

31 January 2018

Environment & Communications References Committee
The Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

Via email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Inquiry into Australian content on broadcast, radio and streaming services

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to Government and the broader community. FECCA strives to ensure that the needs and aspirations of Australians from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds are given proper recognition in public policy.

FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism so as to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are developed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

FECCA thanks the Senate committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Recommendations:

- **FECCA supports** the principle of increased Australian content *that is reflective of Australia's diversity*.
- **FECCA recommends** that appropriate policies be developed to support an increase in on-screen and behind-the-scenes diversity within the Australian media industry.
- **FECCA recommends** appropriate government funding be provided to SBS so it can continue to produce high quality content which is reflective of, and accessible for, Australians of diverse backgrounds.
- **FECCA recommends** that policy to increase Australian content does not impede efforts by SBS and other public broadcasters to provide diverse and high quality content sourced overseas to meet the needs and interests of Australia's multicultural community.

Key Message

1. Need for increased diversity in the Australian media

FECCA broadly supports policy and funding which increases Australian content on broadcast, radio and streaming services. However, FECCA is most concerned that the content produced is reflective and inclusive of the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia's population.

With the 2016 Census showing that more than a quarter of Australia's population were born overseas, almost half have at least one parent born overseas, and 21% per cent (4.87 million people) speak a language other than English at home,¹ FECCA believes the Australian media must diversify to accurately reflect Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity. In a study released by Screen Australia in 2016, *Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity in TV Drama*, data showed that only 18% of main characters in the period between 2011 and 2015 were from non-Anglo Celtic backgrounds².

While there has been increased diversity on Australian TV and in other parts of the media in recent years, for example an increased number of journalists, actors and comedians of CALD backgrounds³, there is still a long way to go before the Australian media is truly representative of the general population. Through an increased focus on diversity throughout, the industry can play a leading role in promoting positive messages regarding Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity.

An important means of increasing on screen diversity is to encourage wider diversity in the content-producing workforce. By developing diverse teams behind the scenes, the media industry can better understand, reflect and appeal to ethno-cultural communities. As quoted by SBS Managing Director, Michael Ebeid:

'Put more beautiful people of colour on TV and connect viewers in ways which transcend race and unite us.' A sentiment so elegantly expressed by Miranda Tapsell at the 2015 TV Week Logie Awards and echoed further by Waleed Aly in his Gold Logie speech this year. For over 40 years, driving cultural understanding and promoting the benefits of diversity through our programs has been at the heart of SBS. We are motivated by our belief that connecting communities and inspiring greater understanding can shift perceptions of 'difference' and normalise diversity within our society⁴

Recent successes have demonstrated an appetite for diversity in Australian scripts developed for television⁵. With increased diversity in the Australian population together with increased access to digital and streaming services, the Australian media sector must broaden the content of its storytelling in order to maintain and increase its audience.

2. Support for SBS – television, broadcast, radio and streaming services

FECCA has consistently argued for the important role that SBS plays in the Australian media sector. SBS's main function is, and has been, to provide multilingual and multicultural

¹ See <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3412.0>

² The study analyzed 199 dramas that aired between 2011 and 2015 inclusive, see <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/sa/newsroom/news/2016/mr-160824-study-of-diversity-on-tv-released> and <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/157b05b4-255a-47b4-bd8b-9f715555fb44/TV-Drama-Diversity.pdf> for more information.

³ Leewai, Jackie, Building future leaders through careers in media, *Australian Mosaic*, issue 45, FECCA 2017

⁴ Ebeid, Michael, We still have a long way to go, *Australian Mosaic*, issue 44, FECCA 2016

⁵ *Seeing ourselves: Reflections on diversity in TV drama*, Screen Australia 2016

programs and content across radio, television, and digital platforms (including streaming). These services reflect Australia's multicultural society in ways that other media outlets do not.

FECCA has consistently called for full funding of SBS so it can provide migrant and CALD Australians with information and entertainment in their preferred language, as well as provide language and cultural development and maintenance, links to their countries of origin as well as cultural understanding which assists with social cohesion and settlement. SBS products assist in reflecting Australia's actual diverse population and in ensuring that this representation is accessible to all Australians regardless of their background. In light of the crucial role SBS plays, and the services it offers, FECCA supports the SBS recommendation to the recent Australian Content Review which called for a fully-funded Australian content quota for SBS, to deliver more SBS Charter aligned content to the community. FECCA supports this recommendation because SBS has demonstrated over many years that it is deeply committed to representing Australia's diverse communities in high quality, locally made content which is reflective of our nation's population.

FECCA is also supportive of SBS' call for all Australian content that is produced as a result of government (taxpayer) funding be available on free-to-air services or via free online streaming platforms. FECCA supports the principles of access and equity embodied in this recommendation.

FECCA argues that we must see on-screen diversity for its social and cultural value. There is enormous potential for broadcast, radio and streaming services to reach across the boundaries of race, faith, language and ethnicity. This is the power to unite Australians through the universality of storytelling. Our media can shape Australian society by reflecting who we are: a nation filled with a richness of experience beyond that of any country on earth. A nation with diversity so woven through its fabric as to make it the envy of all the world. These are the stories we should be telling.

FECCA would be glad to contribute in more detail on matters relating to CALD communities in discussions of content on broadcast, radio and streaming services. For further information please contact FECCA Director Dr Emma Campbell emma@fecca.org.au or 02 6282 5755.