

Submission No. ....

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09 MAY 2005

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS,  
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
AND THE ARTS

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29 April 2005

Dr Anne Dacre,  
Secretary,  
Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts,  
House of Representatives,  
Parliament House,  
CANBERRA, ACT, 2600

e-mail: [cita.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:cita.reps@aph.gov.au)

Dear Dr Dacre,

Thank you for your invitation to contribute to your committee's inquiry into matters relating to Digital Television in Australia, and particularly

- the rollout process for digital television, including progress to date and future plans;
- options for further encouraging consumer interest in the uptake of digital television;
- technological issues relevant to the uptake of digital television; and
- future options.

Given our experience in television production, our familiarity with media research both in Australia and internationally and our observations of public reactions to the introduction of digital television to date, we submit that:

1. the introduction of digital television has been compromised and delayed by
  - a. weak public demand largely due to a lack of knowledge or understanding of its benefits;
  - b. official neglect of the public's reasons for watching television and its much greater demand for high quality content than for modern or sophisticated delivery technology;
  - c. the mistaken choice of HDTV and the consequent excessively high cost of digital television production and consumer technology;
  - d. widespread public confusion about 'digital television';
  - e. a general failure to encourage the production and provision of high quality programming; and
  - f. de facto protection of the interests of existing television networks rather than official recognition of the public benefits of digital television, not least its wider range of channel and program choices and its inherent competitiveness.
2. the full advantage of digital television lies in its capacity to expand the diversity of programming available to the public and the level of competition open to the newly emergent industry. This applies equally to the public and private sectors of the television economy. Vitaly important roles remain for the ABC and SBS, as public service broadcasters at arm's length from government, as they do for commercial operators in a digital television environment.



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3. the future rollout of digital television needs to take account of social and cultural factors as well as technology and economics, all of which are constrained by geography and by history.

In support of these submissions, we observe:

- that the requirement for universal service to all Australian viewers that applied in the early days of television, when the analogue spectrum constituted a scarce resource, no longer applies in a digital environment, provided that adequate bandwidth is provided throughout the country;
- that the potential proliferation of channels in a digital environment allows for the pursuit of more narrowly focussed audiences, each with its own special interests, and thus provides much greater diversity in programming;
- that, as a consequence, it is more important that all programming across all genres inform, entertain (in the sense of catching and holding people's interest and attention) and educate as well as persuading viewers (not least to stay viewing, as well as presenting political points of view and commercial advertising) than to maintain the old uniformity of distinct program genres – news and information, entertainment (including drama, variety and sport) and education. The logic of this situation is that channels should be allowed to specialise in their content offerings;
- that distinctions such as those between broadcasting and data-casting remain dubious in the extreme. Technological convergence means that television – which was once moving pictures on a screen fed by live cameras, still graphics, cine film, video tape and satellites – can and should now admit and embrace material from online computer networks.
- that the risk of digital television succumbing to the 'lowest common denominators' of gambling and pornography is best countered by fostering and encouraging high quality screen production (especially drama, documentary, educational and entertainment material).

We would be glad to discuss our submission more thoroughly with the Committee if it so desires. Meanwhile, we leave with you the following remark (made to the recent Asian Media Summit in Kuala Lumpur)

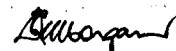
the keys to good... broadcasting... may be summarised as good programs made by good people, doing good work and doing it well. And their judges will be the public they serve. Questions remain about how openly... broadcasting might be governed and public judgements may well be helped if aspiring... broadcasters were to publish their own... charters, against which to account for their performances.

(Morgan [2005] *Evaluating Public Service Broadcasting*, Asian Media Summit, AIBD, Kuala Lumpur)

We thank you for your attention,



Susan Kerrigan,  
Lecturer in Communication.



Frank Morgan,  
Associate Professor.

Attachment 1

Curriculum vitae

*Frank Morgan*

President, JourNet  
UNESCO network of journalism and media schools  
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Acting Chair, Communication Network,  
Australian National Commission for UNESCO

formerly,

President,  
International Association for Media and Communication Research

Visiting Professor of Communication,  
Tampere University, Finland.

Visiting Research Fellow,  
Open University Productions,  
BBC, UK.

Deputy Director, Australian Film Television & Radio School

Writer, director & producer  
Australian Broadcasting Commission,  
Christian Television Association of Victoria, and  
Freelance.

*Susan Kerrigan*

**Current - 2003**

Academic at the University of Newcastle.

Lecturer Media Production

**1998-2002 ABC Television Producer/Director**

Classification: Program Maker, Band 6.

**1990-1998 ABC Television Production Assistant**

Classification: Drama Continuity Craft Specialist, Merit Level

**1987-1989 Bachelor of Arts - Communication Studies.(University of Newcastle)**

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