

10 January 2024

Dear Chair,

Appropriate terms of reference for a COVID-19 Royal Commission

SBS appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry into the appropriate terms of reference for a COVID-19 Royal Commission (the Inquiry).

SBS (which includes National Indigenous Television (NITV) as part of the network) is a unique national asset. SBS services are in more than 60 languages, available to almost 100 per cent of the Australian population, with a remit to serve all Australians, and with specific services for multicultural or multilingual communities and services by, for and about First Nations peoples.

During the COVID-19 crisis, SBS's cross-platform provision of vital public health information was essential to saving lives and ensuring all Australians had access to up-to-date information on measures to stay safe, restrictions, and vaccines.

Therefore, SBS would support the Royal Commission to include terms of reference in relation to

- communications to culturally and linguistically diverse people in Australia;
- communications to First Nations peoples and communities including those in remote and regional areas; and
- preparedness of these communications for future crises.

In a crisis situation, communications to Australia's diverse communities and First Nations peoples not only require swift actions and sufficient resourcing, but also a significant level of existing expertise, established distribution pathways and community trust to attain the desired outcome. It is relevant to note that communicating and working with each of Australia's diverse communities comes with unique challenges and opportunities, and requires a carefully nuanced approach.

SBS's response to the unique needs of its diverse audiences during the acute phases of the pandemic was agile, comprehensive, highly effective and highly valued. The response included the SBS Multilingual coronavirus portal in 63 languages, built within only four days in March 2020, and live interpreting of the daily NSW and Victorian Government press conferences in a range of languages.

There have been a range of findings to date highlighting that improvements are required in relation to the way that crisis communications are prepared and distributed to those who are culturally and linguistically diverse, and First Nations peoples and communities.¹

With the inclusion of the above proposed terms of reference, SBS looks forward to contributing further detailed information regarding its pandemic response, the key learnings, and our considered views regarding how SBS can be further leveraged in the event of future crises as an essential means of connecting Government, authorities, and relevant entities with all Australians.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry. Please do not hesitate to contact Clare O'Neil, SBS Director of Corporate Affairs, at clare.oneil@sbs.com.au.

Yours sincerely,

Mandi Wicks
A/g SBS Managing Director

¹ For example, Radel K. et al., (2023, June). *Understanding First Nations Communities' Preparedness, Concerns And Strategies For Addressing Covid-19*, p. ix, and *Understanding the experiences and communication needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities during the COVID-19 pandemic*, University of Melbourne