



The Howard Government

Putting Australia's Interests First

ELECTION 2001

certainty · leadership · strength

Broadcasting for the 21st Century

The **Broadcasting for the 21st Century** policy commits the Coalition to providing wider access to an array of broadcasting services, a smooth transition to digital broadcasting, maintenance of broadcasting standards, and a media ownership regime which enables Australia's media sector to flourish while protecting its diversity.



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Broadcasting for the 21st Century

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Executive Summary

Part 1 National Broadcasting

- The Coalition has significantly increased total government funding for the ABC in real terms. The ABC will receive \$763 million in 2001-02, over \$100 million more in real terms than it received in Labor's last year of Government.
- The ABC received an additional \$71 million over 4 years in the 2001-02 Budget, which the ABC has indicated will be used to increase regional programming, business programs, family and children's programs, and interactive curriculum support for schools.
- The Coalition will maintain the existing level of triennial funding for the ABC in real terms during its next term.
- **SBS Television will be extended to all population areas between 5,000 and 10,000 people (where spectrum is available) at a cost of \$6.5 million over three years, and an ongoing \$1.8 million per year for transmission costs benefiting over 129,000 people in QLD, NSW, NT and WA.**
- As part of its film industry package, the Coalition has agreed to extend the highly successful SBS Independent until 2005-06, and increase its annual funding from the current \$4.9 million to \$7 million in 2002-03, and then to \$8.6 million indexed from 2003-04.
- The costs of funding the ABC's and SBS's responsibilities to ensure consumers are not disadvantaged by the turn-on of digital television will be met by the Coalition, to a maximum of \$10 million.
- The Coalition will continue to respect and adhere to the statutory and political independence of the ABC and SBS.
- In 2001, the Howard Government committed \$90 million over 5 years to enable the ABC to establish a viable television service in the Asia-Pacific region.

Part 2 Commercial Free-to-air and Subscription Broadcasting

- The Coalition will facilitate a smooth transition to digital television broadcasting, working with broadcasters and the Australian Broadcasting Authority to ensure existing analog television coverage is replicated and consumers are not disadvantaged by any interference caused by the turn-on of digital services.
- A review of the existing datacasting rules will be commenced in early 2002, to ensure that the regime provides maximum opportunity to develop new services that do not breach the moratorium on additional free-to-air television licences.

- **The Coalition will provide funding of up to \$23 million to meet the costs of providing television reception in eligible applicant communities that cannot be assisted under the Television Blackspots Program due to a lack of spectrum or a viable analog solution.**
- **A \$6.5 million Radio Blackspots program will be established to provide radio coverage in 142 towns and communities in regional Australia.**
- The Coalition will make spectrum available on a temporary basis to enable the commencement of digital radio trials by commercial radio broadcasters.
- As part of its film package, the Howard Government will provide an additional \$7.5 million in 2002-03, rising to an additional \$10 million from 2003-04, for the production of high quality Australian adult and children's television drama.
- The Coalition will consider legislating to provide upfront certainty in relation to access arrangements for those considering investing in the digital upgrade of HFC subscription television cable networks.
- The Coalition will extend the anti-siphoning rules to 2005, enabling it to finalise enhancements to the anti-siphoning regime which will ensure the most significant sporting events remain on free-to-air television while subscription broadcasters can offer other sporting events to their viewers.

Part 3 Community Broadcasting and Narrowcasters

- **Existing levels of funding for the community broadcasting sector will be maintained in real terms, including the Infrastructure Fund which was established by the Coalition in 1996, and will be extended to 2005/06.**
- The community television trial will be extended for a further 12 months until the end of 2002, while the longer term future of the sector is considered, including its transition to digital.
- The Coalition will facilitate the smooth transition of community television to the digital environment, including making spectrum available for digital community television free of charge.
- Existing High Powered Open Narrowcasters (HPONs) will be able to roll over their current licences when they expire, in exchange for paying licence fees which reflect the ongoing value of the licences.

