

Public Broadcasting

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS PUBLIC BROADCASTING

The global trend towards concentration of media ownership, particularly in Australia, makes the maintenance of the national broadcasters – ABC and SBS – free from government interference, and independent from commercial influences an even more important part of our democracy. The ABC and SBS have been vital sources of independent news, current affairs, information programs and local drama. They also provide state, local and international perspectives on news and current events which are not shown on nationally networked programs. However funding cuts, especially to the ABC, threaten the broadcasters' ability to fulfil their charters.

“So much of the Fourth Estate is busy selling hamburgers and plasma TVs, it is more vital than ever that our public broadcasters are independent of commercial interests and the government of the day. Our Public Broadcasters are vital for democracy but also education, information and entertainment.”

**Senator Lyn Allison
Spokesperson on Public
Broadcasting**

Democrats Action agenda

- The \$270M in funds raised from the annual commercial broadcasting licences fees be placed into a Public and Community Broadcasting Development Fund, and allocated over the next four years to key initiatives to develop and expand the public and community broadcasting sectors
- A comprehensive review of ABC and SBS funding taking into account the greater range of services offered through new media technologies. Funding levels to be restored to the peak 1985 levels adjusted for inflation and to take account of new platforms, technologies and services. Future triennial funding to be indexed to CPI and reviewed independently
- SBS to be fully government funded to the level of \$60m and for advertising removed. Uphold the independence of the ABC and SBS by extending the prohibition of advertising and sponsorship.
- Additional funding to enhance SBS radio services, allowing more language groups to be represented, and expanding coverage to regional areas. The Democrats also support SBS' request for funding to compete in multi-platform, new technology environment, including the development of broadband delivery.
- Establish 'ABC Independent', a commissioning trust fund to invest solely within Australian independent production sector. ABC Independent would enable the production of at least an additional 30 hours of quality, first-run Australian drama and comedy each year.
- Enable the ABC and SBS to start providing quality content to Australian audiences via new digital platforms (broadband and multi-channel). Services



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could include ABC Kids Digital, ABC News and Information Digital, and Triple J Broadband, dependent on funding.

- Extend transmission and level of programming of radio and TV networks. Currently, over a million Australians in regional areas of Australia do not yet have access to ABC 'national' networks, especially Triple J, ABC News Radio and SBS Radio and TV.
- Offset the increased cost of broadcasting and program making, which are increasing at a faster rate than the indexation of the ABC and SBS base rate funding.
- Renew and resurrect the National Interest Initiatives Program (NII) post 2008/09 budget. The NII has allowed the ABC to introduce new programs and services in regional and rural Australia. Commitment to the funding beyond the next financial year, will give the ABC the certainty required for the future delivery of these services.
- Introduce a transparent appointment process to the ABC and SBS Boards based upon merit and (re)instate the staff elected director position on the ABC and SBS Boards.
- SBS should be kept as a unique and independent, multicultural public broadcaster and not be merged with the ABC.

The Issues:

Since 1985, the ABC's funding has been slashed by 30%, with cuts under both Labor and Coalition Governments. The Broadcaster's funding has been cut far more than any other major area of government expenditure leaving the public and community broadcasting sector starved of funds. The BBC receives almost 10 times the funding of the ABC and services only 3 times the population of Australia.



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Authorised by Jack Evans, 5 Poinciana Place, Wanneroo WA 6065
Printed by Senator Lyn Allison, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600