

**Re: Program cuts at the ABC**

There needs to be a public inquiry into the siphoning of taxpayers' funds meant to sustain independent public broadcasting to the commercial television sector.

The list of current program cuts, misleadingly represented as schedule refreshment, is in fact the intentional destruction of the ABC's creative independence.

An inquiry to establish the facts is needed into this major shift in the role of the public broadcaster away from its Charter and public purpose.

I think an inquiry would show that this process, which began with the outsourcing of production units such as drama, then moved on to natural history, now includes all documentary, arts and, finally, studio-based light entertainment.

The loss of in-house production will have a particularly significant impact on arts and other specialist communities especially those outside of Sydney and Melbourne.

Public broadcasting is founded on the idea that you cannot have creative independence unless you have a capacity to make programs yourself, unencumbered by the commercial imperative.

Under the Kim Dalton model ABC programs are these days commissioned on the basis of their commercial 'bankability' – their capacity to be on-sold to pay TV and other commercial operators after a showing on the ABC. When this commissioning model is applied there is little room for public purpose, innovation and risk-taking, much less independence from commercial influence. What the public gets from this model is Hallmark television or light-weight, sexy and formulaic stuff pitched at an AB demographic.

The public has become alerted to the way in which SBS has been undermined with its once loyal audience by SBS's increasing dependence on commerciality.

Commercial co-productions and out-sourcing at the ABC, though less visible, are just as corrosive of the public role of the ABC as paid advertising at SBS. All of this without any public discussion.

In the context of the current 'convergence review' this siphoning of taxpayer funds to commercial purposes fundamentally shifts the place of the ABC in the Australian media and cultural landscape.

An inquiry would show the extent to which the taxpayer's trust in the ABC as an independent and creative voice is being betrayed.

The public trust of the ABC is based on an expectation that we are independent of commercial influence.

That trust is being breached by current management and board policy.

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