxes in multicultural Australia (2006)* and Ipsos McKay’s *SBS Immigration Nation (2010)*. SBS has also commissioned additional research where there were gaps in research and good information, for example into the needs of new and emerging communities (Cultural Partners Report *Audience Needs for Radio and Online Services Among Ageing and New and Emerging CALD Communities*, 2009).
- **Using locational approaches:** Effective engagement with local communities requires an understanding of the cultural and linguistic profiles of those communities. SBS has stringers and contributors in every state and territory and conducts outside broadcasts in local communities around Australia for our language programs.
- **Planning for sustainability:** Cultural diversity will continue to be a significant part of Australia’s future – Australia will continue to adapt to new waves of migration as well as continuing the work of responding to and supporting the existing diversity of the Australian population. SBS, in highlighting the value of diversity and contributing to cultural and linguistic maintenance, ensures that the nation continues to benefit from positive contributions of Australians of a wide range of cultural backgrounds.



Conclusion

Recent research on social cohesion by the Scanlon Foundation (2010) found that indicators of belonging, social justice, participation, legitimacy and worth were in decline in recent years. These worrying trends emphasise the importance of ongoing work to support social cohesion: a socially inclusive society cannot be left to chance.

SBS supports the Government's recent commitment to a federal multicultural policy framework. There is now more work to be done. Much of this work involves supporting new arrivals and Australians from our many diverse communities to be fully engaged citizens with opportunities for self-representation and participation. Culturally relevant and inclusive media form a key part of this process, providing crucial access to public life in this country.

SBS will continue to deliver on its Charter obligations to provide culturally and linguistically relevant services which support a cohesive society and will continue to innovate in telling the stories of Australian diversity.

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