

2025-26 Federal Budget Funding for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Submission by ABC Friends Ltd

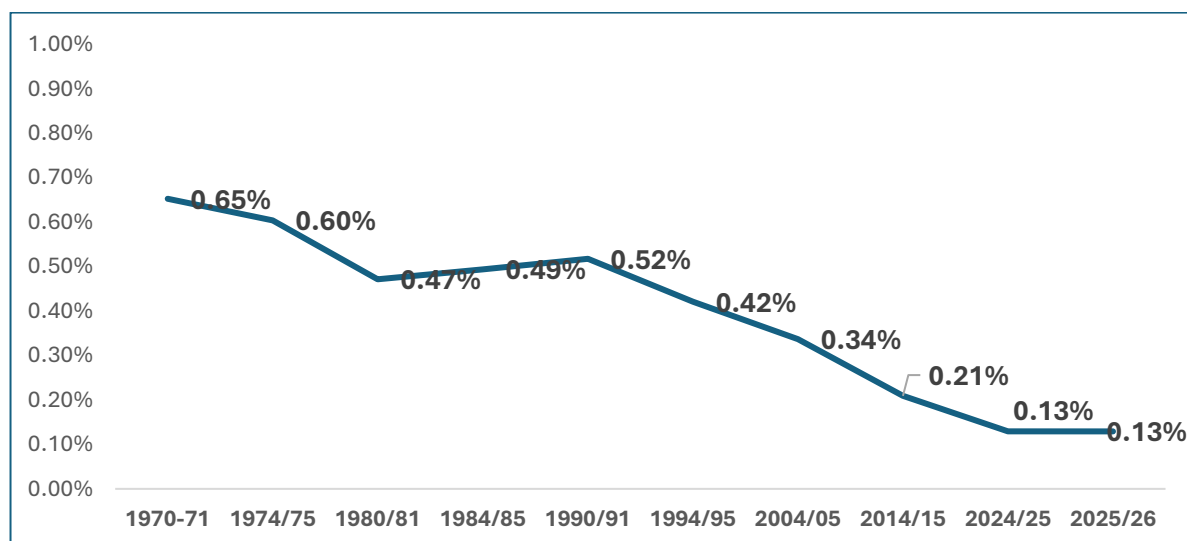
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ABC Friends welcomes improvements to the ABC's funding made by the Albanese government since its election in 2022. Total ABC funding has increased by over \$350 million.

The introduction of five-year funding, the restoration of indexation, the incorporation of some terminating programs into the ABC's operating grant, and additional funding for services in the Indo-Pacific have enabled the ABC to increase the quantity and quality of its programs and given it greater ability to plan.

However, after years of brutal cuts, the ABC is still funded at much lower levels than it was in 2014 and much less as a proportion of the federal budget. (*Figure 1*)

Figure 1: ABC operational funding as a percentage of Federal Budget Outlays (1970/71 to 2025/26)¹



Sources: ABC revenue, PBS relevant year & Jolly, Australian Parliamentary Library, J2014, pp. 58-59. Budget outlays: Relevant year Budget paper number 1, 1970/71 to 1994/95: 1994/95; Budget Paper number 1; 2004/05, p. 6-4; 2014/15, p. 6-6; 2024 /25 & 2025/26 figures, 2025/26 Budget Paper number 1, Statement 5, p. 117.

The cuts led to heavy reductions in original Australian screen content, state-based current affairs programming, TV arts and science content, specialist radio programming, live music recording and international reporting. Televised sports coverage disappeared.

Over the same period, the ABC increased its services, developing new content for streaming, mobile and online platforms and operating a growing number of radio and television outlets. To take one example, in 1970, when the ABC received 0.65% of federal budget outlays, it had one TV channel.

¹ Compiled by Michael Ward, ABC Alumni

Today, with just 0.13% of federal budget outlays, the ABC produces content for, and operates, four TV channels, its on-demand iView platform, ABC websites, 44 local radio stations, and a host of social media platforms.

The ABC's budget should be restored, to guarantee its future as a fearless presenter of quality news and original Australian content. Australia needs an agile, vital ABC that supports quality and creativity, that's willing to take risks. We need an ABC that offers content for Australians of all ages and backgrounds, regardless of where they live or how they access news and entertainment

With the high cost of streaming subscriptions and cost of living pressures, we need a national public broadcaster that is free and accessible for all Australians.

