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Joint Standing Committee on Migration - Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia

Introduction

Save Our SBS Inc is pleased to have the opportunity to make our submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration¹ on multiculturalism in Australia.

About Save Our SBS

Save Our SBS Inc is a not-for-profit organisation representing 8000 people in all States and Territories living in metropolitan and regional Australia, our subscribers and members, being critical supporters of Australia's national multicultural and multilingual broadcaster, the Special Broadcasting Service Corporation (SBS). We have a close working relationship with SBS and organisations who are also interested in multicultural and multilingual broadcasting. We have made various submissions² to government and continue to do so with the aim of always providing the best possible outcome for SBS and in the interests of consumers of SBS, its audience.

Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation

Before discussing the role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda³ it is necessary to mention that there are distinct differences between multiculturalism and social inclusion. Broadly speaking these can be described as follows:-

¹ Joint Standing Committee on Migration <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/>

² Save Our SBS submissions <http://saveoursbs.org/archives/category/submissions>

³ Social Inclusion Agenda <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au>

Multiculturalism is an expression of the diverse mix of cultures that make up a society; races, languages, philosophies, religions, and the cultural inheritance, where all are respected, even if not understood by people from other cultures.

Multiculturalism could also include any subset within an existing culture, i.e., a subculture, e.g., people of a particular orientation, practice or belief and so on. In a treasured multicultural society no group or subculture would be regarded as inferior or of less value than another.

Social inclusion is the embracing of the multicultural expressions. For example, social inclusion may exist then when each culture or subculture in a society is included equally in the wider society as well as their own group, without discrimination or favour.

The federal government's booklet, *Australia's Multicultural Policy - The People of Australia*⁴ outlines important multicultural policy principles and key initiatives. It has already allowed a dialogue about multiculturalism to occur; something that had been frowned upon since 2006 in the absence of a national multicultural policy. In the context of SBS and the Federal Government's Social Inclusion Principles⁵ SBS is well positioned through its Charter⁶ to reflect Australia's multicultural society. Ahead of, but consistent with the foregoing, in 2010 SBS articulated a policy direction of social inclusion and cohesion as fundamental to SBS⁷. This was pre-empted by SBS's Second Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)⁸ which is SBS's policy and practice about increasing awareness of the contribution of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities to Australian society and building capacity to learn from and serve Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples. The RAP builds on the unique content that SBS has demonstrated in its commitment to telling Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander stories on SBS. Rightfully SBS sees this as crucial to building relationships and partnerships with Indigenous peoples. This is but one example of social inclusion; a policy that has led to an outcome and is on-going.

Settlement and participation

When people feel socially included, settlement may result.

⁴ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Australia's Multicultural Policy - The People of Australia*, 16 February 2011, http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/pdf_doc/people-of-australia-multicultural-policy-booklet.pdf

⁵ *Social Inclusion Principles for Australia* <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/SIAgenda/Principles/Documents/SIPrinciples.pdf>

⁶ *Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991*, section 6, [http://www.comlaw.gov.au/ComLaw/Legislation/ActCompilation1.nsf/0/2F8013F942CC76E5CA2571FD0020CC29/\\$file/SpecBroadService91WD02.pdf](http://www.comlaw.gov.au/ComLaw/Legislation/ActCompilation1.nsf/0/2F8013F942CC76E5CA2571FD0020CC29/$file/SpecBroadService91WD02.pdf)

⁷ SBS Corporate Plan 2010-2013, pages 9 & 10, http://media.sbs.com.au/home/upload_media/site_20_rand_1685307411_sbs_corporate_plan7.pdf

⁸ SBS - Second Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), 2010, http://media.sbs.com.au/shows/upload_media/Second_RAP.pdf

The purpose of SBS is spelt out in its Charter, “to provide multilingual and multicultural radio and television services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians. . . in their preferred languages. . . and promote Australia’s multicultural society”. To facilitate the purpose of SBS fully, its role, is broader than that of a broadcaster, although that is its primary function. In the 21st century broadcasting has extended to the internet too.

Probably no other media organisation in Australia engages as widely as SBS does with the communities it serves. SBS does so, not just through the medium of broadcasting, but often by holding public forums and community meetings. This is important as it allows direct interaction. This may also occur on-line.

Through the use of modern technology it is relatively easy for migrants to access media in their country of origin. However SBS is often the first and ongoing *Australian* media reference point for new and emerging communities. Given that almost one-quarter of all Australians were born outside Australia and a little less speak a language other than English (LOTE)⁹ in the home, SBS has particular relevance for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and other Australians who may not identify as being a part of any of the above. This is not surprising considering that almost two thirds of all Australians believe that Australia should be a multicultural society¹⁰.

