

years of operation, the Senate standing committees remain 'standing ready' to act on behalf of the Senate to take Parliament to the people, obtain their views and in reporting them improve government decision-making while preserving and enhancing the quality of Australian parliamentary democracy.

TELE-OLGY: STUDIES IN TELEVISION

John Hartley. - London: Routledge, 1992.

Tele-ology brings together John Hartley's work on television. The book draws on current critical theory in Cultural Studies, from Marx to Madonna, to develop a wide-ranging and thought-provoking view of television broadcasting in Britain, Australia and the United States. Hartley's exploration of contemporary cultural politics takes in television truth, propaganda and populism; mythologies of the television audience; and television drama as a 'photopoetic' genre in the tradition of Shakespeare. His study of television as a political art incorporates discussion of a diverse range of topics, from news programmes and drama ('Edge of Darkness') to advertisements, continuity and gardening shows; from Kennedy Martin to Kylie Minogue. *Tele-ology* aims to stimulate an informed public debate about television's textual regimes and cultural power, with an entertaining and provocative approach which is designed to be as accessible as it is sensitive to the complexities of the subject matter.



PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

**1993 UNIVERSITY DAY ADDRESS BY BRIAN JOHNS,
ABA CHAIRMAN
ON MONDAY 10 MAY,
UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

I am delighted to have this opportunity to spend time in distinguished creative company to share some thoughts on broadcasting.

It strikes me that there is a pleasing symmetry to this occasion.

Early next month a significant collaboration will begin between this university, your consortium partners and the Special Broadcasting Service.

I speak to you today in my present incarnation as Chairman of the broadcasting regulator.

But in a previous life I was involved in the early planning of the Wollongong Graduate Consortium, so this distance-learning venture is of great personal interest to me.

Apart from its intrinsic importance, the project potentially has wide significance beyond the university, and indeed, beyond educational television because it holds the promise of greater diversity in broadcasting.

The fact that the project combines the talents of professional educators and broadcasters is also of significance because it represents a new collaboration to create a fresh broadcasting voice.

There are two related elements in my address today: the creation of diversity in broadcasting and planning for the future in a constantly changing environment.

Planning is a concept which many people think is a good one. But anyone who has ever been frustrated by speed humps in suburban streets will wonder whether traffic management, like planning, makes things better, or just slows them down.

THE OLD BROADCASTING ACT

The ABA has been operating now for seven months - a brief enough time - but still it might be useful to recall the environment in which the ABA was established.

Its predecessor - the Tribunal - was the centre-piece of what the Minister described as 'antiquated, even nightmarish legislation'.

One of the results of conducting regulation in this environment was that the *modus operandi* of the Tribunal - the public inquiry - was often long and adversarial, with the results frequently litigated.

It was, therefore, a vehicle ill-suited to quickly facilitating diversity in broadcasting.

New services - when they finally started - tended to be more of the same.

The Act was ill-equipped to handle technological advances because new technology required amendments.

Consequently the Government decided to replace this 50-year-old scissors-and-paste piece of legislation and adopt a new approach.

THE NEW BROADCASTING SERVICES ACT

With the new Broadcasting Services Act, we have moved from heavy regulation to a lighter touch, with the aim of creating an environment more conducive to diversity.

In radio, for example, the ownership provisions are more relaxed. A company can now own two licences in one market and there are no restrictions on foreign ownership.

This creates the potential for new configurations of proprietorship, new and different participants and the potential for greater diversity in what we hear.

The Act also reflects the realities of regulation in a broadcasting environment with rapidly changing technology, by being largely non-specific about modes of delivery.

The Act also highlights the importance of planning as a central part of the regulatory function.

Planning, previously conducted behind closed departmental doors in Canberra, is now a public process.

PLANNING

The planning provisions of the Act have been designed to generate greater

certainty in the industry and to allow public input into key decisions about the introduction of new services.

The ABA is presently in the midst of the biggest public planning exercise ever undertaken in the history of Australian communications

Stage one is the establishment of planning priorities.

Stage two is determining the number of channels to be available - by area - throughout Australia.

And stage three is the preparation of plans determining the number and characteristics, including technical parameters, of the broadcasting services that are to be available in particular areas.

A week ago saw the release of a draft document which contains details of 23 planning zones and their priority for planning, from Darwin and the Top End, to Hobart and Southern Tasmania.

This draft planning priorities document is now available for public comment.

It follows an earlier call at the end of last year for people to tell us their priorities in relation to radio and television services.

People expressed their views that they wanted more choice.

There is a strong interest in more community services, both radio and television.

People also expressed the wish to have extensions to existing ABC, including Triple J, and SBS services.