Part 4 Media Ownership, Broadcasting Standards and Australian Content

- The Coalition is committed to a 21st century media ownership regime that gives all media organisations maximum opportunity to grow and offer a wide array of innovative services to the Australian public.
- The cross media rules are anachronistic, and media organisations should be able to obtain exemptions from the rules if they give undertakings to: maintain separate and distinct editorial processes; and retain existing levels of local news and current affairs production on television and radio.
- The existing media-specific foreign ownership rules that apply to television and newspapers are preventing the introduction of new players and a more competitive media sector. They should be abolished, with media acquisitions considered under the Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act.
- If the Coalition's proposed media ownership changes cannot be achieved, the restrictions on the broadcasting sector in relation to foreign managed funds will be reviewed as a matter of priority.
- The Coalition is committed to retaining the Australian Content Standards, which play a crucial role in portraying and reflecting Australia's unique cultural identity.
- The Coalition will request a review of the free-to-air television Code of Practice, with an emphasis on ensuring that it reflects community standards regarding the appropriate portrayal of violence in such an accessible medium.

The Labor Alternative

- Labor continually reduced ABC funding over 13 years.
- Under the last year of the Keating Labor Government, the ABC received \$565.74 million (including transmission funding), which in today's dollars equates to \$649.25 million. Under the Coalition, the ABC's funding for 2001-02 will total \$763.3 million.
- Labor allowed the ABC to embark on risky commercial ventures, such as subscription television and Australia Television International, which inevitably fell over.
- Labor has continually sought to erode the statutory independence of the ABC through both its attempts to introduce tied funding, and its repeated attacks on ABC management and individual journalists.
- Under Labor, the ABC became increasingly Sydney-centric, with no additional funding provided to increase levels of local and regional programming.
- Labor's refused to support the \$120 million Television Fund, which is: providing SBS Television to all population areas with 10,000 or more people; fixing television reception in 200-250 black spots; and extending self-help broadcasting facilities in remote areas.
- Labor 'mogul specific' cross-media and foreign ownerships laws continue to prevent new players from competing in the Australian media environment and stop existing players from taking advantage of technology-driven opportunities to offer new services.
- Labor allowed the radio Licence Area Planning process to grind to a halt, thereby denying regional Australians the opportunity of the benefits of new radio licences.
- Labor failed to provide certainty for community radio broadcasters, and did not provide additional infrastructure funding for the sector.
- Labor failed to provide security of tenure for High Powered Open Narrowcasters with large audience support bases.
- Labor allowed Low Powered Narrowcasting licences to be hoarded by licensees, thereby denying communities the opportunity to use this valuable spectrum.
- Labor took no action to prepare for the introduction of either digital television or radio in Australia.

Highlights of the Government's Achievements

National Broadcasting

- Although the Coalition was forced to make a one-off reduction of ABC funding to help fix the \$10.5 billion Budget deficit left by Labor, it has since progressively increased the ABC's funding.
- As a result, the ABC will receive a total of \$763 million in Federal Government funding in 2001-02, over \$100 million more in real terms than it received in Labor's last year in government.
- In addition to the ABC triennial funding which was maintained in real terms in the 2000-01 Budget, the Coalition provided the ABC with an additional \$71.2 million over 4 years in the 2001-02 Budget.
- With this additional funding, the ABC is increasing regional programs, business programs, family and children's programs, and trialing the provision of interactive curriculum in schools.
- The Coalition is fully funding the ABC's and SBS's digital television distribution and transmission costs over the next ten years at a cost of over \$1 billion.
- In addition, the ABC is receiving direct funding of \$68 million to digitise its studio and equipment, and the Government is also committed to meeting the ABC's digital equipment loan.
- In 2001, the Howard Government committed \$90 million over 5 years to enable the ABC to establish a viable television service in the Asia-Pacific region.
- From 2000, Radio Australia is receiving an additional \$2.8 million a year to enhance its shortwave transmission to Asia and its online services.
- Under the Coalition, the ABC has significantly increased its presence in regional Australia, establishing new radio stations, refurbishing existing premises and re-commencing local television news in Canberra.
- One-off funding has been provided to enable the ABC to extend its radio services in remote areas of northern Australia and in regional Victoria.
- An additional 39 communities with populations of less than 10,000 are receiving SBS for the first time through the SBS Self-Help Retransmission Subsidy Scheme.
- SBS has been able to build a significant online presence through the Coalition's provision of a one-off \$2.2 million grant in 1999.
- The highly successful SBS Independent has been extended to 2006, and its annual funding is being increased from the current