With sufficient government funding there is a role for SBS to commit to assisting new arrivals to settle. When SBS was first established, this occurred through, among other things, on-air English language programs. There are a variety of other ways of assisting people to be included. A feeling of inclusion will help people to settle. During the settling process there is a role for SBS to build a strong acceptance of the diversity of cultures that exists within the existing Australian society. Established Australians would also benefit.

The role of the media cannot be underestimated in terms of influencing the wider community. It is unfortunate that some (commercial) media outlets have abused this power.

Sometimes this has been executed in a misleading, negative, or even a racially hateful manner. The Cronulla riots in 2005 where a Sydney commercial radio presenter called for “*a rally, a street march, call it what you will. A community show of force. . .*” against a certain community. The call resulted in riots of some 5000 people taking violent action against people of a particular ethnic background. The radio presenter was later found by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to have encouraged violence or brutality and to have vilified people on the basis of

⁹ ABS Census (2006) <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/census+data>

¹⁰ Ipsos-Eureka Social Research Institute - Ipsos Mackay, Special Broadcasting Service Immigration Nation *Thought Leadership Research Report*, Dec, 2010 (Feb 2011), page, 14, http://media.sbs.com.au/home/upload_media/site_20_rand_1318646201_sbs_immigration_nation_cut_down_report_final_14_feb.pdf

ethnicity¹¹. This is only one example of the power of the media, albeit an abuse of power to facilitate a horrible event.

So where does SBS fit into all this?

The power of the media, in the case above, was more than just inciting violence; that alone being bad enough. It contributed to making a particular ethnic community feel unsafe, isolated, and without a sense of belonging to the wider Australian society. In short it divided the community. Then, there was no social inclusion policy and any counter view to that cited above was faced with ridicule and incidental. Although other media and SBS may have been able to off-set some of the prevailing attitudes at the time, in the absence of a national agenda there remained a risk that most likely the events had a negative impact on those new to Australia or those already settled, to feel safe, wanted and included.

Ignorance about ethnic communities can lead to fear and outcomes such as the one described above. One of SBS's roles is to educate the Australian community about other cultures by making ethnic programs available to all Australians. This may lead to better harmony of ethnic cultures within the Australian community.

Participation only occurs when one feels included. To settle, one must be able to participate.

Language is very powerful. It is a tool required for participation. When the communicated language is not your own, isolation may exist. Considering that less than one-third of programs on SBS's main television channel are in LOTE¹², many commentators have criticised SBS for not serving the Australian communities "*in their preferred languages*" to the same extent that was the case when SBS television was established. This may be a spin-off of the enthusiastic commercial approach at SBS television of the past five years and an issue of lack of adequate public funding.

Television is more costly to operate than radio.

Probably SBS Radio and on-line services address the language issue more fully than SBS television currently can, or does, given the chronic under-funding of SBS.

Acknowledgment should also be given to the ethnic and multicultural community broadcasting sector, as well as the SBS; in balancing a local and national conversation about the impact of Australia's multicultural policy.

¹¹ 2005 Cronulla riots, Wikipedia, 1 May 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2005_Cronulla_riots

¹² QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Special Broadcasting Service, Allison, Sen Lyn, Question 93 Senate Hansard, (chamber/hansards/2008-06-16/0157) Page 2135, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, upon notice, on 12 February 2008 refer to sub-question 4 and Minister's answer "*32.03% of nightly programming (167 hours) was in a language other than English*", <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansards%2F2008-06-16%2F0157%22>

National productive capacity

Migrants cannot be fully productive individuals unless they are comfortably integrated into, and embraced by, their new community. SBS plays an important role in facilitating this integration process in several ways. It provides programs from ethnic cultures which help to educate the broader community to allow better understanding and acceptance of those cultures. It is unreasonable to expect that immigrants immediately take on the culture of their new country. It is therefore also a role of SBS to provide ethnic communities living in Australia with a way of getting information about their country of origin and helping them to maintain a connection with the culture they are accustomed to as they welcomed into and form part of the Australian community and therefore allow them to be productive contributors to the Australian productive capacity.

In the past 5 years, funding for much of the work of SBS was derived from reliance on the commercial dollar. This is evidenced by the disruption of programs for advertisements on SBS-TV since late 2006. That has co-existed with a more commercial-type presentation of programs. However, SBS still struggles. In 2010 SBS reported that it needs *“to find a way to offset the hits to our commercial revenue that have occurred firstly as a consequence of the global financial crisis and secondly because of the explosion of multichannels from commercial broadcasters which has doubled the amount of commercial inventory in the market and is having an impact on the revenue that SBS can derive”*¹³. SBS is the least government funded public broadcaster in Australia. Put another way, governments have not funded SBS adequately. Although Australia produced the world’s first multicultural broadcaster, public funding for it, by any measure, is inadequate.

