

**Australian Broadcasting Corporation Submission**

**Review of the Viability of Creating  
an Indigenous Television Broadcasting Service  
and the Regulatory Arrangements that should apply  
to the Digital Transmission of such a Service  
using Spectrum in the Broadcasting Services Bands**

**(Department of Communications, Information and the Arts)**



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# **Australian Broadcasting Corporation Submission to the Review of the Viability of Creating an Indigenous Television Broadcasting Service and the Regulatory Arrangements that should apply to the Digital Transmission of such a Service using Spectrum in the Broadcasting Services Bands**

## **Introduction**

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Department's inquiry into the viability of creating an Indigenous Television Broadcasting Service. The Discussion Paper canvasses a range of models and proposals, some of which have a direct impact on the ABC.

## **The ABC as a Producer of Indigenous Programming**

The ABC has a long history of producing Indigenous programming. The Corporation's Charter requires that it broadcast "programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community."<sup>1</sup> The ABC understands this obligation to include presenting content by, for and about Indigenous Australians, including programming that reflects issues and developments affecting Indigenous Australians to the wider community. Accordingly, the Corporation produces, commissions and purchases such material for broadcast on ABC Radio and Television and for publication on ABC Online.

The ABC's *Editorial Policies* acknowledge that "[t]he ABC has a role to play in facilitating the ability of Indigenous Australians to protect, promote and develop their diverse cultures, languages and local heritage. Indigenous Australians require access to the full range of media available and have special communication needs in remote areas and in dealing with cultural and language differences."<sup>2</sup>

ABC Television's Indigenous Production Unit (IPU) produces a weekly prime-time magazine-style program, *Message Stick*, and documentaries and other programs that are screened across the ABC Television schedule. ABC Radio carries the regular programs *Speaking Out* (Local Radio) and *Away!* (Radio National), as well as more general coverage of issues relevant to Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. The *Message Stick* website on ABC Online is the most popular Indigenous website in Australia and features an Indigenous news service, children's interactive games, an event diary and Arts material, as well as content

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<sup>1</sup> *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983*, s.6(1)a(i).

<sup>2</sup> *ABC Editorial Policies*, par.10.11.3.

related to Television and Radio programs.<sup>3</sup> Anecdotally, the ABC is aware of number of Indigenous media groups that use the online Indigenous news service as a source of news for their services.

The Corporation also provides employment equity to Indigenous Australians and supports the development of Indigenous broadcasting associations.

### **Indigenous Broadcaster Programming Carried on ABC Multichannel**

The ABC notes that the Discussion Paper requests comments on proposals for a national Indigenous broadcasting service carried by either the ABC or SBS using multichannel capacity. The ABC does not have the multichannel capacity available to carry an additional service such as the proposed Indigenous national broadcaster service.

As announced on 27 August 2004, the ABC is developing a second digital channel, to be launched in March 2005, to supplement its primary channel and enhance its delivery of public broadcasting programming. The new service will carry material that cannot be accommodated on the primary channel, as well as time-shifted content, to ensure that the Australian public has greater access to the full range of publicly-funded programming on ABC Television.

The present legislated requirement to simulcast analog, HDTV and SDTV versions of programming places severe limitations on the ability of broadcasters to multichannel. When the ABC begins transmission of its second channel in March 2005, it will be broadcasting one HDTV signal and two SDTV signals. This will require the Corporation to transmit its HDTV content in the lowest-resolution format, 576p, to accommodate the SDTV multichannel service. The ABC will not have the capacity to provide spectrum for any additional multichannels.

### **Indigenous Production Body**

The Discussion Paper also seeks comments on the possible establishment of an Indigenous production body that would be free to negotiate the carriage of its output with existing broadcasters. If such a body was created, the ABC would be interested in exploring potential acquisition and co-production opportunities, particularly after the establishment of its second digital channel in 2005. However, it should be noted that the Corporation would only be able to carry programming that is consistent with its *Editorial Policies* and the scheduling needs of its channels. For example, the ABC is prohibited from carrying advertising, and would be unable to broadcast content that depended on sponsorship or advertising for its realisation.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/message/>

### **The ABC as a Training Provider**

For a number of years, the ABC has actively supported the development of Indigenous radio broadcasters. It has assisted more than twenty Indigenous communities gain radio broadcasting services, and is currently providing support to seven emerging communities that have expressed a desire to develop media services. ABC Radio has also assisted Bumma Bipperra in Cairns and the Charleville community to broadcast cultural events nationally through the National Indigenous radio service. The Corporation has also provided technical support to a number of Indigenous broadcasting organisations.

The ABC would be willing to provide similar support to a national Indigenous television service or production company.

As a Registered Training Organisation, the ABC would be willing to assist in the training and development of staff across the range of production and technical roles required to operate an Indigenous broadcast service or production company. It is worth noting that the ABC has experienced Indigenous staff working in an extensive range of roles across the Corporation who will be able to assist in the delivery of appropriate and accredited training.