\$4.9 million to \$7 million in 2002-03, and \$8.6 million indexed from 2003-04.

Digital Broadcasting

- A comprehensive legislative framework for the introduction of digital television was enacted in 2000.
- Digital television is commencing progressively, from January 2001 to 2004, in metropolitan and regional Australia.
- The legislative framework requires transmission in both High Definition and Standard Definition. It also requires broadcasters to simulcast in analog and digital for at least eight years to enable a smooth transition for consumers.
- Over time digital television will not only enhance the television viewing experience, but will also provide access to a range of interactive services, including email and home shopping and banking.
- The framework requires all programming during prime time and all news and current affairs to be captioned for the hearing impaired.
- The Coalition is providing financial assistance of up to \$260 million to enable regional television broadcasters to make the transition to digital.
- Spectrum is being made available to trial the use of digital broadcasting spectrum for high speed internet services in regional communities.

Commercial and Subscription Broadcasting

- The Coalition is fixing between 200 and 250 television reception black spots around Australia, through the \$35 million Television Black Spot program.
- An additional \$10 million has been allocated from the \$120 million Television Fund to enable self-help groups in rural and remote Australia to extend and improve their television reception.
- A further \$5 million is being spent to ensure that the transmission costs of self-help groups continue to be subsidised following the sale of the National Transmission Network to ntl.
- The Howard Government is providing an additional \$7.5 million in 2002-03, rising to an additional \$10 million from 2003-04, for the production of high quality Australian adult and children's television drama.
- The anti-siphoning regime has been strengthened through the passage of anti-hoarding legislation, requiring free-to-air broadcasters to offer to the ABC and SBS, at a nominal price, those events on the anti-hoarding list to which they have the rights but

choose not to telecast live.

- Legislation has been passed providing for automatic de-listing of events from the anti-siphoning list if they have not been taken up by free-to-air broadcasters, thereby providing for their broadcast by subscription operators.

Community Broadcasting and Narrowcasting

- Under the Coalition, funding to the community broadcasting sector increased by 55 per cent between 1995/96 and 2000/01 through the introduction of an Infrastructure Fund. This Fund has enabled:
 - An increase of 40 languages broadcast, bringing the total to 98 languages – following the provision of additional funding for Multicultural Community Broadcasting;
 - The extension of the Community Radio Satellite which is now the principal source of satellite delivered program content in the sector, with just under 80 per cent of stations accessing the service;
 - The rollout of 181 computers to the sector with software to access the Internet and email – over 90 per cent of permanently licensed stations now have access to the Internet;
 - The development of a Community Broadcasting Database to be made available online to stations for marketing and management purposes; and
 - In 1998, the Coalition provided an additional \$1.5 million over three years to support the contribution of the community broadcasting sector to the development of the Australian music industry.
- The Coalition introduced Temporary Community Broadcasting Licences to allow aspirant broadcasters to demonstrate their ability to provide a permanent community broadcast service.
- The community television trial has been extended, and two reviews are being conducted into the future of community television, including into its transition to digital.
- Legislation has been passed to prevent holders of Low Powered Narrowcasting licences from hoarding these licences to the detriment of potential uses in local communities.
- High Powered Open Narrowcasters are being provided with security of tenure through a Ministerial Direction enabling the roll over of their licences upon their expiry.