Despite the above, SBS still exists and airs high quality programs. The production of programs is a form of art. Art is an expression of diversity. Art can bring peoples of differing cultures together.

The SBS Charter states that SBS must *“contribute to extending the range of Australian television and radio services and reflect the changing nature of Australia society, by presenting many points of view and using innovative forms of expression.”* This provision recognises that diversity is a form a cultural expression. SBS Independent (SBSi)¹⁴ was the independent arm of SBS that was established to foster this objective. It received funding from government¹⁵, however when SBSi was absorbed into the SBS funding may have been affected¹⁶ and the cultural expression changed. With a greater reliance on advertising neutralised by ever increasing costs

¹³ SBS Manger Director Mr Shaun Brown appearing before the Senate Estimates BCDE 24/05/2010 (committees/estimate/13005/0001) ECA page 4 (PDF page 8)

http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/estimate/13005/toc_pdf/7622-3.pdf

¹⁴ Wikipedia *“SBS independent”* 6 February 2011 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SBS_independent

¹⁵ Senator Coonan media release Federal Budget 2005-06 *SBS Independent—continuation of funding for the Special Production Fund*

http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/coonan/media/media_releases/sbsindependent_continuation_of_funding_for_the_special_production_fund

¹⁶ Communications and the Digital Economy, Media Release, Budget 2009: *More Australian stories from ABC and SBS*, 12 May 2008, http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media_releases/2009/035

and inadequate revenue from the public purse, in a 2010 submission to government, SBS emphasised that greater government funding was required *“to the television production industry, particularly in a climate where the Screen Australia direct funding subsidy is decreasing year on year”*¹⁷.

The employment of persons required in the production of television or radio programs not only adds to the diverse Australian culture, the process itself enhances our national capacity to produce. The employment of many stimulates the economy. In this aspect alone, the whole of Australian society would benefit if government invested heavily in SBS.

The implementation of a multicultural policy needs to be nurtured – not left to struggle - resulting in a need to turn to commercial revenue in the manner that SBS television has had to since late 2006.

Conclusion

In the context of the foregoing, Save Our SBS recommends that the Joint Standing Committee on Migration consider the points below.

Without sufficient government funding, a social inclusion agenda will have little purpose.

For social inclusion and cohesion to have any real meaning there needs to be strong recognition of, and on-going financial support for, the role of SBS as Australia’s multicultural and multilingual broadcaster. It is not satisfactory for Australia to boast that Australia produced the world’s first multicultural broadcaster but then leave it to struggle due to lack of adequate government funding.

Government funding to a greater extent than has occurred in the past decade is overdue and now necessary so that SBS can provide services to CALD communities through its radio, television and on-line services. The latter has never been funded by government.

Possibly the most noticeable impact of insufficient government funding on SBS in recent years has been the expansion of commercial breaks into SBS-TV. However this approach, by the very purpose it seeks to serve (to raise funds so that the broadcaster may remain operational) undermines that of social inclusion because the client of SBS television has now become the advertiser, not the audience. Daily minute by minute ratings have become the norm; necessary to make adjustments to appease the advertiser. The audience is now the product that is sold to the client, the advertiser. This was not the case prior to 2007, when advertisements were placed between programs only. Then, the more distinct separation of commercials away from programs meant that the program remained the product, the audience the client with the net result of a more socially inclusive broadcaster. The current situation can only

¹⁷ 2010 Review Australian Independent Screen Production Sector SBS SUBMISSION page 4
http://www.arts.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0003/91893/special_broadcasting_service.pdf

be reversed if the following triple action occurs:- a legislated phasing out of commercial disruptions into SBS television programs coupled with proportional increases in government funding and further public money for expansion of services. Save Our SBS strongly recommends the foregoing. SBS shall then be freed from the constraints it currently faces, switching the focus of the client of SBS from advertiser back to the audience, thus fostering social inclusion to the full extent. This is entirely appropriate in consideration of the whole of government approach for a national multicultural policy.

If SBS is to move forward in the direction that it was established for, and give meaning to the principles of social inclusiveness and assist migrants to settle, and affect the national productive capacity in a fruitful way for all Australians, SBS will need far greater public funding than has occurred to date. With a massive injection of government funding, SBS could be central to ensuring that Australia continues to lead the way as a world example of a successful multicultural society.

**The Committee of Management
Save Our SBS Inc
2011**

This submission may also be read on the *SaveOurSBS.org* website at: <http://saveoursbs.org/archives/1861>