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Review Manager  
ABC/SBS Review  
Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy  
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Dear Review Manager,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the current review of the ABC and SBS. Universities Australia is the body that represents Australia's universities, and it is very supportive of the role of the ABC and SBS, appreciative of how well this role has been pursued by those broadcasters, and cognisant of the fact that this performance has occurred despite inadequate public investment in national public broadcasting.

In a global knowledge economy rich with information from a multiplicity of sources, a nation needs balanced and authoritative creation and review of that information to ensure that the most important developments are available for informed decision-making about the nation.

Much information will come via commercial sources and this is invaluable. But commercial provision is inevitably conditioned by the profit motive that drives such business at its core. The role of public broadcasting is to complement that business provision through a not-for-profit broadcasting capacity. The combination can be highly synergistic to the benefit of both sectors, and particularly so in an industry that matters as much for the political, social and cultural dimensions of our national life as its strictly economic aspects. Of course even this latter economic dimension in this modern era, where we acknowledge the role of the new creative sectors, is a source of significant competitive advantage for a country well beyond the role of more traditional industries.

Some not-for-profit broadcasting can be community based, but much must come from a comprehensive and integrated broadcasting capability based upon thorough professionalism in media delivery. In the process therefore there must, by definition, be absolutely limited recourse to commercial income. In Australia this capability is met by the ABC and, with due qualification for advertising, the SBS. Also there must be systems and culture that ensure substantial professional independence in content provision, while still fully complying with all reasonable accountability requirements for the use of public funds.

Universities Australia notes that independent research evidence<sup>1</sup> indicates that:

- there is overwhelming public support for Australian public broadcasting, including especially in the key dimension of trust and respect;
- there is a public willingness to provide adequate resourcing for public broadcasting that is ahead of present funding levels;
- public broadcaster costs per broadcast hour and per viewer/listener are at least as efficient as commercial broadcasting;
- public broadcasting has been notably innovative in its use of new media outreach to the community; and yet; and
- Australian public broadcasting is less well funded than public broadcasting in countries with a comparable broadcasting tradition and structure.

Universities Australia therefore supports the maintenance and enhancement of a strong public broadcasting sector, including appropriate resourcing for functions that have become even more vital, not less, in the twenty first century. Universities share with public broadcasters a crucial obligation for development and transmission of knowledge and for critical social evaluation.

In this brief submission, Universities Australia would also like to note the important role that the two public broadcasters play in areas very close to university direct interests: educational programming, public interest programming and in the dissemination of information concerning Australian research and innovation.

Such programming provides Australia with an intelligent window on the world, and the world with a window on a creative Australia. For the university sector, public broadcasting is invaluable as an aid to teaching and as a means of communicating insight from higher education and research institutions.

Universities Australia therefore strongly supports a comprehensive and diverse role for our national public broadcasters, with particular reference to educational and public interest programming and to the communication of debates across the sciences, social sciences, humanities and creative arts. This includes adequate resourcing of specialist programming in areas such as science, the environment, politics, culture and religion.

Universities Australia also supports efforts by public broadcasters to make available the maximum possible programming material (including archived material) online and through emerging multi-platform digital environments. Universities Australia argues that such material is a public asset and should remain free for non-commercial use. This is culturally desirable and economically efficient since the information takes on the nature of a "public good" which when produced should not be artificially rationed. Good resourcing for the overhead costs is needed to ensure this happens properly.

In sum, Universities Australia strongly endorses the importance of a strong and vibrant public broadcasting sector characterised by:

- arms length independence from Government in media content creation and delivery;
- adequate public investment with no increase required from commercial income sources;

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<sup>1</sup> For one survey see "Fundamentals of ABC", in the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, Dialogue, Volume 22, 3/2003, 75-83

- considerable provision of educational and public interest programming; and with
- open public access to the broadcasting product through a range of media.

Please contact me if you would like to discuss any of these issues further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Glenn Withers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr Glenn Withers AO  
Chief Executive Officer