Part 1 National Broadcasting

The Howard Government remains committed to a strong and independent national broadcasting sector, notable for the excellence of its service and content, and reflecting the broad cross-section of interests in the wider Australian community.

A The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

The ABC is one of the nation's primary cultural institutions, providing an unmatched breadth of television, radio and online services that reach into the lives of all Australians, regardless of where they live.

The Coalition is committed to maintaining the ABC as a strong and independent alternative to the commercial broadcasting sector, fully attuned to the interests and needs of the Australian community.

For the ABC to operate as a truly independent national broadcaster, it is critical that it is not subject to undue commercial or political influence.

The Coalition will maintain the current prohibitions in the *ABC Act* in relation to advertising and sponsorship.

The Coalition has no intention of changing the ABC Charter.

We will encourage the ABC to be responsive to the needs and views of its audiences, particularly in relation to content and programming matters.

(i) ABC Funding

In 2001-02, the ABC is receiving a total of \$763 million in Federal Government funding, which in real dollars is over \$100 million more than the ABC received in 1995-96, Labor's last year in government.

The Coalition is committed to the retention of triennial funding for the ABC, and will ensure the existing level of the ABC's triennial funding is maintained in real terms throughout our next term in government.

Additionally, in the 2001-02 Budget, the Coalition provided the ABC with a one-off funding increase of \$71.2 million over 4 years. This extra funding is in response to a specific request from the ABC, which has indicated that the money will be used to increase regional programs, business programs, family and children's programs and to trial the provision of interactive curriculum in schools.

The Coalition is also providing \$68 million to fund the ABC's digital equipment costs and has committed to paying out an earlier loan by the ABC for digital equipment. As a result of the requirement to simulcast during the transition to digital television, the ABC will incur

additional distribution and transmission costs, which the Coalition has also agreed to meet, at a cost of some \$600 million over 10 years.

(ii) *The ABC's International Services*

The Coalition Government is committed to Radio Australia, which provides a significant Australian radio presence in the Asia Pacific region.

During 2000, the Coalition committed to the provision of up to an additional \$2.8 million per year ongoing to enhance Radio Australia's radio transmission and website presence. Earlier in 2000, the Coalition provided the ABC with further funding to enable it to lease satellite transponder space when Australia Television was discontinued by the Seven Network.

In 2001, the Coalition also committed to the provision of \$90 million over five years to enable the ABC to re-establish a high-quality Australian television international broadcasting presence in Asia.

B *The Special Broadcasting Service*

The Coalition is committed to maintaining SBS as a strong and independent multicultural and multilingual national broadcaster.

Since its commencement (when the television service was established under a Coalition Government) SBS has proven itself to be a highly valued broadcasting service, both for Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds and for the wider community.

The Coalition supports SBS as a fully-fledged broadcaster, separate from, but complementary to, the ABC.

The *SBS Act* guarantees SBS's independence from influence by the government of the day, and the Coalition considers that SBS is best able to determine its language and programming selection.

(i) *Funding*

The Coalition is committed to the retention of triennial funding for the SBS, and will ensure the existing level of SBS triennial funding is maintained in real terms throughout our next term in government.

In its current term, the Coalition has provided SBS with an additional \$8 million to purchase international programs, in recognition of the increasing costs of these programs.

(ii) SBS Independent (SBSi)

SBS Independent (SBSi) is a separate unit of SBS with the objective of commissioning quality multicultural drama and documentaries from the Australian independent production sector.

SBSi programs are innovative and cross-cultural and are not just enjoyed by Australians – these award-winning programs have carried images of Australia's diversity and strength to an international audience.

The Government will continue to support the highly successful and diverse work of SBSi with an increase in its annual funding from its current \$5 million to \$7 million in 2002-03, and then to \$8.6 million (indexed) from 2003-04. This is evidence of the Coalition's continued recognition of the work of SBSi and more broadly, Australia's independent production sector.

