

## Discussion Paper: 2011-12 Regional Telecommunications

### SBS SUBMISSION

#### INTRODUCTION

SBS welcomes the opportunity to respond to the 2011-12 Regional Telecommunications Review Issues Paper.

SBS is Australia's multilingual and multicultural national broadcasting service. SBS operates under the *Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991* (SBS Act). SBS's principal function is to provide multilingual and multicultural radio and television services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians, and, in doing so, reflect and promote Australia's multicultural society (SBS Charter). SBS also delivers content online on its website [www.sbs.com.au](http://www.sbs.com.au).

SBS's television services current reach 97 per cent of the population (analogue and digital); its analogue radio services reach around 63 per cent of the population; and its digital radio services reach around 52 per cent. In addition SBS offers two subscription channels (World Movies and the arts channel STVDIO) which are distributed on the AUSTAR and FOXTEL platforms.

SBS principal submissions are:

- SBS has a historical lack of comprehensive services in regional and remote Australia.
- SBS's new services, particularly in online and on-demand television and radio, will be able to be delivered more equitably with new technology and the national broadband network (NBN).
- As consumers transition to the NBN and change the way they obtain access to media in a broadband world, mechanisms must be found to ensure that ubiquitous access to public broadcasting services is maintained. This may involve government subsidy of distribution online in the same way that it pays for terrestrial over the air distribution.
- Full participation with media services allows all Australians the ability to fully participate in Australian society, provides educational and economic benefits and promotes social inclusion.

## **NATIONAL BROADCASTING**

The Government's examination of the role of Australia's national broadcasters in the digital era in 2009 identified the following important roles for the national broadcasters in the evolving media landscape, where commercial media will be under pressure to reduce costs as audiences fragment and advertising revenue streams decline:

- Delivering freely accessible services across platforms and technologies.
- Providing innovative and compelling Australian programming that caters to diverse tastes and interests.
- Producing quality Australian content which 'helps forge a sense of national identity within Australia's diverse, multicultural society' and has positive local employment impacts.
- Providing independent, impartial and balanced content.
- Sources of credible and trustworthy news and information.
- Supporting an informed and educated citizenry and the effective functioning of Australia's democratic institutions through news, current affairs and information services.
- Enabling local communities to connect, collaborate and find a voice.
- Supporting the building of community and cultural awareness in Australia through multilingual and multicultural programming that reflects and explores Australia's multicultural society.<sup>1</sup>

The Government's objectives for the national broadcasters have become more important in light of the rate of change in the media landscape and the long term challenges to Australian content that are becoming apparent.

In meeting these challenges SBS identified some key strategic themes in its 2010-2013 Corporate Plan:

- To survive in the increasingly complex world SBS must offer distinctive content that is used and valued.
- SBS can look to the Charter to find its point of distinction: portraying points of view and perspectives that no one else does because only SBS truly reflects the multicultural nature of Australian society.
- Technology creates the opportunity to reach more people in different, highly relevant ways.

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<sup>1</sup> DBCDE, Strengthening Our National Broadcasters, May 2009.

### **SBS and Regional Communities**

SBS recognises that communities exist on different geographic scales: national, state, district, towns and suburbs. It is important to recognise that a one size fits all approach to content, especially news and information is not applicable.

SBS notes that other types of communities also exist in Australia drawn together by different bonds and affinities. SBS's particular remit is to support the communications needs of communities related by language and culture, including Indigenous communities. It does this by the provision of television, radio and online services in languages other than English and that address the particular needs of individual communities.

Today's globalised media environment, where it is possible to obtain home country media easily (by satellite or online), creates a situation where culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) Australians can bypass Australian media and become disconnected from Australian life. Media that is relevant to their needs and provides news and information about Australia in an accessible form is increasingly important. Engagement by all in Australian civic, cultural and economic life is a crucial factor in promoting social cohesion and inclusion.

In regional Australia, the importance of SBS is magnified. Often communities that speak a language other than English (LOTE) exist in smaller numbers than in the major metropolises. This can lead to isolation and a lack of community engagement. Providing a community of interest, particularly focussed around language, aids in social inclusion.

