

SBS Managing Director Michael Ebeid, NSW Ministerial Consultative Committee Winter Symposium, July 4, 2013, Sydney

*\*\*\*Check against delivery\*\*\**

## **Introduction**

It is great to be here with you this evening.

Can I begin my remarks by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation.

Thank you Minister Dominello for providing me with the opportunity to speak to you tonight about:

- The challenges and opportunities for SBS in diverse modern Australia;
- Changes in the media landscape and how SBS is responding to the changes in how audiences consume media today.

From time to time, the value of public broadcasting is questioned and debated.

I don't shy away from this debate, because I firmly believe that SBS is more relevant to Australians today than when we were first created 35 years ago.

As a first generation migrant, I also know that Australia has benefited from this modest investment in services which celebrate, debate and challenge what it means to be Australian... in this wonderfully diverse country of ours.

The need for SBS is more striking now than ever before when you consider that:

- One in four Australians was born overseas; and
- Four million out of 23 million people speak a language other than English at home. That's more than double the number than when SBS was first established.

I'm sure these statistics are very familiar to all of you, given the work you do to help steer policies and initiatives for successful multiculturalism in NSW.

And you would also know too well that in contrast to the Australian experience, we are witnessing the failure of some European and UK versions of multiculturalism.

I believe SBS is empowering Australians to understand and appreciate the values of multiculturalism and diversity which are critical to our success as a migrant nation.

We do that across three radio networks, five television channels, online and emerging platforms and we broadcast in more languages than any other broadcaster in the world.

That's our point of difference as a public broadcaster.

## **Unique content for diverse Australia**

SBS delivers content that breaks down the barriers and brings diversity, inclusiveness, tolerance and social cohesion to the fore.

This is of course is not just about multiculturalism, which is but one element of diversity.

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As multiculturalism has evolved over the past 30 years, so too has SBS broadened its focus to include diversity in all of its forms.

Whether that's through our main channel, SBS ONE or our new SBS 2 where edgier content is attracting new and younger audiences.

Or through NITV, which is reaching four million Australians only six months in on free-to-air and bringing Indigenous content to a wider Australian audience.

Or whether that's through our subscription television channels, World Movies with films from more than 200 countries or STUDIO which is shining a light on grass-roots arts and entertainment that unites communities.

Or of course on radio which is that the very heart of everything we do at SBS.

I am sure that many of you would be aware that we recently changed the SBS Radio Schedule following a major review of Australia's demographics for the first time in 18 years. I'll come back to that in a moment.

Our other point of difference is that audience engagement with our content lives off the screen. We use local content to drill down into the local issues and challenges Australians are facing.

We are very proud of our Outreach program in which we partner with external organisations to open-up a deeper dialogue within communities around our key programs to maximise their public value.

For example, for Go Back to Where You Came From, SBS partnered with the Refugee Council of Australia and Amnesty International to produce a teaching resource about asylum seeker issues which was distributed to every secondary school in Australia. Eighty per cent of teachers said they watched Go Back after receiving the pack and many used it in classes.

### **SBS today**

It has been a period of change and challenge at SBS over the past two years.

We've had some big successes like Go Back, Once Upon a Time in Cabramatta, Dirty Business about how immigration shaped the mining sector, a documentary about Rupert Murdoch and JABBED, about immunisation.

We've got some great content coming up. One of the big ones is Better Man which airs this month. It's a drama about the last Australian hung overseas in Singapore in 2005 and features a star studded cast of Claudia Karvan, David Wenham and Bryan Brown.

It gets SBS back into the drama genre for the first time in three years with content that inspires change.

There is also a lot of work happening on Once Upon a Time in Punchbowl which will give audiences unheard perspectives by those involved and affected by the 2005 Cronulla Riots. It will broadcast in November and also be accompanied by an Outreach program in the local community.

We are anticipating that Punchbowl will have a significant impact on the debate about what it means to be Australian in modern, diverse Australia.

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We are the network that brought Australians Wilfred and South Park and we want to stay in the comedy space. That's why we've commissioned Legally Brown, a new series with great comedian, Nazeem Hussain. It will explore social and racial divisions through comedy, to encourage Australians to better value diversity.

We have a growing and successful food offering in which we take audiences on a cultural journey through food.

Let me pause briefly to show you some of the content I have just spoken about.

It is unlikely that any other broadcaster would commission or air the sort of content which you've just seen.

Making local content and telling Australian stories is expensive but we firmly believe that it is essential for the development of our society and capturing stories for future generations.

### **SBS Radio Schedule**

Let me move on to another big project for SBS and that's our new Radio Schedule which I touched on earlier.

We've just implemented a new Schedule and have increased the languages we broadcast in from 68 to 74.