(iii) Regional Extension of SBS Television

The Coalition Government has allocated over \$70 million to extend SBS television to transmission areas of more than 10,000 people.

This program has proven to be very successful in regional Australia and has provided SBS Television to over 78 sites, boosting the potential SBS audience by some 1.2 million people.

In its next term, the Coalition will extend SBS television to population areas between 5,000 and 10,000 people, where the necessary spectrum is available.

The proposed extensions will cost \$6.5 million over 3 years with ongoing transmission costs of \$1.8 million per year. It is anticipated that this additional rollout of SBS will increase the reach of SBS television by up to 129,000 people in QLD, WA, NSW and the NT.

(iv) SBS New Media Unit – SBS Online

The Government has provided \$2 million to fund the establishment of SBS New Media which will enable Australian and international consumers to access SBS news, views and programming information in over 53 foreign languages over the Internet.

Part 2 Commercial Broadcasting

For many years, Australia has been served extremely well by its high quality free-to-air commercial television and radio industries.

Internationally, the quality of Australia's commercial television and radio programming is recognised as being on a par with the best in the world.

The Coalition is committed to the ongoing development of Australia's free-to-air commercial broadcasting sector, and also its subscription television industry.

The emergence of digital technology is set to revolutionise traditional broadcasting in Australia. The Coalition will oversee a smooth transition to digital broadcasting, ensuring that the benefits of these new technologies are passed on to all consumers.

A Free-to-air and Subscription Television

(i) Digital Television

In 2000, the Coalition enacted the legislative framework for the introduction of digital television in Australia from 1 January 2001.

This framework requires broadcasters to transmit in both a High Definition and a Standard Definition format, thereby providing consumers with a choice in terms of receiver equipment.

Digital television will not only provide Australians with markedly superior picture and sound quality, it will also alleviate poor reception in many areas.

During the initial transition to digital television, commercial free-to-air networks will not be able to provide multiple digital channels, but the ABC and SBS will be able to multichannel in a wide range of genres. The ABC has already launched its first new digital channel, 'ABC for Kids'.

Digital television will also enable broadcasters to provide enhanced services, such as different camera angles, additional text and graphics, and access to interactive services such as home shopping.

The Howard Government's legislative framework requires all broadcasters to transmit analog and digital signals simultaneously for at least eight years, thereby ensuring consumers are able to make a smooth transition to the digital environment.

In the initial stages of digital television, the Coalition has given priority to minimising the effects of any interference that digital broadcasts might cause to existing services. An Interference Management Strategy has been devised with the free-to-air and subscription broadcasting sectors, and the Coalition has committed to contributing up to \$10 million to that Strategy on behalf of the ABC and SBS.

The Coalition is also working closely with broadcasters and television equipment manufacturers in developing common equipment standards that will provide consumers with certainty in their digital purchase choices, and which maximise the opportunity for interactivity in the future.

From 1 January 2003, free-to-air broadcasters must provide a minimum of 20 hours High Definition (HDTV) programming per week.

The Coalition recognises that broadcasters need flexibility to provide specialised programming without diminishing their commitment to HDTV. As happens with the Australian content quota, the Coalition will consider legislative amendments to enable broadcasters to meet their 20 hour per week HDTV requirement on an annualised basis (i.e. 1040 hours per year) including advertisement time.

The digital television framework also provides for the introduction of datacasting services, which must differ from broadcasting so as to preserve the pre-2007 moratorium that will enable free-to-air television networks to make the expensive transition to digital.

The Coalition will commence a review of the current datacasting rules in early 2002 to ensure that they provide maximum opportunity for new and innovative services, whilst not breaching the pre-2007 moratorium on additional free-to-air television licences.

(ii) *Extension of the Television Blackspots Program*

Before the 1998 election, the Coalition committed to the \$35 million Television Blackspots Program, the aim of which is to provide improved television reception in some 200 to 250 communities.