The *Broadcasting Services Act 1991* (BSA) allocates spectrum use against public policy objectives. Public broadcasters carve out a place for crucial communications services in a landscape which is becoming swamped by other commercially-focussed services which do not support the important public policy objectives of the BSA such as developing and reflecting a sense of Australian identity, character and cultural diversity, and fair and accurate coverage of matters of public interest.

Increasingly television is only one part of the public engagement with national broadcasting. SBS's new services, particularly in the area of on-demand television and radio and extensive online offerings, will be able to be delivered more equitably with new technology and the NBN. Engagement through online, particularly webpages, blogs and interactive features allows audiences, wherever they live, the ability to participate in conversations being held on the national broadcaster – from arts to sport to current events.

For example, SBS is currently piloting two services directed at the Chinese community (*Mandarin News Australia* and the Chinese Broadband Community Centre) that aim to extend the range and scope of Australian focused news and information available to Chinese language speakers. It is hoped that SBS will receive additional funding to make these services permanent and to expand them to other communities.

SBS notes that online platforms, supported by broadband infrastructure are ideal for the delivery of these types of services to geographically dispersed communities of interest.

### **SBS Radio**

SBS's reach into regional Australia is severely limited by its lack of radio transmission infrastructure. Only 18 per cent of Australia's regional population can receive SBS's radio services on terrestrial radio transmitters.<sup>2</sup>

Digital radio provides an opportunity to complement SBS's analogue radio services and address serious imbalances in the availability of SBS radio services to culturally and linguistically diverse communities throughout Australia.

The rollout of digital radio, using appropriate technologies, will give SBS the opportunity to provide its services Australia-wide. Radio is a key communication tool in linking communities of interest. It serves to educate, to maintain culture links, and to provide in-language programming.

SBS operates two radio transmitters in Sydney (NSW), Melbourne (Vic), Canberra (ACT), and Wollongong (NSW), and a single transmitter running the national service in Adelaide (SA), Brisbane (Qld), Darwin (NT), Newcastle (NSW), Hobart (Tas) and Perth (WA).

SBS Radio is otherwise only available in locations where communities have installed and operate their own self-help transmitters. In regional Victoria, for example, SBS Radio is only available in six locations – Ballarat (Warrenheip); Maryborough; Mildura, Morwell; Myrtleford and Wodonga. These areas receive only one SBS service, the national service.

In recent years, SBS has received an average of 20 requests per year for the establishment of new self-help radio services in locations throughout regional Australia. Thirty-six such services were established in 2010/11.

Having access to only one SBS service limits the range of programming that SBS can provide to regional audiences. The national service currently has the capacity to broadcast only 54 out of SBS Radio's 68 language programs.

### **Participation in the Digital Economy**

The provision of the NBN provides new opportunities for content creators in regional and remote areas. SBS's Charter states that it must: "make use of Australia's diverse creative resources". High speed internet will increase the capacity for both audiences and for professional content creators to engage with the national broadcasters in the supply of diverse content – both user-generated content, and commissioned content. It will increase

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<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census. Proportion of the total population of Australia excluding the capital cities: Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.

the ability of creative collaboration between creative teams located in geographically diverse locales, and increase the number of creative companies situated in the regions.

The flow on effect will have a positive impact on the content and for SBS audiences as a more diverse range of viewpoints and ideas will be presented.

### **Delivery of Education Outcomes**

SBS provides many educational outcomes through its distinctive programming and these will be enhanced by the NBN. Firstly, SBS is a rich source of news and information about the world through its news and current affairs and documentaries. It engages more deeply online, with the provision of associated webpages and specific educational resources.

Secondly, foreign language material is invaluable for language students. Regional and remote areas often do not have the depth or breadth of language speakers as cities, and SBS plays a significant role in providing LOTE resources. SBS language broadcast on radio, online streaming and podcasts provide teachers and students access to native-speaker level language programming. Foreign language television programming with subtitles allows all levels of language students both factual and drama material to enhance understanding of languages.

