

ABC Triennial Funding Submission 2006-09 Background Briefing

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NEW INNOVATIVE SERVICES

Australian content

Friends of the ABC applaud the ABC's proposal to increase production of Australian drama, children's programs, and Australian documentaries by about 170 hours over the next three years. We urge the Government to support the ABC's request for an investment fund which will bring us more of our own Australian stories, and also provide a boost to all the talent in the television production sector.

The drop to an all-time low of 20 hours new ABC-produced Australian drama in 2005 is a disgrace. It threatens the relevance of the ABC to all of us who have loved shows from *Brides of Christ* to *Seachange*, from *Certain Women* to *Grass Roots*.

Last time the ABC made a similar request (they are now asking for an average \$20m per annum over 3 years), the Government rejected it, and we've seen the result. We hope for better this time around.

Regional and outer-metropolitan initiatives

Another welcome initiative is the ABC's proposal to address under-served regional and outer-metropolitan radio and radio online services. Locally relevant radio is one reason why the ABC is so loved across Australia. It is a distinctive feature of the ABC that it goes where the commercial networks, in their search for the advertising dollar, will not. Friends of the ABC call upon the Government to do better than in 2003 when they rejected a similar request (they are now asking for about \$4.5 m per annum)

Digital-only content

The third of the additional, new services for which the ABC is seeking funding will make the take-up of digital TV more compelling. The ABC is proposing to build on the success of its recently opened ABC2 by generating an extra 200 hours of digital-only content for ABC2 and Broadband platforms. This initiative will be welcomed by ABC2 viewers, will encourage a wider audience, and is a terribly important part of the ABC's effort to remain relevant in a changing technological world.

This proposal, for about \$14m per annum over 3 years, is far less than the amount the ABC requested in 2003 when the Government's rejection meant the closure of ABC Kids and Fly TV, the 2 digital channels they had initiated.

EXISTING FUNDING – CLOSING THE GAP

Friends of the ABC also urge support for the ABC's request for funds to close the gap between the ABC's needs and the amount it is receiving from the Government. For programming purposes, the ABC is down \$51m on what it had 10 years ago, according to revelations at Senate Estimates last October.

It is simply not possible to maintain quality and diversity in 2006 on 1996 income levels.

Friends of the ABC strongly support the ABC's request for the special-purpose, time-specific funding (the National Interest Initiative program which has been so successful especially in extending regional and rural radio services and production) to be rolled into its triennial budget. The National Interest Initiative funding, \$54.4 million over three years, will cut out in 2007-08. The regional radio stations and the new programs generated by that funding (Canberra's weekend TV news is one of them) are too important to hinge on short-term funding.

Summary

The ABC's proposals will enable the ABC to maintain the quality and the diversity of its programs at a high standard, and they will also enable the ABC to introduce innovations – both essential if Aunty, at over 70, is to get a new lease on life.