

## **SBS SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN VICTORIA**

**21 FEBRUARY 2025**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Special Broadcasting Service (**SBS**) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into the cultural and creative industries in Victoria (**'the Committee'**).

For 50 years, SBS has played a crucial and unique role in Australia. The history of SBS began in 1975 when the Australian Government established radio stations 2EA in Sydney and 3EA in Melbourne to inform Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds about Medibank. Since then, SBS has evolved to deliver services across multiple platforms, broadcast and online, and we have grown our language portfolio to more than 60 languages, so that all audiences have free access to trusted news and high-quality entertainment. Today SBS News is the most trusted news source in Australia, and SBS has been awarded Australian podcast publisher of the year for three consecutive years. National Indigenous Television (NITV) is Australia's leading platform for First Nations storytelling and home to the only national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander television news service. The SBS network delivers exceptional programming by and for Australia's diverse communities and in doing so, supports civic, social, and economic participation, and social cohesion in contemporary Australia.

The services SBS provides are of ongoing importance in Victoria, where more than a third of all people were born outside of Australia, 30% speak a language other than English at home, and 41% of people have a parent that was born overseas.<sup>1</sup> A significant proportion of our resourcing is committed to Victoria. In addition to a highly visible presence in Melbourne and producing a range of content in Victoria, SBS partners with Victoria's multilingual and multicultural communities to celebrate and share in key cultural moments and events. We would welcome discussion about new opportunities to build on SBS's services and leverage its existing capabilities, to deliver further benefits for Victoria's First Nations, multilingual and multicultural communities.

### **HOW SBS IS FUNDED**

SBS is a hybrid funded national broadcaster, deriving funding from the Australian Government and through commercial activities. The majority of SBS funding comes from Government appropriation; in 2023-24, this funding amounted to \$334.9 million. The remainder of SBS's operating budget is from own-source revenue, amounting to \$159 million in 2023-24. This is predominantly sourced through commercial revenue including advertising and sponsorship. SBS

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census, <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/2>.



is highly efficient, delivering multi-platform services including trusted news and entertainment in over 60 languages across the entire country through this resourcing.

## **SBS PRESENCE IN VICTORIA**

SBS is established in Victoria with an office in Melbourne's Federation Square. This highly visible presence in the heart of Melbourne ensures that the community feels connected to SBS as an important and accessible public institution. We have a headcount of 192 FTE employees in Melbourne as of the end of January 2025, which is approximately 14% of SBS's FTE staff. These employees are spread across divisions including National Indigenous Television (NITV), TV & Online Content, News and Current Affairs, Audio and Language Content, and more. The staff in this office are a central part of SBS and NITV's content creation workforce. Outside of SBS's Sydney headquarters, the Melbourne office is the largest of SBS's interstate offices.

## **SBS PRODUCTION IN VICTORIA**

SBS has a long history of partnering with Victorian cultural and creative industries, including through the commissioning of film and TV productions with Victorian production companies, through the engagement of local cast and crew, and through on-location filming in the state. Between July 2021 through to February 2025, SBS has commissioned about 83 hours of content in Victoria (about 20% of external content production<sup>2</sup> hours). These productions range across genres, including children's content like the *Little J and Big Cuz* TV series, the AFL focused program *Yokayi Shorts*, factual content like *Getting to the Guts of Mental Health with Dr. Michael Mosely* and *Meet the Neighbours*, and premium scripted dramas including crime series *Swift Street* and thriller series *Safe Home*. These productions contribute to the creative sector in Victoria and deliver TV programming that serves and reflects Australia's diverse communities.

Between July 2021 and February 2025, SBS contributed to projects with a total combined budget of \$55.8m in Victoria. Of that \$55.8 million, about 24.5% was funded through direct investment from SBS, about 7% was contributed by VicScreen, with the remainder from other contributors such as Screen Australia. When looking at premium Australian drama, the share of SBS's spend in Victoria is particularly significant. Between 2021 and 2024, on average, about 34% of SBS's budget for premium drama was spent on productions in Victoria. SBS's commissions have supported 12 hours of premium drama in Victoria over the past four years, which represents about 38% of the premium drama hours SBS commissioned over this period.

SBS also has members of its Audio and Language Content team and News and Current Affairs team based in Melbourne. These teams engage contemporary Australia with multi-platform content, broadcast live and available on-demand through online platforms. Our teams in Melbourne contribute to the delivery of trusted news and stories in over 60 languages, reaching diverse multilingual communities including the over 722,000 households across Victoria that speak a language other than English at home.<sup>3</sup> These stories ensure all audiences have access to important information and entertainment, fostering social inclusion and supporting democratic and economic participation.

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<sup>2</sup> I.e., outside of SBS's studios.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census, <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/2>.



## **SBS CAREER PATHWAY AND PROGRESSION INITIATIVES**

Across SBS and NITV, we invest in career pathway and content initiatives designed to support and elevate under-represented screen creatives.

SBS's *Talent Escalator* is a nationwide initiative focused on creating opportunities within the television sector. The Talent Escalator supports career development for emerging and mid-level practitioners through opportunities for participants to work with production companies of SBS-commissioned programs across unscripted and scripted, in roles that are a step up from their existing level of experience. Since 2017, SBS has supported more than 30 Talent Escalator positions, including 11 positions in Victoria.

SBS supports the *Australian International Documentary Conference (AIDC) Leading Lights Program* for practitioners from under-represented backgrounds. This program is designed to assist industry newcomers to establish themselves as part of Australia's screen community. Over 300 emerging and diverse screen creatives have been able to attend AIDC and participate in the Leading Lights professional development program. Since its inception in 2018, 108 were Victorian practitioners. In the past four years, SBS has sponsored 20 positions, including five brand-new positions for the Leading Lights Program, March 2025.

