

14 May 2015

Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee
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Dear Committee Members

**Addendum to the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils' of
Australia's Submission to the Senate Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee on the Inquiry into the Communications Legislation
Amendment (SBS Advertising Flexibility and other Measures) Bill 2015**

To be read in conjunction with the FECCA Submission to the Senate
Environment and Communications Legislation Committee

Introduction

The purpose of this addendum is to provide further comment on the *Communications Legislation Amendment (SBS Advertising Flexibility and other Measures) Bill 2015* (the Bill).

The comments in this addendum reflect those of our members and aim to support FECCA's position on the Bill, and are being submitted following our regular ongoing consultations with our stakeholders.

FECCA's Position

FECCA reiterates its support of the Bill that provides SBS with flexibility in scheduling advertising and sponsorship announcements in its broadcasting services as outlined in FECCA's submission of 13 April 2015.

Commentary

Additional consultation with FECCA's constituency has further reinforced FECCA's position in support of the Bill. FECCA constituents have expressed that while in principle they do not wish to see any increase in advertising on SBS they are also very concerned that the Bill not passing could impact adversely on SBS programming and other services. In particular FECCA constituents are concerned that programs could be cut and opportunities to invest in additional initiatives that could be of benefit to the Australian multicultural community could potentially be reduced.

FECCA and ethnic communities in Australia have had a very strong association with SBS since its inception. Ethnic communities at a grass root level have played a critical role in the formation and development of SBS. FECCA has consistently supported the broadcaster on its journey over the past forty years

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to grow and develop and to continue to serve the multilingual and multicultural communities of Australia and has advocated strongly for continued Government funding and support.

FECCA also recognises and acknowledges the challenges faced by SBS especially at the present moment given the reduction in funding of \$53.7 million applied to SBS in the 2014-15 budget, and has repeatedly called on the Government to reinstate the funding. FECCA is of the view that these funding cuts present the long term risk of SBS losing its multicultural focus, as it relates to the Australian context.

This is why FECCA is of the view that given that the overall advertising time in a 24 hour cycle will not increase it will not make a major difference to the way the broadcaster currently operates. SBS would not have to cut programs and services and this is very important to our constituents. FECCA's constituents would prefer to have the 'inconvenience' of a few additional advertising minutes during peak hour viewing than to have cuts in programs or other services and initiatives.

In the current climate that we live in Australia, with the threats of terrorism and the global movement of people fleeing conflicts around the world and seeking refuge in Australia and the impact these factors are having on the Australian community, and in particular on specific community groups, it is in our view imperative that SBS resources not only be maintained but increased.

FECCA believes that money invested in SBS by the Government is money well spent. FECCA is of the view that programming and other engagement activities and initiatives with the community need to increase rather than decrease to meet the ever changing landscape of multicultural Australia.

FECCA fears that if the Bill is not passed it will compromise SBS's capacity to continue to play a significant role in strengthening communities and social cohesion through its programs and other initiatives. More than any other time in the recent history of Australia we need a public independent broadcasting vehicle such as SBS to ensure that it continues to inform, educate, entertain and facilitate connections with and participation in Australian society.

SBS has played and continues to play a significant role in the settlement of migrants and refugees in to the Australian community. Given the significant number of Australians that do not speak English well or do not speak English at all¹, SBS's role is even more critical with helping meet the information, education and entertainment needs of this group of Australians. It is FECCA's view that this role could be compromised if the Bill is not passed and SBS is forced to cut programs, services and staff.

FECCA's community engagement and research demonstrates that Australia's migrants and refugees continue to face multiple disadvantages across a number of indicators, including social inclusion, employment and income equality, health, education, housing, family safety, and experiences of discrimination.

¹ According to the 2011 Census, this number is approximately 675,000 people.

In addition, FECCA's ongoing engagement and consultation with Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse communities highlight that current policy and practice to support equal access to information, services and resources and promote social inclusion remain inadequate. This results in negative outcomes for various groups of Australians from diverse backgrounds, including women, children and youth, older people, and especially affects recent immigrants and refugees and people who live outside metropolitan areas.

The subsequent risk of these people experiencing disadvantage and social exclusion adversely affects not only new Australians themselves, but also negatively affects the levels of social cohesion within communities, and halts the potential for increased and inclusive economic growth, and prosperity for Australian society at large.

As a public broadcaster with effectively a social Charter SBS can also play a role in helping reach out to disadvantaged communities and particularly CALD communities facing double disadvantage such as CALD people with a disability, older CALD people reverting to their first languages, CALD women and new migrants and refugees facing settlement challenges.

An adequately funded SBS, which also is able to maximise opportunities offered by current legislation and by the additional flexibility that is being offered by this Bill if passed, has the potential to enable SBS to continue to play a positive role in addressing some of the challenges facing CALD communities and the broader Australian community as outlined previously.

FECCA is cognisant of the risks that increased advertising within programs could place on SBS that could potentially result in SBS not being able, or seen to not be able, to continue to effectively meet its Charter obligations.

Notwithstanding this FECCA views the flexibility offered by the Bill in a positive way. The Bill seeks to enable SBS to further maximise opportunities and strengthen its capacity to improve its programs and services. It is our view that under the current economic situation that Australia finds itself and the resulting government funding cuts to the broadcaster, it is making the best of the worst situation.

As such, and always being cognisant of the potential risks that SBS could be presented with, FECCA recommends (as it has advocated in the past) that SBS put in place safeguards and guidelines or that it reinforces current safeguards and guidelines that reassure its audience and other stakeholders that programming and the integrity of the SBS Charter would not be, or seen to be, compromised or influenced by the advertisers.

In addition, and as previously advocated by FECCA, these guidelines could be strengthened by including a statement that "Board members and other stakeholders will act with integrity and at all times ensure that the independence of SBS as a public broadcaster is safeguarded". FECCA believes it is important that temptation does not set in, resulting in further increase of advertising and commercialisation of such a unique public broadcaster.

SBS is highly valued by multicultural communities in Australia including the Australian community as a whole. SBS's role as a public broadcaster is unique and very relevant today as it was on the day of its inception. A balance needs to be found to address the impact the current government funding cuts will have on the organisation. It is FECCA's view that the Bill offers a compromise by allowing flexibility for SBS to continue to be relevant and not to lose its core multicultural focus.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joseph A. Caputo', is positioned below the text 'Yours sincerely'.

Joseph A. Caputo OAM JP
FECCA Chair