

- empowering the ABA to make standards relating to Australian content on commercial television;
- ensuring Australian control of the most influential media; and
- opportunities for cultural diversity in the general expansion of services, especially narrowcasting services.

When I put these two objects side by side, the first - promotion of diversity - is clearly market-driven, the second - the sense of national identity - is much less so.

The first requires the ABA to set clear ground rules then get out of the way of the markets.

The second seems to invite a less passive role. A market-driven expansion of viewer choice poses threats to, as well as opportunities for, the development of a sense of national identity.

A proliferation of new services will mean an overall diminution in the proportion of Australian material on the airwaves. The new channels of pay television cannot possibly aspire to the levels of Australian content now seen on free to air television.

It seems to me that on issues of Australian content there is what could amount to an advocate's role for the ABA.

In saying this I am conscious that Mark Armstrong, himself an experienced regulator, holds the view that regulated indus-

tries tend to capture their regulators whether by accident or design.

Yet if the ABA is to move into advocacy mode from time to time, I suspect there is no stronger or commonly held belief that 'Australian content is a good thing'. The problems arise about the means of achieving it.

I have said many times in my other working lives that a very good case could be made for claiming that there has been no more important structural change for the cause of Australian culture than the Australian content levels determined by the Tribunal.

I recall citing the popularity of Australian television programs to sceptical colleagues at Penguin, as proof that there is indeed a widespread and hungry audience for Australian material.

Incredible as it may seem, there are still those who will believe that Australians, alone among all people, are not intrinsically interested in seeing their own lives explored and examined.

It is because those levels of Australian content are so important that they must be under almost continual examination, to see how they can be improved and made more effective.

And, I have to say, my own experience of now more than 30 years of working in one area or another of Australia's cultural

and intellectual life, that higher can no longer simply be deemed to be better.

I suspect that we will have to be more ingenious. Which may well involve establishing co-operative approaches with other government agencies, especially funding bodies, to ensure the most effective lift in Australian content.

For example, we know that we face a dearth of Australian-made mini-series in the foreseeable future.

One of the reasons for this shortage is a lack of export market which would achieve a spread of the high cost involved.

Again, I know from experience just how hard that export market is to achieve. Hitherto, we have placed the responsibility for achieving that market on individual producers or networks on a project by project basis. That is simply not good enough, but here I am getting into another argument for another day.

I conclude now by saying that the Broadcasting Services Act must not be seen as a vehicle travelling in isolation in the cause of Australian content. There have to be other connections made.

And, I hope, the ABA will in the near future explore the role it can play now in making those connections, as part of being an effective participant in managing change in these exciting broadcasting days.



IN PRAISE OF THE ABT

IN HIS SPEECH TO THE FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN RADIO BROADCASTERS AT THEIR NATIONAL CONFERENCE RECENTLY, PRESIDENT JOHN MARTIN MADE THE FOLLOWING KIND REMARKS ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING TRIBUNAL.

This is ... an appropriate time for me, on behalf of the commercial radio industry, to express publicly our appreciation to all members and staff of the Australian Broad-

casting Tribunal for their advice and assistance over the last 15 or so years, and to welcome to the world of broadcasting the members and staff of the ABA.

ABA Fees

The ABA has determined the following fees:

1. Opinions on category of service for class licences: \$475.
2. Licence renewals: \$200.

These fees may be adjusted.

The ABA has not yet determined a fee for prior opinions on control of licences.