

Review of the ABC
From: Anne Lawson
Sent: Thursday, 1 December 2005 7:34 PM
To: ABC-Review, ABC-Review
Subject: Review of the ABC

Re Review of ABC

I would like to make a strong statement in support of adequate funding for the ABC.

In my work I find the programs on both the Radio National and to a lesser extent on local radio invaluable. They provide both a broader context for my areas of expertise and a thoughtful and often a very well informed view from the perspective of a layman. We all try to tap into the consumer view but that can be narrow. Radio offers an opportunity for many and diverse people to contribute to debate, story telling and public information.

The information provided is balanced up to date and in the areas I am familiar with, usually correct and well based. This is not the case with the printed news media where I invariably find mistakes when I have some knowledge of the matter.

Increased support for the ABC to extend its services is supported.

Anne Lawson

From: Jann&Alan Page
Sent: Sunday, 27 November 2005 9:54 AM
To: ABC-Review, ABC-Review
Subject: FROM MR AND MRS ALAN AND JANN PAGE

Our ABC Radio Station here in Perth - 720 - happens to be, in our opinion the best radio available. We are extremely loyal listeners and have noticed over the past 4 years a wonderful change to our local ABC Radio station, brought about we feel by a dedicated, hard working band of people who have managed to lift the Station's ratings to the top - almost above the FM Stations.

These people give their all from what we see or feel, listening to the radio and have managed to include the 'ordinary listener' in Perth so that we do in fact feel very much a 'Part of OUR ABC'.

We do hope that these people get recognition for their hard work - at times that doesn't seem obvious to us and quite simply, without OUR ABC whom we rely on for a great day's listening, we wouldn't even turn our radio on.

I do hope our comments reach someone who cares.

Yours sincerely
Mr. and Mrs. Alan and Jann Page

Submission to the Department of
Communications Information Technology and
the Arts' ABC Funding Adequacy and
Efficiency Review

December 2005

1. The Australian Film Commission

The Australian Film Commission (AFC) is an Australian Government agency, operating as part of the Commonwealth Film Program to ensure the creation, availability and preservation of Australian screen content. The AFC enriches Australia's national identity by fostering an internationally competitive audiovisual production industry, making Australia's audiovisual content and culture available to all, and developing and preserving a national collection of sound and moving image.

The AFC has a key role to play in the development of a vibrant audiovisual industry in Australia and is capable of producing a diverse range of quality products for Australian and international audiences.

2. ABC's cultural role

In the age of globalisation, convergence and market reform, it is reasonable to reassess the role of public broadcasting in Australia. It is the AFC's submission that the continued existence of strong public broadcasting is fundamental to the cultural life of the nation.

It is arguable that the ABC has been the most significant cultural institution in Australia for many decades and that the creation and support for this national public broadcaster has been one of the most significant achievements in the building of Australia as a nation in the last century.

The ABC has played, and must continue to play, a critical role in developing the creative industries in Australia. The creative industries fuel creative capital and creative workers, which are increasingly being recognised as key drivers within national innovation systems.

The importance of the ABC as a cultural institution flows across all its programming and the contribution this makes to the sense that we have of ourselves as a nation and as individual Australians.

The representation and dissemination of Australian cultural identity is a crucial part of the role that the ABC has fulfilled and should continue to fulfil.

3. ABC's legislative obligations

The Charter of the ABC is contained in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983 and it sets out the main functions of the ABC. Broadly

they fall into three areas:

- a. Provide national radio and television services that are comprehensive, innovative and of a high standard, that inform and entertain and which contribute to national identity and reflect the cultural diversity of the nation. As part of this the ABC is also enjoined to provide programs of an educational nature;
 - b. Broadcast outside of Australia programs of an informational, entertainment and cultural nature that will inform the world about Australia and give Australians living abroad information about Australia and its attitudes on world affairs;
 - c. Encourage and promote the performing arts in Australia.
- As the Mansfield report noted,¹ the ABC Charter is quite general and ranks each main function equally, rather than giving priority to one function. Mansfield favoured a redrawing of the charter so as to give priority to the domestic services being provided on a national basis, but also with particular attention being paid to meeting the needs of audiences in regional and remote Australia. Mansfield also favoured giving priority to specific programming types in the charter – news, current affairs, information, children’s programs and youth.

Both the Special Broadcasting Service and commercial free-to-air broadcasters also have a public service remit. The commercial broadcasters are required to fulfill social and cultural obligations – Australian content and children’s television standards as well as their coregulatory obligations under the Free TV codes of practice.

A recently completed review of public service television broadcasting undertaken by the UK Office of Communications (OFCOM) is summarised in their February 2005 report *Competition for Quality*. Like Australia, the UK broadcasting system is a mixed economy of privately owned and publicly supported television broadcasters and like Australia it is also an increasingly competitive broadcasting market. Despite this increased level of competition OFCOM has recognised there are aspects of television which the public values enormously but which the market will not provide or would under-provide.

OFCOM has restated the purposes of public service broadcasting as follows:

- To inform ourselves and others and to increase our understanding of the world through news, information and analysis of current events and ideas.

¹The Mansfield Report, *The Challenge of a Better ABC*, Bob Mansfield, January 1997

-

To stimulate our interest in and knowledge of arts, science, history and other topics through content that is accessible and can encourage informal learning.

-

To reflect our cultural identity through original programming at the national and regional level, on occasion bringing audiences together for shared experiences.

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To make us aware of different cultures and viewpoints, through programs that reflect the lives of other people and other communities.

The AFC believes these purposes are also relevant to the Australian broadcasting system, in which the ABC stands at the heart of public service broadcasting. The characteristics the AFC sees as essential to the role of the ABC in the digital age are:

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Universality of service provision -The original conception of the ABC was that it would be a national service available to all Australians no matter their location or position in society and that it would provide a service of equal technical quality to all. It is essential that the ABC extends universality into the development of new digital media, as it has been able to successfully do in the online environment.