Recommendations

1. That the federal government commit to restore ABC funding by \$150 million per year to be phased in progressively from 2026-27, the additional funds to be available for:
 - More original Australian content, particularly for children's programs, scripted drama, documentaries, arts, science, and factual programming
 - Increased ABC's news and current affairs services in regional Australia and an enhanced international role in regions where the ABC has a limited presence
2. That additional funding be allocated for the ABC's emergency broadcasting program and that the budget for this item be indexed annually to meet the increasing costs of this service. We further recommend that the government investigate, with the ABC, the establishment of a supplementary fund to ensure that the full costs of the service are covered.
3. That DFAT extend funding for international funding for the ABC's Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy to \$20 million annually, plus indexation.
4. That the government adjust the indexation formula applied to the ABC, so that it covers the impact of real-world inflation, including the cost of content production.

SUBMISSION

1. The need to watch, read and listen to Australian voices

The ABC now presents 37% less Australian content on its main channel than it did in 2013. Children’s programs, scripted drama, religion, arts, entertainment, factual and sports programming have all declined.

In 2013-14 the ABC screened 1060 hours of original content on its main channel. In 2024-25 it screened 667 hours. (Table 1)

Table 1: ABC main channel first release ‘non-news’ genre program hours

Genre	2013/14 hours	2024/25 hours	% difference
Arts	80	33	-58
Children's*	9	0	-100
Documentary	44	34	-23
Drama	101	36	-64
Entertainment	430	380	-12
Factual	192	148	-23
Indigenous*	5	3	-66
Religion	18	11	-39
Sport	181	22	-88
Total 'non-news current affairs'	1060	667	-37%

Source: ABC Annual Reports. Compiled by ABC Alumni

The biggest declines occurred in sport (-88%), drama (-64%), entertainment (-50%) and arts (-47%).

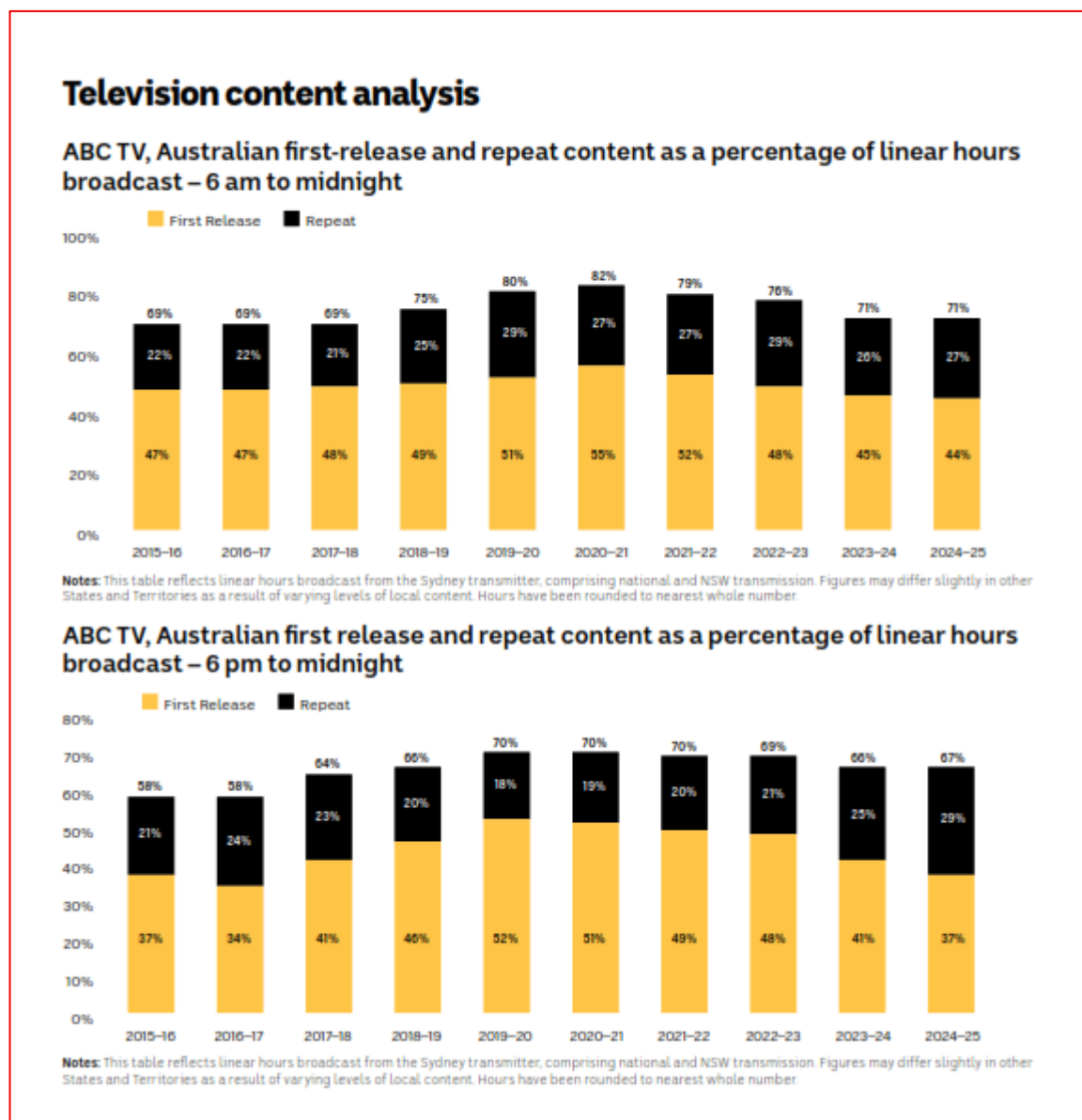
First release children's program hours, which screened primarily on the ABC Kids and Family channel, totalled 71 hours in 2024-25 – an average of 1.4 hours per week.

