



**Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy  
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital  
Economy**

**Deputy Leader of the Government  
in the Senate**

**Address to Friends of the ABC**

**Adult Education Centre, York Street, Launceston  
Thursday, 16 July 2009**

5–10 mins

**Good morning everyone, it's a pleasure to be with you today.**

**I know that the Friends of the ABC are passionate about our national broadcaster, and I share your affection for the ABC.**

**The ABC is one of Australia's most important and trusted cultural institutions. It is a national treasure.**

**I'm sure you're all keen to hear more detail of the Government's historic funding commitment to the ABC in this year's budget.**

**So let me start by outlining that commitment for you.**

**Firstly, I'm very pleased that, in the middle of the most significant global economic downturn in 75 years, the Government was able to give the ABC its biggest funding boost since it was incorporated in 1983.**

**The commitment of the Rudd Government to maintaining the ABC as a comprehensive national broadcaster was soundly demonstrated in this year's budget.**

**Over the next triennium, from 2009/2010 to 2011/2012, the Government will maintain the ABC's base funding in real dollar terms and provide an additional \$165.3 million of new funding, consisting of:**

- **\$45.1 million in 2009-10,**
- **\$47.1 million in 2010-11, and**
- **\$73.1 million in 2011-12.**

**This funding will enable the ABC to provide a dedicated digital children's television channel, up to 90 hours per year of high quality, original Australian drama programming, and to expand the capabilities of the ABC's regional broadband hubs.**

**Including the new funding, the Government is providing the ABC with more than \$2.2 billion in indexed base funding over the next three years.**

**I'm delighted that we were, in the midst of one of the tightest budgets in Australia's history, able to deliver this fantastic outcome for the ABC.**

**Of course, it was one of Labor's election commitments to increase the amount of original Australian drama content on the ABC.**

**The current drama requirement for commercial television broadcasters equates to approximately 90 hours per annum of first run Australian drama.**

**In contrast, under the previous government's budget cuts, the level of Australian drama on the ABC fell to less than 20 hours per year in 2007 – that's around 20% of the minimum requirement of commercial TV.**

**The Rudd Government considers that the ABC- our national broadcaster - is the natural home of Australian drama.**

**The funding announced in this year's budget will enable the ABC to produce and broadcast similar amounts of original Australian drama to the levels required of the commercial networks.**

**The ABC will also use this new funding to fulfil its vision of establishing a dedicated ABC digital Children's Channel - one of the Government's nine practical initiatives stemming from the Australia 2020 Summit.**

**The ABC digital children's channel will offer high-quality educational, commercial-free viewing options for Australian families.**

**It will broadcast child-appropriate content for 15 hours per day and will be complemented by interactive elements and online content.**

**ABC3, as it will be known, will be delivered free of charge into Australian homes via digital broadcasting.**

**The Government's new funding will also enable the ABC to expand the capabilities of its network of regional broadband hubs by placing specialist video producers in its Local Radio stations to film, edit and upload original local material to ABC Local websites.**

**This will add to the ABC's ability to explore key local issues – including local sport and regional and rural stories – making these sites more valuable as community gateways.**

**It will also enable the ABC to become a key provider of online content – ensuring the national broadcaster is a major content producer and a foundation player as we roll out the national broadband network.**

**Of course, quite apart from these new initiatives, the ABC requires core funding to enable it to continue its traditional services.**

**That's why we've committed to maintaining the ABC's core funding in real dollar terms – ensuring that the ABC's annual budget keeps pace with inflation and that no existing services need be cut due to inflationary pressures.**

**The new funding also includes \$13.6 million of additional capital funding for the ABC in 2009–10 to assist it to maintain its extensive asset base.**

**As I said at the outset, this is the largest increase in the ABC's operational base funding in five trienniums – since the ABC was incorporated in 1983.**

**I think you'll agree that this is in stark contrast to the actions of the Howard Government.**

**Their first budget stripped \$55 million per year from the ABC's base funding, crippling the national broadcaster's ability to keep pace with the changing media environment.**

**Of course, the move to digital television and the rollout of the national broadband network are changing the fundamentals of the Australian media sector.**

**In a few years time, television as we know it will look very different indeed.**

**With multiple channels on your TV set, and a range of content being streamed into your homes via the NBN, the choices for viewers will expand at a great rate in the years ahead.**

**The Government is committed to delivering Australian audiences the kinds of choices in television and online content that much of the rest of the developed world already takes for granted.**

**Of course, we started at something of a disadvantage, after years of inaction and failed plans by the previous Government.**

**Failures both in the switch to digital only television, and in providing high speed broadband to Australian homes and businesses.**

**But we've been making great progress in both these areas recently, and Tasmania will be an early beneficiary of the national broadband network – we're negotiating now with the state government on a commencement date.**

**When it comes to the switch to digital only television, Tasmania has a little time yet to prepare – we won't be turning off the analogue signal here until the first half of 2013.**

**We're doing this because the Government believes that the benefits of digital television are long overdue for Australian audiences.**

**I assure you that the Government will ensure no viewers are left behind in the switch to digital only television broadcasting.**

**Information on how to make the switch, and assistance to households who might find it difficult to do so, are the key parts of our pilot project for switch-over in Mildura, Victoria, in the first half of next year.**

**Lessons learned in Mildura will be applied as we progressively switch off the analogue signal around Australia.**

**In Tasmania, the switch to digital TV will bring you increased content, and provide services that have previously been unavailable.**

**Of course, Tasmanians are already able to enjoy the benefits of digital television – and I understand that the new ONE sports channel will start broadcasting here in Tasmania by the end of the month.**

**Of course, digital television already brings you such delights as those to be found on ABC2, and, by the end of this year, the ABC children's channel, ABC3.**

**Once again showing that the ABC is at the forefront of new media developments in Australia.**

**I know many of you will have questions for me, so I'll leave it there for now – over to you!**

**[ENDS]**