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Providing programs that inform and educate – to contribute to an informed citizenry able to participate fully in the life of society.

-

Catering for a variety and diversity of interests in the community.

-

Providing programs that reflect the culture and language of the community – the ABC has been the most significant cultural institution in Australia for many decades and the continued representation and dissemination of Australian cultural identity is a crucial part of its role.

-

Providing programs that are of high quality and promote innovation by exploring new ideas.

4. Falling levels of Australian Content

The AFC is concerned that levels of Australian content on the ABC have fallen dramatically over the past four years. Australian content has declined from around 58 per cent of total hours broadcast in the 1990s to

49.3 per cent in 2003/04 and 52 per cent in 2004/05: see Appendix A.

A large part of this has been due to the decline in Australian drama on the ABC. First run Australian drama content fell to 3 hours in 2004/05, down 96 per cent from 83 hours in 2001/02: see Appendix B. Overall, including repeats, the ABC screened 163 hours of Australian drama content in 2004/05 up from 133 hours in 2003/04 but still significantly down from the 349 hours of Australian drama screened in 2000/01: see Appendix C.

At the same time, the hours of imported drama have increased 101 per cent from 342 hours in 2000/01 to 688 hours in the last financial year – following a peak of 771 hours in 2003/04.

The decline in Australian drama content has been matched by falls in Australian documentary², comedy³ and education⁴. Indigenous programming remains low.⁵

Children's programming however, has remained static for the ABC, but compares poorly with commercial broadcasters. 68 hours of first run children's programming screened on the ABC in 2004/05 (548 hours including repeats) up from 47 hours of first run children's programming in 2003/04 (out of a total of 418 hours screened). This level of first release children's is well under half the amount of first release children's programming screened on the commercial broadcasters, who screened an average of 164.7 hours of first release children's programming each in 2004.

The ABC spent \$13.1 million on Australian TV drama in 2004/05, similar to 2003/04's \$13.2 million, which was the lowest spend by the ABC for five years.

The level of Australian content on the ABC, particularly drama, has fallen to unacceptable and unprecedented levels. The AFC believes that the decline in first run drama production on the ABC to three hours in 2004-05 compromises the ABC's ability to fulfil its Charter functions. The ABC is obliged to deliver innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services to entertain and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community. The

² The hours of Australian documentaries screened on the ABC have similarly fallen over the previous four years from 230 hours of local documentaries screened in 2000/01 falling to 140 hours in 2004/05 – a fall of 39 per cent. As a share of total documentary hours (ie. both imported and local) – which have accounted for around 500 hours of programming per year since 2000/01 – the Australian share has dropped from 41 per cent to 31.8 per cent following a low of 22 per cent in 2003/04. Nevertheless, first release documentary

increased from 41 hours in 2001/02 to 52 hours in 2004/05.³ The number of hours of Australian comedy has declined by over 73 percent over the previous five years from 82 hours in 2000/01 to 22 hours in 2004/05. First run local comedy reached a low of eight hours, a decrease of 64 per cent from 2003/04 (22 hours)

and 81 per cent from 2001/02 (43 hours).

⁴ Local educational programming has fallen by close to 80 per cent, from 795 hours in

2000/01 to 171 hours in 2004/05. First run educational programming decreased over 70

per cent from 28 hours in 2001/02 to 8 hours in 04/05.⁵ A total of 65 hours of

Indigenous programming was screened in 2004/05 with 18 hours

first release and 47 hours repeat.

AFC believes that the delivery and production of new Australian drama is critical to fulfilling this obligation.

The ABC has traditionally been a risk taker in local content production, providing an environment of collaboration and innovation that has produced some of Australia's boldest and most successful television from programs such as The Aunty Jack Show, Sweet and Sour and The Norman Gunston show, through to Brides of Christ, Frontline, The Games and Kath and Kim. Programs such as these would arguably never have been made on a commercial network. With lowering levels of local drama and comedy production, the ABC is less and less a content innovator and leader.

The AFC thinks that the record of SBS Independent (SBSi) demonstrates how a public broadcaster can fruitfully harness the resources and creativity to be found in the independent sector and produce programming that is exciting, innovative and meets the remit of a public service broadcaster. The existence of an initiative at the ABC like that of SBSi is particularly relevant given the current parlous state of the ABC's investment in new Australian drama and documentary. 6

Under the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA), the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is empowered to determine standards relating to the Australian content of programs broadcast by commercial television licensees, which stipulates levels of Australian content considered minimums. The Australian Content Standard (ACS) requires 55 per cent Australian content (6.00 am-midnight) and stipulates a minimum level of first release Australian drama (250 points which equates to between 90-250 hours); first release children's drama (32 hours); first release documentary (20 hours) and programming for children (390 hours, including programs for preschool children).

Content regulations on commercial broadcasters are maintained to ensure that the culture of the nation is represented on our screens and to encourage the expression of creativity. It is an essential public interest obligation of privately owned television in return for continued spectrum access and protection from competition.⁷ The commercial broadcasters consistently meet the requirements of the ACS.

6 SBSi commissioned 93 hours of documentary and 57 hours of drama in 04/05.

According

to their annual report, 'In 2004/05 financial year SBS broadcast at least 8.5 hours of SBSi

funded Australian drama and 63 hours of SBSi funded Australian documentaries were transmitted. These figures include SBSi funded indigenous productions.

7 Section 3 of the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 sets out the objectives Parliament sought

to achieve from broadcasting including among others:

- * to promote the availability to audiences throughout Australia of a diverse range of radio and television services offering entertainment, education and information;
- * to promote the role of broadcasting services in developing and reflecting a sense of national identity, character and cultural diversity;
- * to promote the provision of high quality and innovative programming by providers of broadcasting services;

While the ABC is not subject to the ACS, its charter obligation to broadcast “programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community” is very similar to the objectives of the BSA.