### **Case Studies**

#### *Go Back To Where You Came From*

SBS's compelling series, *Go Back To Where You Came From*, is an excellent case study of a complete 360 degree media experience. The three-part documentary series, and the follow-up program, were complemented by radio programming in dozens of languages. Online, the dedicated *Go Back* website allowed Australians to participate in a range of conversations around the topics of migrants, refugees and population. SBS partnered with the Refugee Council and Amnesty Australia to produce an educational resource for every secondary school in Australia. The publication directed students and teachers to enhanced education materials on the website. The curriculum-relevant resources enable students and teachers to interact with the content of the series. They feature clips from the documentary, classroom activities and curriculum applications. The tutorials include student activities, supported by teacher notes with background information, facts and statistics.

[www.sbs.com.au/shows/goback/listings/page/i/2/h/Schools/](http://www.sbs.com.au/shows/goback/listings/page/i/2/h/Schools/)

#### *Dateline*

The *Dateline* website provides a detailed examination of issues in world affairs. For example, the page below, on Libya, includes all recent *Dateline* stories about Libya, a timeline of issues and events, links to *World News Australia* stories, a short description, map and facts about the country; and links to other perspectives from world media. It provides a complex resource for students and audiences in general.

[www.sbs.com.au/dateline/country/grid/id/99/n/Libya](http://www.sbs.com.au/dateline/country/grid/id/99/n/Libya)

### *Multimedia properties*

SBS produces a number of key multimedia properties which are valuable additions to the curriculum, and for exploration by general audiences. They are particularly useful when examining areas not generally covered by mainstream media, or even the ABC. The ability for regional Australians to interact with this content, and for teachers to utilise it more fully will be enhanced by the NBN. Examples of key content include:

*First Australians* – the landmark seven part series about Indigenous Australia

[www.sbs.com.au/firstaustralians](http://www.sbs.com.au/firstaustralians)

*Immigration Nation* – a history of immigration since 1900

[www.sbs.com.au/immigrationnation/resources](http://www.sbs.com.au/immigrationnation/resources)

*The Dragon Children* – examines Asian students and education today, including written and video material in English, Chinese, and subtitled in both

[www.sbs.com.au/dragonchildren](http://www.sbs.com.au/dragonchildren)

### **SBS and Indigenous Communities**

SBS has a proud tradition of working with Indigenous television makers to create remarkable content. In fact, SBS's Indigenous content has flooded awards ceremonies over the past four years. Our broadcasts take audiences to new locations and introduce cultures quite foreign to metropolitan audiences. Programs have included:

- *First Australians* – the landmark documentary series and winner of the Logie and AFI Awards for Best Documentary, and the Premier's Literary Award.
- *The Circuit* – drama series set in the Kimberleys.
- *Remote Area Nurse* – drama series set in the Torres Strait.
- *The Tall Man* – set in northern Queensland, this feature length documentary premiered at the Toronto Film Festival, and was nominated for Walkley, Human Rights and AACTA awards.

In addition, SBS broadcasts the weekly the current affairs program *Living Black* – winner of the Deadly Award for best news program in 2011 – and *Living Black Radio*.

Beyond the actual production of Indigenous stories for television, online and radio, SBS is committed to ensuring the growth of Indigenous practitioners in the cultural and media industries. SBS was a founding member, and is the current Chair of the Media Reconciliation Industry Network Group (RING). The Media RING is about to announce a multi-million dollar partnership with DEEWR for its Media RING employment strategy providing training, education and jobs in the media industry. To be administered by Screen Australia, this ambitious project identifies the essential need for more Indigenous representation in the

media in front and behind the screen. The project will be actively recruiting Indigenous people in remote and regional areas across Australia to participate in training and employment in the media industry.

A significant restriction on the amount of commissioned content, news reporting, and user-generated content from and about Indigenous people on SBS is the geographic spread of Indigenous communities, the cost of reporting and filming in regional and remote areas and the lack of fast broadband. This can lead to Indigenous Australians, particularly in remote Australia, to be excluded from participating in the nation's civic life and conversations. The provision of fast broadband will assist in bringing a greater diversity of Indigenous viewpoints to audiences. SBS also recommends that funding for media education and training must be considered when providing new or significantly enhanced broadband services.

There is also a strong need for innovative use of technology to assist in the maintenance and preservation of Indigenous languages.

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