

# The ABC : *THE FACTS*

## **The ABC - Important to Australia**

- The ABC is Australia's *independent* and *comprehensive* national public broadcaster. The ABC's independence - from government and commercial influence - enables it to report without fear or favour.
- The ABC is responsible to inform, educate, entertain and to promote Australian culture. It is Australia's open university, accessible to all.
- The ABC's significance is even greater in a country where the highest concentration of media ownership in the western world results in less diversity of information and opinion.

## **Public Support & Public Use**

- Independent opinion polls regularly reveal over 80% of Australians believe the ABC provides a valuable service to the community.<sup>1</sup>
- An estimated 75% of Australians use the ABC each week<sup>2</sup>.

## **Commercial Costs you More**

- Included in the cost of almost everything you buy is the cost of advertising. So we are all forced to pay far more for commercial TV and radio than we do for the ABC.

## **Bias**

- The ABC has a responsibility to the public to report and analyse, and to ask the hard questions of governments. As a result, both Liberal and Labor governments have perceived the ABC as being biased against them.  
No reputable independent study has found bias to be a problem in the ABC. The Federal Government's own appointee to inquire into the ABC, Mr Bob Mansfield, did not find bias to be an issue.<sup>3</sup> The Australian National Audit Office review found ABC procedures and practices to be effective in delivering news and current affairs which is independent, accurate and impartial.<sup>4</sup>

## **ABC sets the Standard**

- Importantly, if public service broadcasters have a strong audience share, they set standards for commercial broadcasters.<sup>5</sup>

## **ABC Services & Funding**

- The ABC provides: a national television service; four specialist national radio networks - Radio National, Classic FM and Triple J and News Radio; nine metropolitan radio networks and 51 regional radio stations; overseas services Radio Australia and Australia Network television; ABC Online and three internet music-based services; a digital tv channel (ABC 2) and podcasting.  
... and all for a budget of around two thirds of the Nine Network for television alone.
- The ABC is being starved of funds. The ABC's operational funds (i.e., the funds available to it for programming) have declined by 29.7% in real terms since 1985-86.<sup>6</sup> This decline is out of proportion to any other major area of federal government expenditure.
- Since 1996, despite the Howard Government presiding over record budget surpluses: ABC triennial funding (important for the ABC's independence from government) has been cut by \$66 million (12% per annum<sup>7</sup>; and the level of funds available for programme-making has dropped by \$51million per annum.<sup>8</sup>
- Since 1992, the ABC's revenue relative to its commercial peers has decreased from 23% to 17% in 2001-02.<sup>9</sup>
- For almost three times the population of Australia, the BBC receives almost 10 times the funding of the ABC.<sup>10</sup>

## **Results of Inadequate Funding**

- staff cut by 20% since 1996
- less diversity and fewer specialist, well-researched programs
- loss of Australian voices, history and perspectives as the ABC is forced to rely on imported documentary, history and science programming
- insufficient resources to seek out and investigate news
- a diminution in the quality and depth of arts coverage and less original performance<sup>11</sup>
- Australian drama down to 3 hours a year!<sup>12</sup>
- ABC money-making activities are damaging public confidence in the ABC's independence, interfering with its programming responsibilities and detracting from audience satisfaction
- Radio Australia, the ABC's overseas broadcasting service, has been emasculated

**Note:** Funding information in this fact sheet was accurate until the May 2006 Federal Budget. ABC funding in that Budget was increased. But it was short-term targeted funding which the Government directed be used to purchase programs from the private sector (i.e., privatisation by stealth), and it was \$37.6 million short of the additional funding which leaks from a KPMG report reveal the ABC needed for the next three years just to continue at its depleted level of operation. (The Government commissioned, but refuses to release the KPMG report.)

1 & 2 Newspoll independent surveys since 1998

and ratings analysis June 2005

3 Mansfield Review 1996

4 ANAO report 2002

5 *Public Service Broadcasters Around the World*, McKinsey and Co, 1999

6 ABC Annual Report 2005

7 Budget papers since 1996

8 October 2005 Senate Estimates

9 Macquarie Bank Report *An Analysis of the ABC's Funding Relative to International Public Broadcasters and Domestic Peers*, 2002

10 calculation Budget and ABC and BBC Annual Reports

11 *Arts Programming on ABC Radio, Television and Online* report Mar 2004 by Prof Liz Jacka

12 Australian drama down from 102 hours in 2001. October 2005 Senate Estimates.

