

Submission to National Commission of Audit

Referring to the following terms of reference:

In relation to activities performed by the Commonwealth, the Commission is asked to identify:

- whether there remains a compelling case for the activity to continue to be undertaken; and
- if so, whether there is a strong case for continued direct involvement of government, or whether the activity could be undertaken more efficiently by the private sector, the not-for-profit sector, the States, or local government.

The Commission is asked to report on efficiencies and savings to improve the effectiveness of, and value-for-money from, all Commonwealth expenditure across the forward estimates and in the medium term, including:

- options for greater efficiencies in the Australian Government, such as: .....
- potential improvements to productivity, service quality, and value for money across the public sector, including better delivery of services to the regions;

The ABC and SBS provide vital services across the whole Australian community including a trust-worthy source of information, a way for Australians to feel united as a nation across all sectors of the society, a full and reliable information source based on local knowledge in emergencies such as bush-fire and flood, education, entertainment and the support and promotion of Australian performers such as musicians, actors, artists etc.

We can also get significant health and medical advances and warnings, learn about current affairs, science, cosmology, social programs to help drug and alcohol addicts, news, Australian history, and biographies of famous Australians which is heard nowhere else. In fact, most of the content covered on the ABC and SBS is not available in a cohesive and integrated form anywhere else. In that way, they are unique.

I am certain that the service provided by these two independent broadcasters would never be provided by the private sector, the not-for-profit sector, the States, or local government.

The private sector is really only interested in profit and much of the content broadcast on the ABC and SBS is unrelated to the production of sheer profit or would even be entirely unprofitable.

Imagine bushfire reports being constantly interrupted by the need to play advertisements. It just would not happen.

The not-for-profit sector does not have the kind of budget that could possibly provide the Australia-wide service which the government-funded broadcasters do. The states have never shown any interest in broadcasting and even if they did it would not give us the integrated, uniting approach across the whole country that the ABC and SBS do. And the same goes for local council.

In short, the independent, Commonwealth government-funded broadcasters must remain fully funded by the Commonwealth government and in the interests of our democracy, also remain independent of any government intervention. This has been the case as with the BBC, the CBC, and the European government funded broadcasters for decades and has shown to have been an institution which millions of people treasure dearly. The ABC and the SBS are part of many people's daily lives and reach millions in Australia, especially taking into account the range across the nation of stations, local, national, specialist (eg Triple J, ABC classical and Jazz, News Radio) and channels .Also through Radio Australia, we are able to reach out to Asian countries, with accurate reporting and cultural programs.

In terms of value for money, the commercial broadcasters could never do what the ABC and SBS does with the relatively small amount of money which these organisations achieve particularly when you consider that they reach across the whole nation to those in the regions and remote areas as well as the cities and suburbs. I have spoken to some farmers who are so remote that they are only able to receive a signal from Radio National, listening as they drive their tractors etc and are therefore very well-informed and in touch with the rest of the community and indeed the nation.