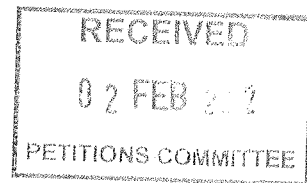




SENATOR THE HON STEPHEN CONROY

MINISTER FOR BROADBAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY
MINISTER ASSISTING THE PRIME MINISTER ON DIGITAL PRODUCTIVITY
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SENATE



The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

20 JAN 2012

Dear Mr Murphy

Petition regarding ABC lawn bowls

Thank you for your letter dated 24 November 2011 concerning the petition on the reinstatement free-to-air broadcasts of lawn bowls on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). The petitioners' request is noted and I acknowledge that the ABC's decision to cease broadcasting lawn bowls has caused considerable disappointment in the bowls community.

While I appreciate the concerns of the petitioners, it is important to note that the Australian Government provides an overall level of funding to the ABC, but has no power to direct the ABC in relation to programming matters. Parliament has guaranteed this independence to ensure that what is broadcast is free of political interference. Internal ABC programming decisions are the responsibility of the ABC Board and Executive. The petitioners may wish to contact the ABC directly in regards to their request for the immediate reinstatement of lawn bowls on the ABC.

As you may be aware, the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee has completed an inquiry into "Recent ABC programming decisions", which included ABC's coverage of lawn bowls. The committee released its report on 13 October 2011 and the government will provide a response to the report in due course. A copy of the report can be found at

www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ec_ctte/abc/report/index.htm

In the ABC's response to Questions on Notice from the public hearing conducted as part of this inquiry, it explained that its decision to cease bowls coverage was editorial. It explained that bowls has been on the ABC for many years, and audience numbers have declined markedly in this time. In 2009, average five city audience numbers were 200,674, while the most recent audience figures for 2011 are 168,000. The ABC noted that Senator the Hon Mark Arbib, Minister for Sport has raised this matter with them, and their discussion into the potential for future coverage of lawn bowls on ABC television is ongoing. I am advised that this is still the case. A copy of the ABC's response to Questions on Notice can be found at

www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ec_ctte/abc/submissions.htm

Thank you for bringing this important issue to my attention.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Conroy
Minister for Broadband,
Communications and the Digital Economy

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29 JAN 2012