We've introduced six new languages, more programs for language groups which have grown significantly and a new digital only channel for 21 languages available on digital radio and digital television, online and mobile apps.

This project was the biggest change management project we've undertaken in our 35 year history. It involved extensive consultation with community groups and frankly, it involved making some really tough decisions.

It was absolutely the right thing to do because we needed to rebalance the languages we broadcast with the multicultural make-up of Australia which has changed significantly during the time since we last reviewed the schedule in 1994.

For the first time, SBS is delivering news and information in Malayalam, Dinka, Hmong, Pashto Swahili and Tigrinya, to provide a service for the people speaking those languages in Australia today.

The number of broadcast hours for existing language programs, such as Mandarin, Cantonese, Hindi and Punjabi, has increased substantially to cater for the rising number of people speaking those languages.

We have given big language groups like Italian, Arabic, Korean and Vietnamese timeslots to maximise the listening opportunities for those audiences.

The new Radio Schedule is about ensuring SBS keeps pace with the changing demographics of today's Australia and delivers on its Charter obligations by better servicing the largest communities with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and offering more services to emerging high-needs communities.

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In addition, we run digital music stations covering Asian pop, Arabic pop, the biggest Bollywood, Bhangra and Desi pop which are targeting a youth audience of second and third generation migrants.

We know our younger audiences are seeking to re-engage with their culture and backgrounds and are doing so in a contemporary way.

### **Content in-language**

But our in-language offering extends much broader than radio.

We run movies in more than 80 languages on SBS ONE and hundreds of LOTE movies through World Movies which I mentioned earlier.

We are also the only network on which audiences can watch in-language news from other countries. Through WorldWatch we share the world's best news and programs with an Australian audience and we are always working hard to ensure we've got the best news on air at any one time. And we know that the opportunity to extend our LOTE services and maximise their public value is increasing with the expanding digital platforms that are available to our audiences.

Let me paint you a picture briefly.

Just five years ago there were only five free-to-air television stations plus Foxtel in Australia.

Today there are 16 free-to-air stations, hundreds of pay television stations and thousands of channels available via the internet.

The average home has four internet enabled smart devices.

Currently in Australia, 27 per cent of homes have a TV, PC, tablet device and mobile phone – that's up 16 per cent from just one year ago.

Nearly 50 per cent of us use Facebook every month and increasingly we use Facebook and Twitter while we watch television.

Dual screens or 'concurrent watching and interacting' is emerging as a major trend.

Currently there are one billion smart phones in the world. Google estimates that there will be six billion smartphones in just three years.

In Australia, 61 per cent of the population has a smart phone – up from 48 per cent just one year ago.

Our own projections for our news and current affairs mobile app is that more people will access SBS news from their mobile phones on their way to or from work than from a desktop within the next 12 months.

Just about every network including SBS has a catch-up or on-demand viewing service. And of course ours is the best and available on mobile devices, connected televisions as well as the desktop.

We know that video consumption will be a major driver of the rollout of a national broadband network we expect the appetite for on demand viewing to grow exponentially.

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This means SBS can offer more LOTE services – LOTE movies, LOTE news and increasingly interactive LOTE online documentary, and we can do that across a myriad of platforms and devices to deepen our reach and engagement with our audiences.

We've been doing an increasing number of interactive online documentaries. For example, we launched a documentary called A Convenient Education about issues facing international students based on the experiences of Indian students in Victoria in 2010.

We know we can grow our LOTE services in this space.

### **Community engagement**

This leads me to our community engagement work.

As a public broadcaster, SBS has a range of ways of engaging with Australian communities, including through our content, marketing activities and the conversations and relationships we facilitate.

We are continually having two-way conversations with the CALD sector in the form of partnerships, activities, research and consultations.

These conversations and relationships assist us to deliver on our Charter obligations to contribute to meeting the communications needs of multicultural Australia and reflect the ways our diverse society is changing.

The interactions also help us maximise the public benefit of our services and we are always working hard to ensure that SBS is valued by...and valuable to... the communities that it was established to service.

### **Conclusion**

Let me go back to where I began my remarks.

Language content is at the heart of SBS and there is no other broadcaster in Australia that can deliver audiences rich and engaging news and information in-language about the issues affecting them and their communities.

We deliver unique, authentic content across television, radio, online and on the platforms and devices our audiences are choosing to use...

And that's despite operating on one fifth of the average budget of all the other broadcasters.

But we want to, we need to, and we are capable of doing more.

SBS helps Australians understand and appreciate the value of diversity.

In this room, we all know that the challenge of successful multiculturalism will never disappear.

That means that demand for SBS services will only continue to grow as Australia becomes more and more diverse.

I am happy to take your questions.