

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates May 2017

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 146

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Written, 06/06/2017

Topic: Position and value – Australian content

Senator Hanson-Young, Sarah asked:

Noting:

- the SBS recently argued for a fully funded Australian content quota to be applied to the SBS
 - the Managing Director of the ABC made comments at the Content Conversation relating to content quotas
 - the BBC has recently been made subject to local content quotas
1. Can the ABC state its position on the desirability and value of Australian content quotas for:
- (a) the ABC
 - (b) commercial television broadcasters, and
 - (c) SVODs such as Stan, Amazon and Netflix.

Answer:

1 (a). The provision of local content is central to the purpose of the ABC as the source of Australian culture, conversations and stories. The ABC Charter sets out the Corporation's obligations under the ABC Act, requiring the ABC to, inter alia:

- broadcast programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community
- encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs;
- enable Australian citizens living or travelling outside Australia to obtain information about Australian affairs and Australian attitudes on world affairs; and
- provide a balance between broadcasting programs of wide appeal and specialized broadcasting programs.

To fulfil these Charter requirements, it is incumbent on the ABC to create local content and it does so to the best of its ability within available resources.

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The ABC program schedule is evidence of this commitment to local content. In 2015-16, ABC TV's primary channel broadcast 69 per cent Australian content from 6am to midnight. In comparison, commercial free-to-air television licensees are required to broadcast an annual minimum transmission quota of 55 per cent Australian programming between 6am and midnight on their primary channel. The ABC also exceeds the Australian content quota requirements of commercial free-to-air across specific genres, including documentaries and children's content. Accordingly, the ABC does not believe that a local content quota is required for the ABC.

(b) . The application of quotas to the commercial free-to-air broadcasters in Australia is a policy matter for government. However, the ABC notes that the reduction of commercial content quotas in the UK in 2003 led to a 93 per cent reduction¹ in the production of local children's content, to the detriment of UK audiences and the local content production sector. The ABC would not wish to see a similar occurrence here and considers that should content quotas be removed in Australia, additional measures are put in place to ensure local content production is sustained across the industry.

(c). The application of quotas to SVOD entities is a policy matter for government. However, given the popularity of local content with Australian audiences, the ABC considers that the local broadcasters are in a unique position to develop and produce Australian content and this local market advantage should be encouraged rather than unduly encouraging additional competition in the production of local content.

¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/04/17/broadcasters-forced-invest-british-made-childrens-tv-programmes/>