

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Additional Estimates Hearings February 2016

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 42

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 63, 9/02/2016

Topic: 1996-97 Annual Report - Local content increases

Senator McKenzie, Bridget asked:

Senator McKenzie asked: Thank you. Finally—and not a Dastyari 'finally'—the 1996-97 annual report saw rural and regional Australia as a significant priority of the ABC. It had a budget of \$600 million and a significantly greater service provision to rural and regional Australia at the time, I would argue, than now. We talked about simplistic approaches to budgeting. I would argue that in a constrained fiscal environment such as we are in at the moment, both you as an organisation and we as a nation, that the simplistic view would be to just throw money at something rather than actually choosing to target the very precious resources of the taxpayers. Wouldn't you argue that, since 1996 to now, that is 10 years, the huge explosion of technology, the changing in processes and human capacity, indeed, means that we can find those efficiencies within the organisation?

Mr Scott: Of course we have.

Senator McKENZIE: That is the non-simplistic reaction.

Mr Scott: Of course we have, Senator. I would say to you that, if you go back to 1996, two very significant funding cuts have happened since then. The volume of content that the ABC is producing to rural and regional Australia has vastly increased. ABC News 24—

Senator McKENZIE: Could you, on notice, provide the minutes increasing the local content?

Answer:

In 1995, the ABC had 5,443 staff members and operated one television channel, a local radio network and four national radio networks. Currently, with a real funding cut of 30 per cent since 1985 and staffing of under 5,000, the ABC has five television services, four national radio networks, a local radio service, six digital radio channels, a catch-up TV service and online and mobile services. The ABC has used technological change to provide more services, more efficiently, in line with its Charter obligations and audience trends.

The ABC assumes the Senator is referring to regional local radio. In 2016, the ABC will broadcast 127:45 more hours of regionally generated unduplicated radio content a week than it did in 1996.

This figure relates only to locally generated coverage that is run on radio and does not include the significant amount of locally generated online and mobile content, as well as that on television and content relevant to regional audiences provided by metropolitan based services.