To date, the two rounds of applications have resulted in funding offers to approximately 200 communities. However, a number of applying communities cannot be readily assisted under the Program's current analog retransmission solution due to the lack of available broadcasting spectrum.

The Coalition will provide up to an additional \$23 million to the Television Blackspots Program to fund alternative technical solutions for those eligible communities where an analog retransmission solution is not possible.

It is estimated that, as a result, an additional 14,500 households in regional and remote Australia will receive high quality television services, many for the first time.

(iii) *Funding for Quality Australian Television Drama*

As part of its film package, the Coalition will provide an additional \$7.5 million in 2002-03 to the Australian Film Finance Corporation (FFC), increasing to \$10.5 million from 2003-04 for the development of quality adult and children's television drama.

This funding will provide a significant boost for both the independent production sector and Australia's free-to-air television networks.

(iv) *Anti-Siphoning and Anti-Hoarding Provisions*

The purpose of the anti-siphoning provisions is to ensure that major sporting events that have regularly been broadcast on free-to-air television continue to be available to the public free-of-charge.

In 2001, the Coalition streamlined the anti-siphoning provisions to enable the automatic de-listing of those events that the free-to-air networks do not intend to broadcast six weeks prior to their occurrence.

Recently, the Australian Broadcasting Authority conducted a review of the list of sporting events on the anti-siphoning list. The review concluded that certain events, which have not been regularly shown on free-to-air television, should be removed from the list, while other events should be added to it.

The Coalition Government is considering its response to this review. Given that the rights to major sporting events are often bought up years in advance, the Coalition will extend the anti-siphoning regime for a further 12 months while it considers its response. This response will strike an appropriate balance, ensuring that the most significant sporting events are telecast on free-to-air television, while other sporting events are available for viewers of subscription television.

The Government has been concerned for some time about the limited coverage of major sporting events by free-to-air broadcasters who have bought the rights but decide not to broadcast live and in full.

Accordingly, the Government introduced anti-hoarding provisions which require commercial networks who purchase the right to televise a designated event, but who do not propose to use it in full, to offer the unused portion to the ABC and SBS for a nominal charge.

B Commercial Radio and Narrowcast Radio

(i) Digital Radio

The Government will continue to work with the commercial radio industry in developing an appropriate framework for the introduction of digital radio in Australia.

The commercial radio industry has indicated that it wishes to undertake digital radio trials in 2002. To facilitate these trials, the Coalition will make spectrum temporarily available free-of-charge (other than the normal administrative fee) for the conduct of these trials.

(ii) Commercial Radio Blackspots Program

Regional radio services provide a vital social, cultural and economic link for people in regional, rural and remote communities.

A recent House of Representatives Committee Report has reiterated the importance to regional Australia of radio services that provide local news, sport and community service announcements.

The Coalition will provide an additional \$6.5 million in capital funding over three years to provide commercial radio reception to an estimated 142 communities in regional Australia.

It is estimated that this initiative will benefit a potential audience of over 278,000 people. The program will focus on extending the coverage of commercial radio in areas of regional and remote Australia where it is not commercially viable for licensees to provide coverage.

(iii) High Powered and Low Powered Open Narrowcasters

The Coalition is committed to providing security of tenure to High Powered Open Narrowcasting licensees (both pre and post-LAP) by enabling them to roll-over their licences, on the basis that they will pay a fee that equates to the value of the spectrum that they are using.

Previously, these broadcasters, many of which have significant listener bases, would lose their spectrum and have to re-bid for it, despite having invested large amounts of money in the development of their radio stations.

The Coalition has also established anti-hoarding provisions for Low Powered Open Narrowcasting. Under this regime, a Low Powered Open Narrowcaster must 'use or lose' a licence within six months.

This will ensure that aspirant radio narrowcasting licensees and their audiences are able to derive the benefits of these licences.

