

26 May 2009

Kim Dalton  
Head of Television  
Australian Broadcasting Corporation;  
ABC Ultimo Centre;  
700 Harris Street;  
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GPO Box 9994;  
Sydney NSW 2001

via facsimile: 02 6273 4125

Dear Kim,

**Re: Federal Budget 2009/2010 and ABC Casting Practices**

I am writing to you to congratulate the ABC on receiving a substantial boost in Government funding in the 2009/2010 Federal Budget, and in so doing raise a number of issues relating to casting at the ABC.

With the new injection of funds into the ABC directed specifically at increasing levels of Australian drama and children's content on its suite of channels, the Alliance believes that it is timely to re-examine a number of the casting practices on ABC in-house and outsourced productions.

In his announcement of additional funding, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Stephen Conroy stated that "The ABC and SBS play an important role reflecting our culture by telling Australian stories." The Alliance would hope that this is put into practice by ensuring that all Australian performers are given a fair crack at being a part of producing these Australian stories. The Alliance wishes to work with the ABC to develop policies and practices: that ensure diversity in casting; that guarantee all performers are provided the ability to seek employment at the ABC; and, that preference Australian performers over the employment of foreign performers.

*Diversity in Casting*

Australian screens should reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community. As Australia's national publicly funded broadcaster, the ABC needs to fulfill its Charter responsibilities by ensuring that its productions cast performers belonging to all groups in all types of roles, so that the Australian community is portrayed realistically on screen. Discrimination against performers because of age, sex, race, creed, colour, sexual preference, national origin or disability must be eliminated. While the Alliance is aware of references to non-discrimination in its Code of Practice, the Alliance believes the ABC needs to introduce more practical and directed policies and procedures including:

- Equal Opportunity/Diversity in Casting Rules, be it through: incorporation into the current Code of Practice; incorporation into Corporate Plan to be reported



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on its Annual report; and/or the establishment of a Casting Agreement with the Alliance.

- The collection, analysis and reporting of performer diversity data in its in-house and independently produced programming;
- The introduction of an on-screen talent directory to assist producers to cast more appropriately.

#### *Transparency and openness in casting calls*

It is the Alliance's understanding that casting calls on ABC in-house and independently productions have been regularly limited to a select groups of agents and performers. This restricts the ability of a great majority of performers to seek employment. The Alliance believes that the ABC has an obligation to ensure that all performers are provided, at the very least, the opportunity to seek work on publicly funded productions. The Alliance therefore requests that the ABC consider introducing a policy that the casting agent be required to brief all theatrical agents when casting all ABC (in house and independently sourced) productions.

#### *Engagement of Australian nationals*

The Alliance believes that as a matter of policy and practice the ABC should preference the engagement of Australian performers over non-nationals in all productions. In order to reflect Australian culture accurately and tell Australian stories with Australian faces and voices, *Australian* performers should be engaged. As Australia's publicly funded broadcaster, there is an expectation that its funding should also be directed at supporting and sustaining the development of the production industry including the performer sector.

At this important juncture in the ABC's history, it is critical that the ABC move forward with appropriate policies that maximise support for the local production industry and the performer sector. The Alliance is aware of a number of models that exist internationally that work to ensure these ends and has attached a research paper detailing these to assist.

The Alliance would like the opportunity to discuss this issue with you. I will be in touch with you soon to arrange a time to meet.

Yours sincerely



Simon Whipp  
National Director

*Attached: Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance, Casting: Equal Opportunity and Foreign Actors at the ABC*