Currently, the ABC is not matching the levels of Australian content being programmed by commercial broadcasters. From 6am to midnight the ABC screened 54 per cent Australian content in 2004/05 and 50.9 per cent in 2003/04. This compares to the commercial broadcasters who all exceeded the mandated 55 per cent Australian Content level, with the Seven Network screening 56.09-57.45 per cent in 2004, the Nine Network, 62.01–64.25 per cent; and Network Ten, 55.84–56.59 per cent.

In the case of first release Australia drama, the contrast with the commercial free-to-air networks is even more striking: see Appendix D. The average of first release Australian drama broadcast by the three commercial broadcasters during ‘prime time’⁸ in 2004 was 152.4 hours.⁹ This compares to just three hours broadcast by the ABC during the 2004/05 financial year.¹⁰

The AFC believes that the ABC should at least meet, and preferably exceed, the levels of Australian content met by the commercial broadcasters. Obliging the ABC to comply with the standards applicable to the commercial sector does not compromise its editorial independence and may rather strengthen its charter obligations.

While the AFC endorses the ABC’s current role as a comprehensive broadcaster, it believes, as a result of such poor performance, that there must be a greater degree of specificity about how the ABC is to meet its public service obligations in each triennial funding round. The AFC believes that substantial levels of Australian content must be mandated for the ABC as part of its funding agreement.

Further, the AFC recommends that a specified proportion of its appropriation be allocated for new Australian drama and documentary and that it not be used for any other purpose.

⁸ For purposes of Australian Content Standard, ‘prime time’ is defined as 5pm-11pm, whereas the ABC figure is calculated 6pm-midnight

⁹ Seven screened 204.9 hours of first release adult drama, Ten 154.72 hours and Nine 97.6

hours.

10 An average of 132.2 hours of first release children's programming (drama and other) was broadcast by each of the three commercial FTAs in 2004 compared with 68 hours for the ABC during the 04/05 financial year. The ABC does however surpass the commercial broadcasters in relation to documentary programming with 52 hours in 2004/05 compared to an average of 26.9 hours for commercial broadcasters.

The AFC believes the ABC should specifically set out how it proposes to meet its charter obligations in relation to national identity, by outlining strategies and targets in its corporate plan, similar to its commitment in the 1980s.

5. Impact of the changing media environment on the ABC

As previously argued in its submissions to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Inquiry into the Uptake of Digital Television,¹¹ and the Duration of the Analogue/Digital Television Simulcast Period Review, the AFC believes that the public broadcaster could act as a significant driver in the uptake of digital television.

The ABC has recently launched ABC2, a generalist digital only channel largely offering time-shifted ABC programming and a small amount of new programming. The latter comprises mostly short, interstitial content – animations, music videos and children's educational programs, but also some new documentaries and performance pieces.

New screen content created through the AFC's Broadband Production Initiative and the recently announced Broadband Cross-media Production Initiative will be screened on ABC2. This content will include discrete short films, documentaries and children's animation drawn from the broadband websites for Usmob.com, Dog and Cat News, Dust on my Shoes and The Life, Times and Travels of the Extraordinary Vice-Admiral William Bligh.

However, the ABC remains limited by the current genre restrictions.¹²

Overall there has been little activity in new digital television services besides the Digital Forty Four datacasting services and commercial broadcaster experiments with interactive programming. The national broadcasters have been responsible for the small but important steps towards significant new digital television services. To prompt innovative digital programming the ABC needs a more flexible environment, rather than the current restrictions, such as those applying to genre. Constraints on the ABC translate into constraints on innovative content.

In the context of a more competitive, multi-channel environment, the role of public broadcasters becomes essential to driving competition.

11 http://www.afc.gov.au/downloads/policies/050420_hor_digup_final.pdf

12

Permitted multichannel genres are regional; education; science; religious; health; arts; culture; financial, market or business information bulletins; Parliamentary; public policy; foreign language news; multicultural or Indigenous; children's; history; ABC-produced international news; rural; information; stand-alone international social documentary; subtitled foreign language; stand-alone drama and incidental material.

The AFC considers it crucial that the national broadcasters be strong players in a multi-channel digital environment. A high proportion of Australian content should characterize any secondary channels. The AFC believes that the national broadcasters can act as significant drivers in the uptake of digital television in Australia by providing innovative and adventurous content.

6. ABC's role to develop creative industries and in training

The ABC's charter obligation about supporting the performing arts is outdated and narrow in scope. This commitment needs to be broadened in the digital age to encompass support for the creative industries. Creative industries are widely recognised as the engine rooms of the knowledge economies. The creative industries are economically important, high growth industries. Growth in the creative industries is nearly double the rate of GDP growth in the OECD economies. This translates directly into jobs and economic growth.

Historically, the ABC has played a crucial role in developing and supporting Australia's creative community and training its personnel. The employment provided by the ABC in the past allowed many filmmakers and new media producers to achieve a level of expertise that is more difficult to attain in the fragmented contemporary context of small commercial companies.

This role as trainer of new talent enabled the ABC to meet its charter requirement for innovation. It generated a body of fresh and creative practitioners to service the industry at large, including some of Australia's most famous film and television makers including Jan Chapman, John Seale ACS AFC and Jane Campion.

In a survey of filmmakers who had been nominated for AFI awards between 1988 and 1993,¹³ the ABC figured strongly as employer of newcomers to the industry. 27 per cent of those who had been in the industry for 10 years or less had worked for the ABC. Of these, 70 per cent had worked there for a year or longer, while 20 per cent had worked there for more than eight years.

The ABC was found to have given 17 per cent of filmmakers surveyed their

first job. Other than Film Australia and SBS, no other organisation assisted more than five per cent. But the figure was even greater for more experienced filmmakers: for filmmakers of 15 years standing or longer, the ABC provided first jobs for 22 per cent.