Too many repeats

With the ABC producing less original content, there has been a steady increase in repeats and more reliance on overseas programs.

- In 2015-16, repeats 22% of the ABC's television content between 6am and midnight and 21% between p.m. and midnight.
- In 2024-25 repeats comprised 27% of the ABC's television content between 6am and midnight and 29% between p.m. and midnight.
- More than 81% and as much as 90% of the ABC's documentaries, scripted drama, arts, and factual program hours in 2024-25 were repeats.
- 96% of Australian children's programs were repeats (71 hours of original content and 1,785 hours of repeats).

Figure 2: ABC first release and repeat content 2015/16 to 2025/25²



² Source: ABC Annual Report 2024-25

The ABC also relies heavily on overseas content. In 2024-25 total overseas content represented 26% of the ABC's transmitted hours – with only 1.1% of these hours being first release programs.

ABC Friends welcomes the federal government's commitment of an additional \$50 million for scripted drama and children's programming over three years from 2025-26.

The funding will produce more original Australian content, but it will not address the serious decline in arts, documentary, factual and other genres. And it will have a comparatively small impact on the quantum hours of original content to be produced.

If the \$50 million allocated by the federal government were allocated equally to drama and children's content, the additional funds granted by the government could generate up to 26 hours a year in new Australian drama and 35 hours for children's programming.³

The ABC is part of our cultural heartland. It must be fully funded to tell our stories.

Whether we watch the ABC on our TV screens in real time, catch up on iView on our devices, or access it on other platforms, Australians need to be able to watch, read and listen to Australian voices. The ABC is now the only free to air service able to offer a full range of Australian content.

The free to air networks do the bare minimum. If the ABC does not offer more Australian content, Australia will be overwhelmed by overseas content produced primarily by the big US tech companies.

We support the government's decision to require Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) services to invest in new Australian drama, children's, documentary, arts and educational programs. But not everyone can afford to pay subscriptions, especially in a cost of living crisis.

Increased investment in public service media is essential to ensure that Australian programs are free and accessible to all Australians.

Recommendation

That the federal government commit to restore ABC funding by \$150 million per year to be phased in progressively from 2026-27, the additional funds to be available for:

- *More original Australian content, particularly for children's programs, scripted drama, documentaries, arts, science, and factual programming*
- *Increased ABC's news and current affairs services in regional Australia and an enhanced international role in regions where the ABC has a limited presence*

2. News and current affairs

Increased use of AI, the spread of misinformation, a fragmented media, the decline in local media, and the use of social media platforms as primary news sources have all contributed to a loss of trust in the media.

