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- (c) the suitability of the continued provision of commercial recorded information or entertainment services carried by Telecom Australia including 0055 and Discovery Services;
- (d) whether the content of pay TV, were such a service to be introduced, should include material which would be classified in the 'R' or 'X' categories, under existing legislation relating to classifications;
- (e) the quality and adequacy of the extensive, Australia-wide qualitative and quantitative research conducted and to be conducted, by the Australian Broadcasting Authority, on:
 - (i) community standards of taste and decency in relation to classifications for pay television
 - (ii) what levels of violence and depictions of sex should be allowed; and
 - (iii) what other matters should be included for viewing for adults and children in the various classifications; and
- (f) whether, considering the existing regulatory arrangements, at both State and Commonwealth levels, used to regulate all film, video, literature and other publications, similar arrangements are, or should be, applicable to regulating the provision of commercial information or entertainment services utilising electronic technologies. □



Call for New Standard

An impressive coalition of cultural bodies, unions, ethnic community organisations and public interest groups has asked the Australian Broadcasting Authority to determine a standard requiring Australian television to show the cultural diversity of our society.

In a letter to ABA Chairman Brian Johns (6 December), the coalition wrote that the request had been made necessary 'by the ABA's failure to respond adequately to the findings of its own research in this area and to the representations and submissions from the community and industry seeking action from the regulator in this area'. The ABA has the power to determine a standard under s.125(2) of the Broadcasting Services Act.

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Australian television drama, in particular, continues to show a society of blond, blue-eyed Anglo-Celtic people.

This is not mere speculation, but is strongly supported by research published earlier this year by the ABA itself, and by the office of Multicultural Affairs (see *CU89*, June 1993). Channel Nine chairman Bruce Gyngell gave it additional credence with his recent statements that the popularity of Australian drama in the UK could, in his view, be attributed to latent racism in Britain and the appeal of programs which reminded people of an era when the British population was predominantly white.

Still the networks have failed to act, apparently in the belief that Australian viewers would turn off in droves if their drama began to show our society as it really is in the 1990s. This is despite the fact that series dramas which have attempted to do this, like *GP* and *A Country Practice*, have attracted and maintained impressive ratings.

Meanwhile, ethnic communities continue to consolidate their position as viewers of television and buyers of advertised products, and the effect of the networks' relentlessly monocultural perspective must begin to be felt. Plans on the part of SBS and commercial interests like Australis Media to set up niche channels pitched to particular ethnic communities will undoubtedly have an effect on the audiences - and the revenue - of mainstream television. Audiences alienated by drama which ignores their existence are very likely to turn to services which acknowledge them.

Advertisers and their agencies are, it appears, beginning to get the message. One Australian of NESB with his own agency, Bob Belgiovane, who has been outspoken on the performance of his industry in this area, recently reaped the rewards when his agency got the Special Broadcasting Service account.

The coalition's letter to the ABA noted that resistance on the part of FACTS to any form of regulation in this area is 'well documented', and that it was therefore surprising that the commercial television broadcasters had 'failed to include this critical area of programming in its code'. The Advisory Notes issued by FACTS provide guidance but no guarantee of the appearance of the faces and stories of non-Anglo Australians.

The Communications Law Centre is co-ordinator of the letter to the ABA.

The 22 signatories to the letter include the Aboriginal Arts Management Association, NSW Anti-Discrimination Board, the Australian Consumers Association, the ACTU, the Australian Writers Guild, the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission, and Ethnic Communities Council, MEAA, NIMAA, and the Northern Land Council. □