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## **Tread carefully on public broadcasting merger, warns media union**

Any moves to merge Australia's national broadcasters with the purpose of finding savings or "efficiencies" must be treated with extreme caution, warns the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance, the union representing news and editorial employees at ABC and SBS.

Commenting after outgoing ABC managing director Mark Scott's address to the National Press Club today, MEAA chief executive officer Paul Murphy said discussion of an ABC-SBS merger was a distraction from serious issues of underfunding faced by both public broadcasters.

He said MEAA was very skeptical that an effective argument could be mounted to bring the two institutions together.

"Merger efforts tend to have more to do with 'saving the silverware' than improving operations and content offerings," Mr Murphy said.

"The ABC and SBS are already doing more with less," Mr Murphy said.

"In real terms the ABC receives about \$200 million less each year from the government than it did a quarter of a century ago, yet it is producing more content through more channels and platforms than ever before. This is a tribute to the dedication and passion of ABC journalists, presenters, technical staff and others.

"As Mark Scott pointed out today, more than \$350 million has been stripped from the ABC by the current government, including \$254 million of operational funding.

"The rationale for a merger seems to be only about making savings. But this simply papers over the real issue that public broadcasting in this country is underfunded for the digital age.

"This must be addressed as a matter of priority in the triennial funding round to be announced in this year's budget. Discussions about transmission costs and platform sharing are good and worthwhile but any savings won't address the underlying funding issue.

"And what happens when the modest savings from a merger are absorbed? Furthermore, it would be extremely naïve to believe that savings could be reinvested into programming and content rather than taken by the government of the day."

Mr Murphy said any financial benefits from a merger would need to be balanced against the likely negative impact on the audiences of the ABC and SBS. He said staff at the ABC and SBS were still going through a painful period of cost-cutting, programming changes and redundancies, and what was needed was funding stability, not more uncertainty.

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**The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance - the people who inform and entertain**

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