

**Opinion Piece by ABC Managing Director Mark Scott for the *Sydney Morning Herald*
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Connecting creative Australians, with each other, and with audiences, has always been central to the ABC's role.

We can't say for sure what the Australian media landscape will be like in twelve years time. Yet the pattern was set long ago by the global environment and infinite choice that came to us when the internet came into our lives.

By 2020, all Australian media will be fighting for time and attention in a market open to the world. Cultural borders will not exist.

We will be saturated with choices about what to watch, listen to and experience; it will be like trying to hold back the ocean with a broom.

Yet sometimes there's less to the market than meets the eye. In the fifty year history of Australian television it was the public broadcaster that had the freedom to make television live up to its full potential, to see the immense power of the most popular media form we know used to inform and educate, and not just entertain.

The 2020 Summit this weekend is an invitation to think about the Australia we want to create and how we can all contribute to making it happen.

For great Australian institutions like the ABC, it is also an opportunity to review what we stand for and the role we should play in the Australia of the future.

What are the key characteristics of the ABC that set us apart in a crowded media environment and justify a continued, or expanded, commitment to public broadcasting in the future?

Part of the answer is the essential "Australianness" of your ABC. It is a brand that Australians turn to in order to find quality Australian content – drama and documentaries, music, news and information – an Australian take on the world.

Another key quality is the ABC's universality – free to all Australians, regardless of economic or geographic circumstances. In the digital economy of the future where access to information will be one of the essentials for success, the universal reach of the ABC becomes more important than ever.

Consistent with our public broadcasting responsibilities, the ABC also has great strengths in certain content genres – news and information, documentaries, science, education, arts and children's programming to name a few.

Just as important is the ABC's localism – the “town square” for local communities where issues can be raised and debated, and in times of crisis, a lifeline of up to date survival information.

By reaching all Australians, with a presence on all major delivery platforms, and a comprehensive range of news and quality, trusted programming, the ABC ensures all Australians can participate in the national debate, and is integral to the development of a population with wide-ranging intellectual and creative curiosity.

As an innovator, exploring new programming and new ways of connecting with audiences, the ABC develops the skills that Australia needs in the digital economy of the future.

As a partner in the digital education revolution the ABC can provide the platform and content to underpin a national curriculum, working with schools, universities, government agencies and education bodies to deliver the digital content that teachers and students need via free to air digital broadcast, broadband, internet channels and downloads.

By providing a national digital platform for Australia's artists and cultural institutions, and by developing new talent, the ABC encourages experimentation, innovation and creative thinking in a changing environment.

Through its international TV and radio broadcasts, the delivery of Australian content online, and aid projects that build local public broadcasting capacity in neighbouring countries, the ABC projects Australian values and perspectives to the world, and deepens the engagement with our neighbours in the Asia Pacific.

When we look to 2020, in a media world with almost limitless choice of content, much of it foreign, delivered to multiple devices in the home and mobile, we see the potential for the ABC to be delivering much more.

A suite of six ABC TV channels, delivered to a variety of in-home and mobile devices, and supported by broadband delivery of on-demand content, niche internet channels, archival material and interactive online sites:

ABC1 – comprehensive, with broad appeal, and 80% Australian content;

ABC2 – fostering new talent, formats, programming and with at least 50% Australian content. A focus on factual, comedy, arts and entertainment;

ABC3 – dedicated non-commercial Children's Channel, with at least 50% Australian content across all genres, including drama, animation and education;

ABC4 – News and public information including live feeds of major events, press conferences and Parliament, building on the ABC's extensive national and international news gathering resources.

ABC5 – Education Channel providing English and foreign language tuition, curriculum material and an integral digital resource for a newly developed national schools curriculum. At least 50% Australian content to meet teachers and students needs.

ABC6 – Best of overseas content, including BBC material.

Digital radio also offers the potential for the ABC to deliver at least 15 radio services, supported by broadband sites providing additional content, information and audience participation, including more specialist music stations, with high levels of Australian content, and specific stations for sport, children and health and wellbeing.

A national high speed broadband network opens the potential for greater access to the ABC's vast archive of audio visual material, and to expand its role as an incubator for emerging talent in music, video and multimedia.

In 2020, there will be so many new choices and voices in media – but how many of them will be Australian? Will we be seeing more our own lives reflected – or less? Who will tell the Australian story?

The ABC will. Within this kind of world, it will be up to the ABC to ensure the Australian accent is not lost, and that distinctive local and the national stories about our people and our lives are still told, still screened, still heard.