The 2025 [Digital News Report](#) found that:

"Trust in news rose slightly in 2025 but continues to linger in the low 40s, consolidating a long-term trend. Public service media continue to be the most trusted news sources in Australia, along with local and regional newspapers. It is clear that people want news to be more impartial, transparent and local. This might explain why the ABC, SBS and local newspapers continue to have the highest levels of trust among Australian consumers."

As the free-to-air networks vacate the field and local newspapers decline, the ABC is now the only local voice for news and current affairs in some regions. Between 2019 and 2024 more than 180 local

³ Figures based on average costs of producing drama and children's programs calculated by Screen Australia costings and taking into account the multiplier effects of co-productions.

news outlets closed. A similar number contracted. According to the [Public Interest Journalism Initiative](#), there are now 27 local government areas with no local digital or print news.

The federal government has introduced two programs to help address the decline in local media but they are small in scope.

In this environment, the role of the ABC in providing quality trusted news is more important than ever. Every year the ABC's reports trigger changes to government policy and major investigations. But in recent years, as funding cuts took their toll on jobs and services, there has been much less investigative reporting and fewer hard-hitting news stories. And the ABC has a limited presence in many international locations and thus cannot provide comprehensive international coverage and analysis.

Australia needs a bold public broadcaster that gives us tough, probing news and current affairs, that serves the public interest through high quality, painstaking investigative journalism.

Our public broadcaster should continue to be the place where all Australians can go confident that the news they receive will be free from misinformation and lies.

ABC Friends supports the statement by the Chair of the ABC, Kim Williams that:

"The ABC needs a plan for renewal and investment and it needs it now".

3. A lifeline in times of crisis

The ABC is there when we need it. In floods, fires and other emergencies it delivers live alerts, keeping Australians up to date, wherever they are. The ABC helps keep Australians safe.

The ABC's emergency service is funded as part of the ABC's operating grant. The increase in the number and intensity of extreme climate events has obliged the ABC to expand its emergency broadcasting, an essential service for all Australians. But because the service is funded through the ABC's operating grant, it has been funded at the expense of other programs and services.

In 2017-18 the ABC managed 256 emergency broadcasts. In 2023-24 that number rose to 659 – and it continues to rise.

The ABC is the only broadcast network able to deliver this critical service. It must be properly funded to do the job.

ABC Friends sees merit in the establishment of supplementary fund, indexed annually to the number of active events that the ABC supports, to meet the full costs of the ABC's emergency service and ensure that all Australians can receive this vital service.

Recommendation

ABC Friends recommends that additional funding be allocated for the ABC's emergency broadcasting program and that the budget for this item be indexed annually to meet the increasing costs of this service.

We further recommend that the government investigate, with the ABC, the establishment of a supplementary fund to ensure that the full costs of the service are covered.

4. ABC International

Since 2022, the Albanese government has provided \$8 million per year for the ABC's Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy through DFAT. ABC Pacific is a trusted voice in the region.

There is a strong case to increase funding to \$20 million per year. An increase would dovetail with the government's initiatives in the region, offering more bespoke content and the capacity to expand into S-E Asia.

Additional funding is even more critical now that funds for the US Agency for Global Media have been withdrawn, silencing the Voice of America and Radio Free Asia.

Our recommended investment is small compared to other countries' international media efforts: China is estimated to spend between AUD \$5 and \$10 billion annually, and the BBC World Service budget is over AUD \$800 million.

Recommendation

ABC Friends recommends that DFAT extend funding for international funding for the ABC's Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy to \$20 million annually, plus indexation.

Indexation

The indexation formula that has been applied to the ABC's budget falls well short of the actual cost of inflation because the 'weighted cost index' used by the Department of Finance to calculate the appropriate rate of indexation is far less than the CPI. To make matters worse, the CPI itself is less than the cost of doing business in the highly competitive media industry within which the ABC operates. Thus, the indexation formula applied to the ABC does not cover the rising costs of production, which are fuelled by increasing competition from the giant streaming companies.

Recommendation

ABC Friends recommends that the government adjust the indexation formula applied to the ABC, so that it covers the impact of real-world inflation, including the cost of content production.

About ABC Friends

ABC Friends Ltd is a not-for-profit charity registered with the ACNC. It was established in 1976. Our purpose is to represent the community interest in defending and promoting the vital role of the ABC as an independent national public media organisation. The organisation has grown in numbers and strength over recent years, with more than 86,000 members and supporters in every state and territory. ABC Friends is not aligned with any political party.

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