The final planning priorities document in July will again take into account the views of Australians about their broadcasting needs.

The size of the task means that we cannot do the planning for all parts of the country at the same time.

So the planning will be carried out over the next two and a half years, in an orderly fashion, according to a public timetable.

The advantage of conducting a public planning process is people are able - quite rightly - to influence that process.

This approach represents the style of the ABA; interchange through seminars and workshops and conferences; receiving submissions and releasing exposure documents; and in some cases interim

arrangements.

There will be few set-piece inquiries.

Formulation of views will follow wide-ranging consultations directly with industry, interest groups and the public.

The disadvantage of taking time to plan is a delay in the start of new services. Even then it will depend upon aspiring broadcasters standing up with their proposals.

The purpose of planning is to provide

‘The ABA is presently in the midst of the biggest public planning exercise ever undertaken in the history of Australian communications’

a measured, rational approach to managing change in the broadcasting environment.

Change, as we all know, there must be: technology demands it and our present and future needs demand it. But first, let's look back to the past - briefly.

HISTORY

The broadcasting industry was very stable for a long time.

However, all of this changed in the eighties.

There were changes to rules of ownership, there were government initiatives to expand regional radio, and to equalise

television services throughout the country;

All of this, together with a buoyant economy, led to an active trade in licences which has all but subsided.

DIFFICULT ECONOMIC TIMES

Today's difficult economic conditions mean that we have a very different broadcasting industry from that which existed just a few short years ago.

Broadcasters are running a very different - a much leaner - style of operation nowadays.

The new rules have facilitated this to some extent. Owning more than one licence in a market means an operator can target two different audiences while achieving savings on overheads.

The Government has recognised the impact of these harder times by placing a moratorium on the addition of any new commercial television services before a ministerial review, which is required to be completed by 1 July 1997.

Nevertheless, there is a sixth channel available which can be put to good use without impairing the fortunes of existing broadcasters.

I will talk more of the sixth channel later.

Even though times have been more difficult, technology keeps developing. And technological advances can drive change irrespective of the buoyancy of the industry.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

New technologies offer the broadcasting industry alternative modes of delivery, or more and better delivery systems.

Fibre optical cable, satellites and microwaves are capable of delivering individual programs and other 'read only' and 'interactive' data services to paying consumers.

Technology has been a critical element in the long debate over pay TV.

PAY TV

The pay TV debate has been about methods of delivery - satellite, microwave or optical fibre, or some combina-

tion of the three - as well as the effect on the existing free-to-air services and on content.

The issue of selecting the right technology to deliver the service is critical.

Today, however, I would like to focus on programming issues.

Discussion about content has centred upon the perception that the introduction of pay TV will bring a rich smorgasbord of new and varied programming.

In this context it is worth examining some of the points raised by one of my predecessors, Bruce Gynge, since his return from London.

He suggests we should be careful about the well-being of our present industry and questions whether pay TV really will bring diverse programming.

Well, of course it would be irresponsible to ignore the circumstances of the existing participants in the industry.

There is little argument that television, or at least terrestrial television, is declining as a business.

It is also true that markets are becoming more fragmented and there is a distinct move towards the globalisation of television.

Today's delivery systems do not respect international boundaries, and the interest shown in pay TV by multinational corporations reflects the present world reality.

The foreign content rules recognise this reality as well as the capacity of the domestic market to raise equity funding.

The introduction of pay TV of itself will not guarantee programming diversity.

What pay TV certainly does offer is easier access - at a cost.

Pay TV - and new technology - offer the opportunity to call up programs on demand - films, sports, news and information.

It should be realised, though, that access does not automatically mean fresh, alternative programs.

Indeed it may largely involve a re-configuration - the transfer of what we see now on free-to-air to pay TV channels.

I have not been aware of great public pressure for the introduction of pay TV.

I believe that one of the reasons for this lies in the fact that our existing free-to-air services, commercial and national,

represent some of the best - and in the minds of experts like Bruce Gynge - the best television in the world.

I can sense disbelief in this audience when I say this.

I can assure you though that in my own fairly intensive experience of the last few years in television, I have not seen better overall schedules anywhere.

Of course, there are high points of excellence elsewhere, but they are high points - high points I might add that we often see here.

The standard of the run of schedules elsewhere is quite another thing.

I wonder if you realise that surveys show Australians watch about 19 hours of television a week. Consider that for a moment and think about just one aspect.

The pressure that demand makes on quality.

How many really good books do we expect to have on offer to us a week? How many films? Or even, how many sound, incisive, revealing newspaper articles?

You will get the idea.

There is a certain disappointment that this demand for television brings about.