Part 3 Community and Indigenous Broadcasting

The community broadcasting sector is unique in the broadcasting industry for its diversity, independence, innovation, localism and commitment to providing the community with a platform for the expression of views and ideas.

Community broadcasting provides an opportunity for individuals and community groups to participate in the production of their own programs and fulfils an important role in providing basic media training.

A Community Radio – Building on Success

In its third term, the Howard Government will ensure that community broadcasters can build on the significant advances they have already made by re-committing for another three years to the Infrastructure Fund it introduced in 1996.

The Coalition will renew until 2005/06 the annual indexed targeted funding of:

- \$0.516m to support community broadcasting infrastructure; and
- \$1.033m to support multicultural broadcasting.

B Community Television

The Coalition is committed to the inclusion of community television in the digital television environment, and will ensure that community broadcasters are provided with access to spectrum for digital.

Spectrum for digital community television will be made available free-of-charge.

The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts is currently conducting a review of community television's role in the digital television environment. This review will form the basis of deliberations relating to the transition to digital.

The Coalition will work closely with the community television sector in developing the framework to enable its smooth transition to digital.

The Australian Broadcasting Authority has recently conduct a review of the community television trial. The Coalition will extend the trial for a further 12 months, while it considers the outcome of that review and the review into the transition to the digital environment.

C Indigenous Broadcasting

The indigenous broadcasting sector in Australia performs an important role in providing news, information and entertainment to Indigenous Australians, especially in remote areas.

The Coalition values the role that Indigenous Broadcasters perform and will examine, in close partnership with the sector, avenues for developing and strengthening the sector, including an examination of licensing options and funding arrangements.

Part 4 Media Ownership, Broadcasting Standards And Australian Content

A Media Ownership

The Coalition is committed to reforming Australia's anachronistic media ownership laws.

Without reform, the current media ownership laws will consign the Australian media sector to an outdated structure, little or no capacity for new players, an absence of further competition, and an inability to respond to a rapidly evolving and converging international media environment.

The Coalition supports a system of granting exemptions from the cross-media rules if two significant undertakings are made to ensure that there is ongoing diversity of opinion and information.

The two undertakings that would have to be provided before any exemption from the cross media rules would be granted are:

- An undertaking to retain separate and distinct processes of editorial decision-making; and
- In the case of television and radio, an undertaking to maintain existing levels of locally produced news and current affairs.

The Coalition also believes that the media specific foreign ownership restrictions in the *Broadcasting Services Act* in relation to free-to-air television and subscription television should be abolished. The current newspaper-specific foreign ownership limits should also be discontinued. These foreign ownership restrictions stifle diversity and competition in an Australian media sector operating in an increasingly global environment.

Under the Coalition's preferred media ownership regime, media acquisitions would be governed by the *Trade Practices Act* and the *Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act*, as well as the cross-media exemption undertakings.

If the Coalition's proposed media changes cannot be achieved, the restrictions on the broadcasting sector in relation to foreign managed funds will be reviewed as a matter of priority.

B Broadcasting Standards and Australian Content

(i) *Broadcasting Standards*

With regard to the setting of broadcasting standards, the Coalition supports a co-regulatory regime, involving broadcasters and the Australian Broadcasting Authority.

Since 1996, the broadcasting standards that apply to free-to-air commercial television and commercial radio have been strengthened significantly. Arrangements to enable members of the public to make and receive responses to complaints have also been streamlined.

Notwithstanding these enhancements, the Coalition Government will request that the Australian Broadcasting Authority oversee a further review of the free-to-air television Code of Practice. This review will concentrate on the need for the Code to reflect community standards with regard to the portrayal of violence in such an accessible and popular medium. The review will also seek to put in place appropriate arrangements for the public disclosure of financial interests by broadcasters, which would apply on a national basis.

(ii) *Australian Content*

The Coalition will retain the current Australian Content Standards, which play a crucial role in portraying and reflecting Australia's unique cultural identity.