



Submission by

Australian News Channel Pty Ltd

House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Procedure

Media Coverage of Parliamentary Proceedings

June 2004

AUSTRALIAN NEWS CHANNEL PTY LTD

ABN 28 068 954 478
Unit E, 5 Skyline Place,
Locked Bag 8, Frenchs Forest NSW 2086
Australia
Telephone: +61 2 9975 8000
Facsimile +61 2 9975 8002
www.skynews.com.au



Background:

Australian News Channel Pty Ltd operates Sky News Australia, the nation's only locally produced 24 hour news channel.

ANC is a joint venture company of Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd, Seven Network Australia and British Sky Broadcasting.

Sky News Australia began services on February 19th 1996, initially on the Foxtel and Optus Cable television networks.

Since that first broadcast, Sky News has grown to become a key part of the Australian media landscape.

Sky News is the number one news channel in Australia and has attracted a greater share of viewing than all the 24-hour news international channels combined.

Sky News is one of the biggest producers of Australian news programming, creating 118 hours a week of television.

Sky News Australia features news on the hour, every hour and headlines every fifteen minutes, changing the way Australians get their television news.

Apart from the flagship news on the hour service, Sky News also produces 14 half hour programs per week, including, Willesee Across Australia, Australian Agenda, Viewpoint, In the First Person and Health News Australia.

Sky News is now available in more than 1.8 million homes across Australia on the Foxtel analogue and digital platforms, Optus, Austar, Transact and Neighborhood Cable subscription television networks and across New Zealand on the Sky Television satellite and Telstra clear cable networks.

The ABC also screens Sky News programs in the Asia Pacific region.

ANC also operates Sky News Australia – New Zealand and produces the daily Prime News First At Five Thirty for the open television broadcaster, Prime Television New Zealand.

Sky News also features an Online service www.skynews.com.au and a 3G telephony service, currently available on Hutchison's 3 network.

Every week across Australia and New Zealand, more than 2 million people access news services from Australian News Channel Pty Ltd



In March 2004, Sky News launched Sky News Active giving viewers access to news on demand 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Sky News Active is available on Foxtel Digital. It is due to be launched later this year to regional, rural and remote areas on the new Austar Digital platform.

Sky News Active offers 8 channels of video content and 5 menus of text ranging from news headlines to business and finance plus sport, weather and showbiz.





Sky News Coverage of Parliamentary Proceedings since 1996

Sky News Australia has been committed to the coverage of National Affairs since its inception.

Federal Politics has become the cornerstone of the channel's news coverage.

Main Points:

1. HOR Question time has been covered live for every sitting since 1996.
2. Live coverage of the Senate during major events.
3. Official openings and all formal ceremonial events have been shown live on Sky News.
4. Full live coverage of Elections and Federal Budgets.
5. More than 250 news conferences have been shown live.
6. More than 400 live interviews with political leaders.
7. Dedicated bureau in Canberra since 2000.
8. Average of 6 live reports every day from Federal Parliament.
9. Live coverage of major committees.
10. Sky News aired the HOR produced series "House for the Nation" in late 2003 and early 2004.
11. Sky News coverage of Parliamentary proceedings and news coverage are available to Australian schools via Foxtel Education and Austar for Schools industry initiatives.
12. Sky News offers schools online support via dedicated website:
www.skynews.com.au/education



Sky News launches dedicated Parliamentary Channel.

On the 24th of March 2004, the Prime Minister officially launched Sky News Active and a revolutionary addition to Australian television – the Sky News Parliamentary Channel.

The Sky News Parliamentary Channel is produced by Australian News Channel Pty Ltd at no cost to the Parliament.

Sky News Parliamentary Channel is available to all FOXTEL Digital Subscribers as part of their basic package.

It is due to be launched later this year to Regional, Rural and Remote Australia on the new Austar Digital platform.

Sky News Parliamentary Channel is a local development of the American C-SPAN and British Parliament service.

Since March, Sky News has shown live coverage of the HOR, Senate and its committees.

On Budget night, Sky News Active, in addition to the Parliamentary Channel, aired a total of 4 channels dedicated to the Budget.

Sky News Active has also featured live coverage of the Senate Estimates Committees.

When Australians go to the polls, Sky News will also offer a 24/7 Election Channel which will operate from the day the election date is announced.

Sky News has full editorial control of what feeds from Parliament it chooses to take. In any given day for example, the Parliamentary Channel may switch to any one of the proceedings underway in the Parliament.

The Sky News Parliamentary Channel utilises the television feeds supplied to media organisations by the Broadcasting section of the Department of Parliamentary Services.

Australian News Channel is grateful for the assistance of this department in the successful launch and operation of this service.



Improving Access to Parliamentary Proceedings

Press Gallery Facilities:

As a relatively new player in the media, Sky News is severely handicapped by the grandfathering of office space in the Press Gallery.

Sky News provides all its political coverage and dedicated Parliamentary Channel from two very small suites. The space is smaller than the space given to other media organisations for storage.

We are physically restricted from expanding our staff and coverage of National Affairs.

This is an impediment to all new players wanting to enter Federal Political reporting.

It is this company's view that the Parliament should address this issue and that the amount of space provided by the Commonwealth be apportioned on a more equitable basis.

This is an issue that is growing as new digital technologies such as Sky News Active change the shape of media reporting and thus how Australians are informed of Parliamentary services.

Access of Television Crews:

Sky News believes the widening of the Filming and Photography guidelines in 1996 has been to the advantage of the Print media and the detriment of Television.

The guidelines provided to DPRS are restrictive and do not allow a full open coverage of Federal Parliament, and in particular major events.

Incidents such as those involving President Bush in the Chamber were of national interest and the Australian people were only able to access that event via the use of footage obtained by a foreign camera crew.

Parliamentary Education Office

Sky News believes that the launch of the Parliamentary Channel offers the Commonwealth a unique opportunity to “open up” the political process to more Australian schools.

We would welcome working closer with the Parliamentary Education Office, in particular with our own school based activities.

Coverage of Committees

Committees are an important part of the political process and a key feature of the Sky News Parliamentary Channel.

It is Sky News’ understanding that committees must decide whether to allow filming of committees as an “opt in”.

We would support an “opt out” provision, in that committees would automatically be able to be covered by DPRS cameras, unless they specifically requested otherwise on worthy grounds.

Angelos Frangopoulos
Managing Editor
Australian News Channel Pty Ltd