13 Career Paths in the Australian Film Industry, AFC, 1998

The ABC accepted that learning was part of the job for newcomers. The ABC provided traineeships during which trainee producers and directors turned out a program every month. Alumni cannot speak highly enough of the professional development opportunities with which they were provided. The ABC no longer provides this training and development role, either through the engagement of staff on a longer-term basis or through consistent support of the independent production sector.

Because the AFC's role is also to assist the career development of writers, directors and producers the collaboration between the two organisations has been fruitful in the past – particularly in the field of new media production. A list of ABC/AFC collaborations is available at Appendix E. Furthermore, many AFC-financed projects are pre-sold to the ABC, for example, *Moulin Rouge Girls*, *Jimmy Little's Gentle Journey*, *The Shadow of Mary Poppins*, *Message from Moree*.

The ABC's poor support for Australian drama impacts upon the on-the-job training opportunities available. The AFC believes that a role in industry training should be part of ABC's charter.

7. Conclusion

The AFC's submission is that:

- In the age of globalisation, convergence and market reform, the continued existence of public broadcasting is fundamental to the cultural life of the nation.
- While remaining a comprehensive broadcaster, there must be a greater degree of specificity about how the ABC is to meet its public service obligations in each triennial funding round.
- The ABC should at least meet, and preferably exceed, the levels of Australian content as the commercial free-to-air broadcasters.
- Substantial levels of Australian content must be mandated for the ABC as part of its funding agreement.
- A specified proportion of the ABC's appropriation should be allocated for expenditure on new Australian drama and documentary and this funding should not be used for any other purpose.
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The ABC's corporate planning process should specifically set out how it proposes to meet its obligations in terms of national identity by demonstrating strategies and targets in relation to Australian content.

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The ABC must be a strong player in a multi-channel digital environment with a high proportion of Australian content characterising any supplementary channels.

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The ABC could act as significant drivers in the uptake of digital television in Australia and assist in driving competition in the commercial sector.

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The ABC's charter obligation to 'encourage and promote the performing arts in Australia' should be updated to replace 'performing arts' with 'creative industries'.

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The ABC's industry training role should be part of its charter obligations.

APPENDIX A: Proportion of Australian content broadcast by the
Australian Broadcasting Corporation: 24 hours

Australian share of
hours

Drama

2000/01 50.5%

2001/02 47.4%

2002/03 21.5%

2003/04 14.7%

2004/05 19.2%

Documentary

2000/01 40.9%

2001/02 41.6%

2002/03 34.6%

2003/04 22.4%

2004/05 31.7%

Comedy

2000/01 31.8%

2001/02 31.1%

2002/03 14.3%

2003/04 16.6%

2004/05 11.5%

Educational

2000/01 68.8%

2001/02 65.0%

2002/03 53.0%

2003/04 50.0%

2004/05 55.7%

Children's

2000/01 28.6%

2001/02 26.2%

2002/03 29.1%

2003/04 22.2%

2004/05 27.6%

Total Hours

2000/01 59.1%

2001/02 55.4%

2002/03 52.4%

2003/04 49.3%

2004/05 52.0%

APPENDIX B: Hours of 'First Release' local and imported programming broadcast by the ABC: 24 hours

Total
Hours
screened
Hours
screened: %
of overall
programming
Australian
Drama

2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Australian
Documentary

83
31
49
3
0.9%
0.4%
0.6%
0.03%

2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Imported
documentary

266
339
408
328
3%
3.9%
4.6%
3.7%

2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Australian
Comedy

41
60

52
52
0.5%
0.7%
0.6%
0.6%
2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Imported
Comedy
125
165
166
150
1.4%
1.9%
1.9%
1.7%

2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Australian
Educational
43
20
22
8
0.5%
0.2%
0.3%
0.1%
2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Imported
Educational
60
78
63
40
0.7%
0.9%
0.7%
0.5%
2001/02

2002/03
 2003/04
 2004/05
 Australian
 Children's
 28
 32
 22
 8
 0.3%
 0.4%
 0.3%
 0.1%
 2001/02
 2002/03
 2003/04
 2004/05
 Imported
 Children's
 28
 17
 10
 0
 0.3%
 0.2%
 0.1%
 0%

2001/02 63 0.7% 2001/02 304 3.5%
 2002/03 85 1.0% 2002/03 219 2.5%
 2003/04 47 0.5% 2003/04 296 3.7%
 2004/05 68 0.8% 2004/05 291 3.3%

Total
 Hours
 screened
 Hours
 screened: %
 of overall
 programming
 Imported
 drama

Source: AFC analysis of ABC Annual Reports: Television Program Analysis
 (Program Hours Transmitted -24 hours)

APPENDIX C: Hours of local and imported programming broadcast by the ABC including repeats: 24 hours

Total
Hours
screened
Hours
screened: %
of overall
programming
Australian
Drama

2000/01
2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Australian
Documentary

2000/01
2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Australian
Comedy

2000/01
2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Australian
Educational

349
228
192
133
163
230
228
165
119
140
82
51
26
40
22

4%
4.4%
2.2%
1.5%
1.9%
2.6%
2.6%
1.9%
1.4%
1.6%
0.9%
0.6%
0.3%
0.5%
0.3%
2000/01
2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Imported
documentary
2000/01
2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Imported
Comedy
2000/01
2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Imported
Educational
342
429
700
771
688
333
320
312
413
301
176
113
156
201

169
3.9%
4.9%
8.0%
8.8%
7.9%
3.8%
3.7%
3.6%
4.7%
3.4%
2.0%
1.3%
1.8%
2.3%
1.9%
2000/01
2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Australian
Children's
795
485
174
155
171
9.1%
5.5%
2.0%
1.8%
2.0%
2000/01
2001/02
2002/03
2003/04
2004/05
Imported
Children's
361
261
155
155
137
4.1%
3.0%
1.8%
1.8%
1.6%

