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Cuts to ABC “dangerous and irresponsible”

The Federal Budget’s cut of \$127 million from the ABC represents a dangerous and irresponsible assault on public broadcasting in Australia.

There are grave implications for audiences seeking news and information, and these cuts only weaken public broadcasting at the very time when commercial broadcasting is struggling due to the challenges of digital disruption – particularly for audiences in rural, regional and remote Australia.

There are also serious implications for television production.

The loss of \$43 million in funding to support news and current affairs is particularly short-sighted, as the ABC can and must play a crucial role in providing high quality public interest journalism in the era of “fake news” and social media platforms stripping revenue from commercial news media.

MEAA Media director Katelin McNerney said: “The \$43 million cut to dedicated news funding and the freezing of indexed funding at a cost of \$84 million are crippling blows to the ABC and follow years of under-funding by the Abbott and Turnbull Governments. Including last night’s announcement, almost \$400 million has been cut from ABC funding since 2014. ABC base funding has been cut in real terms by almost 25 per cent over the past 30 years.

“These funding cuts have placed enormous stress upon the ABC which, last night, was once again being asked to do more with less.

“The timing of these cuts could not be worse: in the lead-up to a federal election when strong journalism to independently scrutinise politicians’ claims and counter claims will be needed. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the ABC to deliver original investigative journalism and local and regional newsgathering with these deep cuts to its funding,” McNerney said.

“The spate of highly-politicised assaults on public broadcasting by the Government in recent years fly in the face of calls made to restore funding. In February the Senate Select Committee into the Future of Public Interest Journalism recommended that the Government must ensure adequate funding for the ABC and SBS to ensure they meet their charter obligations – particularly in rural and regional services and fact-checking capacity,” McNerney said.

“Right now, the ABC is already seeking to cut 20 journalist positions in a proposed restructure, cuts that will hurt its local newsrooms and in turn, starve local communities of quality reporting of news stories that matter to them. Every time the Government announces these politically-motivated assaults on the ABC it is local communities that suffer.”

MEAA Equity director Zoe Angus warned: “These Federal Government cuts also represent a dangerous threat to the creation of original Australian television production, particularly drama. It is this type of short-sighted and devastating cuts to funding that has spurred the [Make it Australian campaign](#). The constant slashing of funding by Governments endangers the ABC’s ability to produce quality Australian screen content and fulfill its important cultural role in Australian storytelling.

“Even before last night’s Budget, more than \$250 million had been cut from the ABC since 2014. Over this same period, the ABC’s commissioning budgets for adult drama and children’s content each dropped by 20%. Given their important cultural role, the ABC must be properly funded and future funding must be guaranteed so that productions can be developed with certainty,” Angus said.

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