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Sport on television

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Referring to the bipartisan policy on the broadcast of sport, Professor Flint said: 'Guaranteed access to the principal sporting events on free-to-air television is firmly established in Australia and the real debate is about the details.'

Television and also radio have obviously significant influences on sport, bringing as they do, sporting events into the living rooms and the clubs and pubs of the nation.

And a principal feature of broadcasting is Parliament's intervention to ensure that the broadcast of 'events of national significance' can be seen on free-to-air television, through the application of the

anti-siphoning list and the anti-hoarding provisions.

'The ABA has an important, and independent role here, but one that is advisory. The final decision lies with the government and more particularly with the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. This is a process which is of course fully consistent with our democracy,' said Professor Flint.

While confirming the underlying philosophy of the anti-siphoning regime the ABA's recent investigation concluded that there were problems with the list that should be addressed.

'The current decade promises to be the most structurally significant for Australian broadcasting with potentially major changes to the television landscape. The ABA advocates that amendments flowing from its investigation be implemented as soon as possible, but the new list should run for no more than five years through to the end of 2006,' he said.

Before this time, there should be a thorough re-examination of the anti-siphoning rules, with changes to the scope of the list and its operation decided in the context of the outcomes of the scheduled digital television reviews. This should include any changes to the restrictions on multi-channelling after 2005 and the 2006 moratorium on new players. The application to the Australian market of a possible non-exclusive rights arrangement perhaps along the lines of the UK system, covering a more limited list of events, should be evaluated. This would require a more rigorous examination of market factors concerning the acquisition and use of sports rights with access to relevant commercial information.



The full text of Professor Flint's speech, 'Nulla Mensa Sine Impensa', is available on the ABA web site, www.aba.gov.au