2000/01 499 5.7%
2001/02 431 4.9%
2002/03 517 5.9%
2003/04 418 4.8%
2004/05 548 6.3%

Total Hours
Hours screened: %
screened of overall
programming
Imported
drama

2000/01 1247 14.2%
2001/02 1314 13.9%
2002/03 1260 14.4%
2003/04 1465 16.7%
2004/05 1436 16.4%

Source: AFC analysis of ABC Annual Reports: Television Program Analysis
(Program Hours Transmitted -24 hours)

APPENDIX D: TOTAL HOURS OF FIRST RELEASE AUSTRALIAN PROGRAMMING

Australian programming (First Release) Seven licensees (average annual hours) Nine licensees (average annual hours) Ten Licensees (average annual hours) Average Commercial Network (average annual hours) ABC (hours) Documentary (6ammidnight) 39.7 20.0 21.0 26.9 52.0 Children's (including drama and other (6ammidnight) 132.7 131.5 132.5 132.2 68.0 Adult Drama (5pm-11pm) 204.9 97.6 154.72 152.4 3.0*

Source: ACMA, 2004, Compliance with the Australian Content Standard, ABC Annual Report 2004/05.

* Figures reported in the ABC Annual Report cover the period 6pm-midnight rather than

5pm-11pm

Notes

Minimum annual requirements relating to Australian Drama, Australian Documentary, and Australian Children's Drama are:

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First Release Adult drama = Drama scores must total 250

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First Release Documentary min annual requirement = 20 hours bet. 6am-midnight

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First Release Australian Children's Drama = 25 hours in C Band (ie three bands which

all occur between 6am and midnight)

For purposes of Australian Content Standard, Prime Time is defined as 5pm-11pm

Appendix E: AFC/ABC Collaboration

The AFC has had a long and successful history of working with the ABC. Below is a list of recent AFC/ABC joint initiatives.

Broadband Production Initiative

In 2001, the AFC was allocated \$2.1 over three years to seed the development of innovative broadband content to be hosted as a broadband component of ABC on-line. The initial allocation was doubled through commercial partnerships and resulted in the production of seven broadband projects.

Broadband Cross-media Production Initiative (BCPI)

The Australian Film Commission (AFC) and the ABC will undertake a new partnership to jointly provide \$1.2 million in funding over two years for the Broadband Cross-media Production Initiative (BCPI). The new funding initiative will be directed to producing documentary and factual content for multi-platform delivery and targeted for hosting and broadcast on the ABC's Broadband and ABC2 digital television services.

Documentary Online

This collaborative initiative entailed the AFC financing a number of documentaries that were developed especially as online projects to be hosted by ABC online. This initiative brought together the creative synergies between traditional documentary filmmakers and interactive media producers.

Women Working in Television Project

Since 1997 the AFC, in conjunction with the public broadcasters and commercial networks, has run the Women Working in Television Project. Numerous publications have been produced, networking events held, and opportunities identified towards advancing the careers of women within the Australian television industry.

Theatre of the Mind

Consultant to the National Film and Sound Archive (a division of the AFC) Bruce Leonard presented a weekly radio program, using an extensive selection of archival material. This was broadcast on the ABC as well as commercial and community radio.

Co-financing

The AFC and ABC have, from time to time, co-financed an Australian production. Most recently, the short feature in 2003/04.

Stuff Art

An award-winning interactive media initiative hosted on the ABC website and publicised by Triple J between 1998 and 2000.

1 December 2005

Manager
ABC Funding Adequacy & Efficiency Review
National Broadcasting Section
DCITA
GPO Box 2154 Canberra ACT 2601
E: abc-review@dcita.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: ABC Funding Adequacy and Efficiency Review - November 2005

I am writing on behalf of the Australian Screen Directors Association, which is the peak professional body representing the interests of Australian directors. It has over 500 members including directors and producers of feature films, television drama, documentaries, animation and television commercials.

Given the short timeframe allowed for this review, ASDA is unable to present as full a submission as it would have liked on such an important issue. Given this ASDA would like to indicate its support for the overall thrust of the Australian Film Commission's submission, and also the MEAA's submission regarding the need for greater levels of Government appropriation for the public broadcaster overall.

However, ASDA would like to make particular reference to those issues that directly affect its members.

In summary, ASDA is of the opinion that rather than becoming redundant in a globalising, converging media world, that the role of the ABC will become even more crucial. The ABC is in a perfect position to become the bridge between the existing broadcast model of communications and a new digital multi-channel media landscape, and at the same time provide a place that Australians can continue to access distinctive, high quality independent Australian content.

In order to undertake these roles the ABC will need to be both adequately resourced as well as obligated, possibly but not necessarily under its charter, to commission a substantial level of Australian content programming.

Key Points

1. ABC and the development of talent and ideas

ASDA notes the role that the ABC has played during its existence, not only in the cultural life of Australians, but in the development of innovative and popular programming, in the coverage of arts issues, and in the development of filmmaking talent.

The ABC has been integral in the development of the creative talents of a great number of Australian directors. Many of the most established directors working in

Australia today developed their careers at the ABC, while a number of successful feature film directors have also honed their craft at the broadcaster, the most recent example being Kate Woods, director of *Looking for Alibrandi*.

The ABC once led the industry in terms of the programming that it created in drama and has also been a key player in broadcasting documentaries that have made an impact, resonated with audiences and told Australians something deeper about the way that they live.

In the past few years, however, the ABC's role in these key areas has demonstrably declined. For instance, ABC no longer leads the training and development of directors, which was so crucial because directors learned about production on the job, by moving up through various craft roles to eventually direct programs. Just as importantly, in regards to creativity and innovation, the ABC does not offer directors the opportunity to fail and learn that it once did.

