



friends of the
ABC WA Inc

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Committee Secretary,
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications,
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT

27th. November 2012

Re: ABC PERTH

I am writing on behalf of the Committee and members of **Friends of the ABC (Western Australia) (FABC-WA)**, a not-for-profit, community organisation based in Perth and loosely associated with similar FABC organisations in other states and territories.

We are writing to add a Western Australian view following the decision by the ABC to end Television production in Tasmania.

FABC-WA supports an independent, non-commercial national broadcaster which fulfills the ABC Charter by **reflecting all parts of the nation to the nation**. FABC-WA believes that the ABC, under its current funding, is not able to properly fulfill its Charter in today's environment of rapid global technological and media change.

Sadly, what the ABC intends in relation to TV production in Tasmania, with the loss of 16 jobs and a reduced role for the ABC in that state, has already happened at ABC Perth. We have no access to actual figures, but do know that similar numbers of talented and experienced staff have left ABC Perth since the de-commissioning of *Rollercoaster* (2009) and *Can We Help?* (2010), the loss of the *Hopman Cup* tennis coverage and the certainty of very limited future involvement in television production (*WA Football League* coverage expected to cease in the near future). Quite a few other staff, including technologists and administrative staff, have also left due to the downturn of work in the branch.

Television production in Perth in 2012 consists of the *ANZAC Day March & Service*, live coverage of the *WA Football League* plus the half-time story inserts, and WA items for *Gardening Australia*. Some WA staff also occasionally work on programs such as *Australian Story* and *Catalyst* when they cover a WA story, however interstate staff are often brought over. A single TV producer position remains and other remaining skilled television staff work as news crews or are hired out to commercial telecasters. Opportunities for career advancement or new learning for these staff are non-existent, and there is no career pathway available for young people looking for a way into the industry via the ABC.

FABC-WA is concerned that funds provided to the ABC to make television programs are ultimately ending up with the independent, commercial or state-funded sector. Meanwhile, facilities at the ABC (a purpose-built 7-year-old building) are underused, hired out, or used by co-producers. FABC-WA would like to see figures that prove that it is cheaper to produce programs externally rather than inside the ABC, even allowing for the 'producer offset' which is not claimable by the ABC as a publicly-funded body.

Cont. O/P

FABC-WA wants to make clear that we have no issue with the ABC entering into co-productions with outside producers and agree with ABC MD Mark Scott that there should be a 'mixed model' of internal and external production. Mr. Scott has repeatedly said, publicly and to staff, that there is currently 75% internal production (excluding News & Current Affairs, *Rage* and local football codes). However, to our knowledge, Mr. Scott has never actually provided a list of the programs that make up this "75%".

FABC-WA is also concerned that, since the policies of the Director Television, Mr. Kim Dalton, have been implemented, there are no longer any opportunities for ABC staff to work on co-productions. Indeed, we have heard that contracts may actually **preclude** the co-production partner from using ABC staff. We believe the ABC may also lose out on rights for re-broadcast and international sales, and also for archival preservation. The provision of ABC content to co-producers for programs that may be on-sold internationally would also be worth further investigation.

FABC-WA also notes the decrease in numbers of Radio National (RN) program-makers based in Perth. What was once a viable unit of about a dozen staff is now down to a quarter of that ... and falling. Some of these staff left by natural attrition, but their positions have been either unfilled or filled in Sydney or Melbourne, with subsequent loss of Western Australian voices. RN facilities in the still new ABC Centre in Perth, including a very impressive Radio Drama studio, go largely unused.

It's worth pointing out that the new national 5:30pm News bulletin on ABC1, whilst it will be read from Perth by the Perth newsreader, will be compiled, edited, scripted etc. in Sydney. Perth 's studio and newsreader are being used only because of the convenience of the time difference, in that the new bulletin at 2:30pm WAST (3:30pm WAT) will not interfere with production of the 7pm News bulletin as it would in all other states and territories.

Whilst ABC Local and Regional Radio and ABC News & Current Affairs on both television and radio maintain a strong presence in Western Australia, the loss of TV production and the reduction of RN program-makers exemplifies the centralisation of the ABC in Sydney and Melbourne. The Perth branch is now seriously depleted and, we hear, staff morale is low. Large areas of the second floor of the new building, where creative and productive inter-action between Radio and Television staff used to happen, are now dark and empty, studio and production spaces rarely used – at least not by ABC staff making ABC programs.

FABC-WA deplores the increasing centralisation of the ABC as exemplified by the recent decision regarding television production in Tasmania, the similar previous decision in relation to Perth, and the general running down of the smaller capital city centres.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring these concerns to your attention.

Bobbie Mackley
President FABC-WA
On behalf of the Committee and members