SBS partners with VicScreen, Arenamedia and Screen Australia to deliver Originate Features – a dynamic development and production program designed to support and amplify feature film writers and writer/directors from traditionally under-represented backgrounds. In June 2023, four feature films were selected, with two fully financed and currently in post-production: Pasa Faho and Sweet Milk Lake.

The Emerging Writers' Incubator is a national initiative designed to nurture underrepresented screenwriting talent in Australia. Launched in 2021, the program is a collaboration between SBS, Screen Australia, and state and territory agencies—including Film Victoria—with support from the Australian Writers' Guild. Each year, six emerging writers receive 12-month paid placements at leading Australian production companies renowned for their contributions to Australian drama. To date, the initiative has supported four placements at Victorian-based companies, with three co-funded by VicScreen.

Further, SBS and NITV commission programs aligning with our Charter, including scripted, unscripted, and digital originals. Through the Digital Originals initiative, a partnership between SBS, NITV and Screen Australia, selected applicants take part in an exclusive industry workshop providing an opportunity to work on narrative writing skills and develop their projects to align with the SBS Charter, SBS Commissioning Equity and Inclusion Guidelines, and SBS and NITV platforms – culminating in a pitch to Screen Australia, SBS and NITV. Over five years, a number of Victorian creatives have been selected for the workshop and progressed to development with SBS. Two projects from Victorian teams have been commissioned and produced, one of which was co-funded for production by VicScreen. A third project from a Victorian team is currently in advanced development.



## SBS CULTURAL ACTIVATIONS IN VICTORIA

SBS is committed to engaging and inspiring all Australians in the shared project of building a more cohesive and inclusive society. We partner with and have an active presence at local community events regularly across the country. In 2023-24, we supported and participated in 21 events in Victoria, including 19 across Melbourne and 2 in regional towns including Ballarat and Bendigo. SBS investment in these events totalled around \$143,000.

Community events engage a diverse range of local groups and organisations, reflecting the diversity of the Victorian population. In 2023-24, the events we contributed to included the Moon Festival in Box Hill, Dussehra Festival in Rockbank, Hume Diwali Mela in Craigieburn, and various events in Melbourne's CBD celebrating Greek, Indonesian, Polish, African, Spanish, Korean, Filipino communities, and more.

SBS's Community Impact Plan commits us to support the key cultural celebrations of Diwali/Deepavali, Ramadan & Eid al-Fitr, Lunar New Year, and NAIDOC Week with multilingual cross-platform content, educational resources, community partnerships, and activations across Australia to engage local communities.

SBS and NITV engage closely with Victorian communities which observe these celebrations:

- **Lunar New Year (2025):** SBS participated in and sponsored four activation events celebrating Lunar New Year, with three held in Melbourne and one in Bendigo. These events were delivered in collaboration with the Asian Business Association of Whitehorse, the Vietnamese Community Association – Victoria Charter, The Korean Society of Victoria Australia Inc., and the National Chinese Museum of Australia (Golden Dragon Museum).
- **Diwali/Deepavali (2024):** SBS participated in and sponsored an activation stall at Federation Square for Celebrate India's Victorian Diwali Festival, as well as Hume's Diwali Mela, both vibrant celebrations of the Festival of Lights. These events featured captivating cultural performances, traditional music, and delicious cuisine, attracting large crowds from across the city.
- **Ramadan & Eid al-Fitr (2024):** SBS partnered with the Islamic Museum of Australia (located in Melbourne) to host an Iftar dinner, bringing together over 100 guests at the museum. This event highlighted our strong and ongoing collaboration with the museum, through which we develop educational resources for teachers. These resources are made available on the SBS Learn online platform, supporting greater understanding and inclusivity in classrooms across Australia. SBS also sponsored an activation stall in April at the SalamFest Eid ul Fitr celebration at Queen Victoria Market.
- **NAIDOC Week (2024):** SBS participated and sponsored an activation stall over two-days at the NAIDOC Market at Federation Square, organised by the Koorie Heritage Trust. The event featured 25 stalls, each showcasing a diverse range of cultural objects, crafts, designs, fashion, jewellery, and gifts created by First Peoples artists and businesses.

As part of the activation, reels of NITV productions *Bamay* and *Little J and Big Cuz* were played in the Elders Room, providing a culturally significant and engaging experience for attendees. Additionally, promotional efforts were enhanced through social video content, further amplifying the reach and impact of the event.



Through these activations, SBS engages directly with Victoria's diverse communities to celebrate rich cultural traditions and connect communities with our services and each other. Our partnerships with local organisations are critical to this effort.

## **CONCLUSION**

SBS welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee's inquiry. SBS plays a unique and critically important role in Australia, providing trusted news, information, and entertainment that reaches everyone – including multicultural, multilingual and First Nations communities – supporting civic, social, and economic participation, and social cohesion in contemporary Australia.

Our operations, teams, and investment in Victoria play an important role in the delivery of our services to all Australians in line with the SBS Charter, and our role as an important public institution. SBS devotes a significant proportion of its resourcing to Victoria, producing content and engaging with local organisations and diverse communities, in addition to investing in initiatives to support career pathways for under-represented screen creatives. SBS also has a significant physical presence in Victoria and has deep and long-standing links with culturally diverse communities across the state. These ongoing investments contribute to Victoria's creative economy and cultural life, delivering services that inform, engage, and reflect Victoria's diverse communities.