Most worryingly, the ABC is no longer the innovator in terms of programming in the way that it once was. Given the current state of the ABC it is unlikely that groundbreaking programs such as *Scales of Justice* in the 1980s or *Blue Murder* in the 1990s would be made. This innovation was crucial because not only did it allow the directors making the programs to test their creative capabilities, and create significant and successful programs.

In terms of the overall health of the industry, the ABC's role in training and allowing experimentation also benefited the commercial networks because they have relied heavily on the ABC as a test bed for both talent and ideas.

2. Australian Content

It is demonstrable that the level of Australian content has declined dramatically in recent years in documentaries and children's television, but particularly in the area of television drama (ASDA refers DCITA to the AFC's statistics).

ASDA does not feel qualified to comment fully on the breakdown of ABC's internal funding allocations. However, it does note the 2002 Macquarie Bank analysis that found that, in comparison to similar public broadcasters, the ABC is under-funded in terms of the appropriation that it receives from Government¹.

The Macquarie Bank report concluded:

On a comparison of Government funding per capita, the ABC funding levels are below its peers and it would need approximately an additional \$200m pa of funding to be on par with the average of the surveyed countries. When compared against the total revenues per capital of public broadcasters, the ABC would approximately require an additional \$700m pa in revenues to have a level of revenue equivalent to the average level of total revenues per capita in our survey group. Finally, when measured against government funding as a proportion of GDP, the ABC would approximately require an addition \$200m

¹ *An Analysis of the ABC's Funding Relative to International Public Broadcasters and Domestic Peers*, Macquarie Bank, September 2002

in funding to equal the average proportion of funding of the public broadcasters surveyed.²

In short, depending on the measure used, the Macquarie Bank considers additional government funding of between \$200 million and \$700 million per annum is required to increase ABC funding to a level comparable with its international peers, let alone to be funded at a level that might enable the ABC to become a world's best public broadcaster.

Having acknowledged this, ASDA also notes that there are a number of external factors that could have contributed to this decline in overall drama hours.

To begin with, the fact that drama costs dramatically more than any other form, and the costs for an average hour of drama has increased substantially over the past ten years, means that it is always vulnerable to import replacement, and the first casualty of any budget cuts. The ABC in recent times has rarely had the budget to fully fund a drama series.

A program such as *Seachange*, for example, despite being immensely popular, was ultimately axed not because of audience numbers, but because it was unable to find the international sales necessary to allow it to continue being made.

Shifts in the international marketplace have also had a significant effect. For example, four years ago, a drama such as *Something in the Air* which ran for two hours every week, was heavily subsidised by German tax-based finance. However, due to changes in German tax law, this financing stream has now effectively dried up, and the ability for the ABC to completely self-fund such a drama series is simply beyond its capacity. This is particularly the case given that much of the ABC's equity contribution for external productions has historically been in the form of facilities and production support rather than cash.

Having said this, ASDA views the level of the decline in drama programming on the ABC as inexcusable. It is of great concern that the ABC Board and Management have allowed drama levels to reach such low levels, and ASDA is concerned about what this apparent neglect indicates about the ABC's programming and production priorities.

There is no sense of a clear strategy to address this decline from within its limited resources, nor any demonstrated willingness to do so.

ASDA is of the view that the ABC needs to demonstrate a clear case as to why its Australian content levels have decreased to the level that they have, and to outline a series of options for the future.

Increasing Levels of Australian content

² *An Analysis of the ABC's Funding Relative to International Public Broadcasters and Domestic Peers*, Macquarie Bank, September 2002, page 33.

While there are clearly internal and external factors at play in regards to the ABC's levels of Australian content, the issue for ASDA is to find a solution that both meets the funding requirements of the ABC but ensures that any additional funding is directed specifically to such programming.

ASDA believes that to increase Australian content levels there needs to be a joint commitment from both the ABC and the Government to provide sufficient resources to allow the ABC to produce a level of Australian content comparable, at least, to the commercial networks.

Independent Production

ASDA would recommend the creation a model for the ABC similar in conception to SBSi, which has been highly successful in developing a partnership between the broadcaster and the independent sector. Such a model would ensure that the maximum amount of Government investment would go on-screen, rather than being merged into general revenue. Just as importantly, such an approach would ensure that content levels would not be able to diminish to the levels that they have at the national broadcaster in recent times.

ASDA notes that such an approach would be in line with the recommendations made by the Mansfield Inquiry 1997, which focused on the need for the ABC to give priority to its broadcasting role over its production role.

3. Cultural Role in the new media landscape

The ABC since its inception has fulfilled a significant cultural role since its inception. It has provided an important complement to the commercial broadcasting system, providing a universal broadcasting service to all Australians which has ensured a level of diversity within the system that has been crucial for the cultural and political life of our country.

ASDA argues that the cultural role of the ABC – and public service broadcasting generally – will be even more important within a changing media environment. As the media fractures and morphs, the role of the ABC at the centre of this change will be increasingly crucial. The ABC must be positioned in this new landscape to continue to provide a space for programming that challenges, informs and entertains Australian audiences.

ASDA would support the ABC leading the way in terms of new platform delivery – be it digital broadcasting, multi-channel programming, or on-line delivery. ASDA would, however, be concerned if the funding for the ABC's presence in these emerging platforms was undertaken at the expense of Australian content on its broadcast platforms.

ASDA would argue that in the foreseeable future that broadcasting remains the core business of the ABC and that such developments in the new media spaces should be funded separately, rather than at the expense of existing platforms and programs.

As it moves into the new multi-channel, digital environment it is crucial that the ABC continues to provide a significant level of Australian content across the various platforms by which it delivers programs, and that it is resourced to do so. It is by committing to this position, as continuing provider of quality Australian content whatever the delivery platform, that the ABC will continue to be a relevant and leading player in the new media landscape.