We will need to work at ensuring that pay TV does indeed deliver greater programming diversity.

Which is one reason why the Act provides for a service devoted predominantly to drama, spending 10 per cent of its programming budget on local production.

The part of the broadcasting spectrum which to me certainly does have great potential for diversity is the sixth channel, which is to be used for community access on a continuing trial basis.

SIXTH CHANNEL

I take the view that this is an opportunity for broadcasters to experiment, to try things out. It is also an opportunity for new participants to enter the field.

Community groups have long been keen to use the sixth channel.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport, Communications and Infrastructure recommended that no permanent decision be made on the use of the sixth channel for two reasons.

Community groups were not fully ready to use the channel in capital cities; and by the time they might be ready, alternative technologies could well be available for delivering educational television.

The ABA is firmly committed to making the sixth channel available to providers of open narrowcasting services for community and educational non-profit use.

To safeguard community participation, the ABA has developed an access statement which details the extent to which services should be open to individuals and groups within the area to be served.

All of this represents an extended opportunity to add to the diversity of television broadcasting.

CONSORTIUM

Which brings me back to the consortium.

When the project starts next month, it will be personally gratifying to see multicultural studies, media studies and journalism, health studies and English language instruction being offered.

Inevitably this project invites comparison with the Open Learning Program, conducted by the ABC in collaboration with a southern institution and their associates.

To those who might say: 'One's enough', I would reply: 'Two is just a beginning'. As I have been saying, we do not want to put a curb on variety, we should encourage it.

In any case the two projects are quite different - Opening Learning is directed towards undergraduates, operates on free-to-air ABC television and now radio and offers bachelor degrees. It also receives substantial federal funding.

I'm sure you know the consortium is committed to the development and delivery of post-graduate and professionally-oriented credit and non-credit courses using television or other off-campus communications means as one component.

I spell this out because the idea of taking advantage of different and new delivery modes today and when they become available is one which I find very interesting.

continued on p. 16

continued from p. 15

I find it interesting for these reasons: this partnership between educational institutions and a professional broadcaster offers a glimpse to the future beyond educational broadcasting.

Television is an expensive medium - very expensive. Much more so than either the print media or book publishing.

Cost is a barrier to innovation, undoubtedly a very significant barrier.

However, ideas, intellectual force and creativity have their place in any successful program mix.

And thinking about your consortium and the partnership of intellectual resources and professionalism it offers encourages me to think of exciting possibilities indeed.

I remind you that some of the best programming we see in this country comes from overseas public broadcasting networks, particularly the US, which tap wide intellectual resources.

Thus the consortium collaboration between your university and SBS represents a genuine possibility for contributions to broadcasting diversity, provided those behind it are ambitious and imaginative.

The consortium exemplifies the way in which educational institutions can operate in contemporary society - attentive to the resources available to them - marketing the products available to them.

One of the objectives of the consortium

is to emphasise advanced courses for professionals in all spheres to upgrade their skills and knowledge.

It is also an explicit objective to operate the consortium as a financially viable activity. And also explicitly - to develop and service the market for these courses.

The consortium will, through this approach, achieve for its participants a new source of revenue.

These activities demonstrate a willingness and capacity to plan.

As I have emphasised, the ABA wants a broadcasting environment which is conducive to diversity, but at the same time caters for the needs of existing broadcasters.

Our new Act gives us the opportunity to plan in a consultative way an environment which broadens the terms of access to means of broadcasting.

The planning process is well underway and showing good results already by identifying the areas of greatest need and setting an appropriate timetable for action.

In the meantime there are opportunities for experimentation for newcomers.

I look forward to seeing the work of the consortium in its chosen sphere and express the confident hope that this partnership may also result in an additional contribution to the diversity of broadcasting.

I wish the consortium every success.



FINANCIAL TABLES

TABLE	PAGE NO.
Quarterly Advertising Revenue Growth	
All States	
to September 1992	17
to December 1992	17
to March 1993	18
Provisional Seasonally Adjusted Quarterly Advertising Revenue Growth	
All States	
to September 1992	19
to December 1992	19
to March 1993	19
Commercial Radio Services Sale of Air Time	
<i>three months to March 1993 - nine months to March 1993</i>	
Australia	20
New South Wales	22
Victoria	23
Queensland	24
South Australia	25
Western Australia	26
Tasmania/Northern Territory	27
Commercial Radio Services Sale of Air Time	
<i>three months to September 1992 - three months to December 1992</i>	
Australia	28
New South Wales	30
Victoria	31
Queensland	32
South Australia	33
Western Australia	34
Tasmania/Northern Territory	35