I would be happy to discuss any of these issues with you, and to answer any questions that you may have about this submission or ASDA's position.

Yours sincerely

Richard Harris
Executive Director

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Public Submissions
ABC Funding Adequacy and Efficiency Review
National Broadcasting Section
Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2601

9 December 2005

To Whom It May Concern,

We have just been made aware that the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts' ABC Funding Adequacy and Efficiency Review, had been broadened to include public submissions.

Please find below a short submission from the Australian Writers' Guild in relation to this review.

The Australian Writers' Guild

The Australian Writers' Guild is the peak industry body representing writers of film, theatre, television, radio and new media. On behalf of its members, the AWG works to improve professional standards, conditions and remuneration; to protect and advance creative rights and to promote the Australian cultural voice in all its diversity. We have 2800 members nationally.

Australia's film, theatre, television, radio and new media writers are key stakeholders in the effective operation of the ABC. Australia's writers have played and will continue to play a critical role in the ABC's ability to fulfil its charter and to present innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services to entertain and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community.

Recommendations

- The ABC is in need of increased funding in order to properly and responsibly fulfil its charter.

- The ABC should at least meet, and preferably exceed, the levels of Australian content as the commercial free-to-air broadcasters;
- A specified proportion of the ABC's appropriation should be allocated for new Australian drama and documentary and should not be used for any other purpose.

Culture and the Creative Industries

A strong public broadcaster is intrinsic to the cultural life of any liberal democracy. Our most important cultural institution, the ABC has also played a critical role in the development, evolution and innovation of Australia's creative industries, and contributed significantly to Australia's information economy.

Declining Levels of Australian Content on the ABC

The three main functions of the ABC, as set out in the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983* are:

- a. Provide national radio and television services that are comprehensive, innovative and of a high standard, that inform and entertain and which contribute to national identity and reflect the cultural diversity of the nation. As part of this the ABC is also enjoined to provide programs of an educational nature;
- b. Broadcast outside of Australia programs of an informational, entertainment and cultural nature that will inform the world about Australia and give Australians living abroad information about Australia and its attitudes on world affairs;
- c. Encourage and promote the performing arts in Australia.

The AWG is concerned that the falling levels of Australian content broadcast on the ABC, particularly on ABC TV, seriously compromises the ABC's ability to fulfil its Charter.

Australian content on the ABC has declined from around 58% of total hours broadcast in the 1992 to 49.3% in 2003/04 and 52% in 2004/05. This is less than the commercial free-to-air networks who are obliged to broadcast 55% Australian content.

Unprecedented is the decline in Australian drama on the ABC. In 2004/05 there was just 3 hours of first run Australian drama content on the ABC. In 2001/02 there were 83 hours of first run Australian drama on the ABC.

Similarly there has been a decrease in the overall hours of Australian drama, documentary, comedy and education programming on the ABC. However, hours of imported drama have doubled: in 2000/01 342 hours of imported

drama were broadcast, in 2004/05 688 hours of imported drama were broadcast.

The AWG believes that Australian drama, documentary, children's, educational and comedy programming on the ABC has fallen to unacceptably low levels and that this has seriously compromised the ABC's ability to fulfil its Charter to deliver **services that are comprehensive, innovative and of a high standard, that inform and entertain and which contribute to national identity and reflect the cultural diversity of the nation.**

The ABC was at the forefront of creating innovative and successful programming: *Blue Murder, The Brides of Christ, Janus, Leaving of Liverpool, Sea Change, Mother and Son, Grass Roots...* The ABC has played a crucial role in the development of some of Australia's best screenwriters and encouraged them to do some of their most innovative work – work which would not have been supported by commercial broadcasters. The ABC has encouraged risk taking. The AWG believes that in order to fulfil its Charter, the ABC must continue to be a public broadcaster which encourages risk taking and commissions innovative programming.

Australian Content Standard

The ABC should be compelled to at least meet, or preferably exceed, the Australian Content Standard, regulated by the ACMA. This will not impinge upon the editorial independence of the ABC, but rather will ensure that the ABC fulfills its Charter to the Australian people.

To do this the ABC requires a substantial amount of additional funding in order to commission higher levels of quality Australian programs.

Additionally, part of the ABC's budget should be quarantined specifically for the commissioning of new Australian drama and documentary programming and not used for any other purpose.

For further inquiries in relation to this submission, please contact Megan Elliott, Executive Director, Australian Writers' Guild t: 02 9281 1554; e: melliott@awg.com.au

Sincerely,



Megan Elliott
Executive Director

Public Submissions
ABC Funding Adequacy and Efficiency Review
National Broadcasting Section
Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2601
abc-review@dcita.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,
In making a brief submission to the ABC Funding Adequacy and Efficiency Review, I address the following terms of reference:

- ABC's legislative obligations;
- range of services provided by the ABC.

I am dismayed at the loss of a specific program addressing environmental issues such as was presented by the late Dr Peter Hunt and after him Ms Alexandra De Blas. The weekly half hour prime-time program, repeated at a different time, dwindled to 10 minutes on Saturdays and then disappeared altogether.

Environmental issues are of national and international importance, and there is keen community interest in them. In my experience, many Australians want reliable information and more information on a wide range of environmental topics.

Given the ABC's statutory functions "to provide within Australia innovative and comprehensive broadcasting and television services of a high standard" and to broadcast "programs and television programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community"; and "programs and television programs of an educational nature" (section 6, *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983*), this absence of a specific radio program on environmental issues is a serious deficiency.

Sufficient funding should be provided to the ABC to make such a program possible and indeed obligatory.

As part of my submission, I include quotations from the Andrew Olle Media Lecture 2005 presented by John Doyle on Friday, 7 October 2005, and shown on ABC TV.

If commercial radio is so slight because it is under resourced, so too is Television. And if more channels are allowed then the resources will be even further stretched. As it is the ABC has been cut to the marrow and can no longer afford to do much Drama, and commercial networks have decided Drama is too flakey and expensive. Meanwhile our very fine drama schools are pumping out scores of new young actors each year and there is nothing for them to do. The lucky ones might get to appear in a Holden advertisement or survive for a season in the Bell Shakespeare Company. So our local content is reduced to game shows, dancing shows, lifestyle shows and talent quests all creaking under the weight of diminishing returns. Think of something mindless, rope in a couple of celebrities and there's your show.

... historically the ABC has been the powerhouse for new ideas that are often taken up by the commercial networks,

... the ABC has been the training and testing ground for the commercial networks for fifty years.

The fact is, it is only the ABC by virtue of being unencumbered by what is popular, that is capable of taking risks. Why is there such a paucity of great locally made drama? Because the ABC isn't doing it.

A fully funded ABC Drama unit would be to the advantage of the commercial networks. The ABC could become Australia's HBO.

ABC News and Current Affairs has somehow survived the Shier era and the petty ideologically driven hounding by former Minister for Communications Richard Alston. The ABC still provides the best news services in the country and arguably services that could be described as being among the best in the world. Radio National is still impossibly excellent. ABC TV has too, somehow managed to survive with its current affairs programs intact, loathed by Labor and Coalition alike, as it should be.

And as it should be, it still strives to put forward an alternative view. So that when the commercial media is dictated to by myopic intrusive ownership and ill-informed populism, is forced through thoughtless need to make irresponsible programs that lack both style and substance, caresses inflammatory and cheap, nasty demagoguery that seeks to marginalize the already marginalized, that describes the world in simple terms, provides simple solutions to complex problems and is purely a servant to fiscal outcomes, then the ABC will always seem to aggravate, annoy and frustrate and it's precisely when the ABC is doing this that it is serving its charter. It's preserving its sceptical asymmetrical mask.

I fully endorse these sentiments and present them as part of my submission.

Yours sincerely,

(Dr) Beth Schultz

From: Basil Schur
Sent: Sunday, 27 November 2005 2:08 PM
To: ABC-Review, ABC-Review
Subject: Submission from a private citizen

26th November 2005

Public Submissions
ABC Funding Adequacy and Efficiency Review
National Broadcasting Section
Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Review

I am an avid listener and viewer of ABC radio and TV programs. I believe that ABC continues to struggle with inadequate funding support to deliver its programs, both in radio and television.

In particular I am concerned that, with better resourcing, the ABC would be able to expand its local content programs, thereby delivering multiple benefits to the Australian economy and culture.

I urge you to recommend increased and secure funding to the ABC, so that it can continue to serve the needs of Australian society.

I look forward to hearing the outcome of this submission and your review

Yours faithfully,

Basil Schur

From: carol a warren
Sent: Tuesday, 29 November 2005 12:02 PM
To: ABC-Review, ABC-Review
Subject: Submission on ABC Funding Adequacy and Efficiency Review

Submission to the ABC Funding Adequacy and Efficiency Review

I wish to submit my strong support for an increase in the funding allocated to the ABC which I regard as one of the most valuable Australian institutions. As a migrant to this country from the United States, I found public broadcasting in Australia to be a breath of fresh air compared to the low level of information, debate and cultural expression available on the commercial media in my country of origin. Public broadcasting there in no way matches the quality of ABC. ABC sets a high standard for the media in Australia, and given the increasing concentration of ownership of commercial media in a few hands, we very much need to increase and expand the role of public broadcasting as a counter-balance to vested interests, and least common denominator approaches to 'infotainment'. In addition, I feel ABC well deserves its reputation as a national treasure; it remains for em the one of the most compelling reflections of Australian culture whcih made me choose to stay and seek citizenship here.

I urge the government place the funding of this national icon above politics, and to restore sufficient funding to enable the ABC to restore programming and services to former levels. I am particularly concerned about ABCs ability to commission high quality domestic drama, to field sufficient numbers of reports, and to produce the programming that represents Australia in the international arena.

Sincerely yours,

Carol Warren

From: cynthia stabler
Sent: Monday, 28 November 2005 6:12 PM
To: ABC-Review, ABC-Review

To Whom it may concern.

I wish to lend my support to the ABC for providing quality unbiased viewing WITHOUT the constant interruption of advertising under limited resources. I cannot imagine life without the ABC! A substantial increase in their budget is justified.

Yours Sincerely
Cynthia Stabler

From: David Ellis
Sent: Tuesday, 29 November 2005 4:50 PM
To: ABC-Review, ABC-Review
Subject: ABC content

Thanks to the ABC for its continued quality TV. It excels in news, current affairs and documentaries and is to be complimented on its showing of quality British drama and comedy. Unfortunately the commercial channels rarely seem to have anything worth watching save their coverage of sport. But what a shame financial restraints prevent the ABC producing more of its own quality drama.

And of course continued thanks for the wonderful ABC Classic Radio, an oasis of good music in a desert of pop, rock & whatever.

David Ellis

From: 37 Scott Road
Sent: Thursday, 1 December 2005 12:39 AM
To: ABC-Review, ABC-Review
Subject: abc highly valued

The ABC is highly valued by me and also by many other Australians of my acquaintance.

The ABC provides a range of services of various kinds for a range of purposes which are not covered by commercial media. Some of these are educational, some to provide information and of course there is the entertainment value too. It is so important to our national and cultural identity that programs are made in Australia and that accents and cultural ideas reinforced and high standards are upheld. As a teacher of English I see the effects of a very strong commercial ethos dominated by overseas drama programs on literacy and values in students and for these commercial media outlets to exist without the non-commercial interests and influence of the ABC would be detrimental to the culture and traditions of the country we love.

Please support an institution so vital to the ethos of Australia

Dorothy Perciva