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Open:

Tenei te mihi ki te tangata whenua, ki a Ngati Whatua me nga iwi o Tamaki Makaurau. Tena koutou katoa.

(Translation: Greetings to the people of this land, to Ngati Whatua and the tribes of Auckland. My acknowledgement to you.)

Introduction :

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. Having spent most of my broadcasting career here, it is exciting to be back in New Zealand to share the Australian experience of diversity on television, and SBS's contribution in particular.

I believe that SBS is a shining example of how, given the right commissioning and professional approach, even a broadcaster with modest means can make a genuine contribution to correcting the cultural imbalance on our television screens.

While I don't want to spend my time speaking about the New Zealand experience - there are many more qualified speakers to do that today - I will make some brief, personal observations.

NZ, Australia and the Indigenous experience

In my opinion, New Zealand is, in at least some respects, ahead of Australia in confronting and debating the issue of diversity in program making.

For a start, while Australia has a vibrant sector dedicated to advocating on multicultural and Indigenous issues, I cannot recall a discussion of this scale taking place between Australia's broadcasters about our contribution (or even obligation) to reflect cultural realities on screen.

Also an important element in reflecting diversity on either side of the Tasman is the place indigenous content occupies on our screens. Here particularly Australia has much to learn from New Zealand.

The outstanding success of Maori TV and the scale of Maori programming on other broadcasters places New Zealand well ahead of Australia.

I am not saying that all has been sorted between Maori and Pakeha, I am saying that the conversation and the debate about Indigenous issues and the Indigenous heritage can be had in New Zealand in ways in which it can't yet in Australia.

Of course there are many in the artistic and cultural fields in Australia who make a significant contribution to ensuring Indigenous stories are told, but we are not yet at a stage where it is universally acknowledged and accepted that those stories must be told, and heard, and watched.

Seeing Indigenous faces on our screens and experiencing Indigenous stories should be an incidental part of our television consumption - not something that is token or categorised as 'special event' television, or something that is the exclusive domain of public broadcasting.

Australia recently introduced the National Indigenous Television Service which is a significant step towards addressing the communications needs of Indigenous Australians.

However, NITV is still in its infancy and the contribution of commercial broadcasters in Australia to Indigenous programming is almost non-existent. The only serious contributors are SBS and, to a lesser degree, the ABC.

Here, while it may have taken many years for Maori TV to be established successfully; that it has universal support and has thrived, makes it an exemplar for Indigenous broadcasting. Personally I am delighted and proud to hear of the growing success of Maori TV every time I return to New Zealand.

Local stories made by local people

A critical part of ensuring diversity on our screens is to foster and encourage more local production. The contribution made by our host - New Zealand On-Air - to supporting locally made productions in this country cannot be understated. We all know the critical role of funding agencies here and in Australia to ensure our stories are not swamped by the flood of cheap content from overseas.

(NZ On-Air CEO) Jane Wrightson recently announced that more than 11,600 hours of local programming screened on New Zealand television in 2008.

Jane noted that New Zealanders' desire to see themselves reflected on screen remains undiminished. Those figures seem to back up that sentiment.

Australians are just as passionate as New Zealanders about seeing Australian stories portrayed on their television screens.

The preservation and promotion of the Australian national identity is dear to the hearts of many. It is what drives such passionate support of the public broadcasters in Australia because we tell the best and the most Australian stories.

When you look at the challenges facing public broadcasting here, in the UK and across the world, the fact that Australia has three independent broadcasters that receive varying degrees of taxpayer support is a privilege.

A recent Australian Government review into the future of the ABC and SBS elicited more than 2500 submissions - the majority of which were from ordinary Australians expressing their views on the future of public broadcasting.

This is heartening stuff to those of us who have committed most of our professional lives to public broadcasting.

The presence of SBS ensures plurality and diversity in Australia's media landscape. We tell stories that the others won't.

What's more, we also source those stories from the Australian independent production sector in recognition that we cannot and should not be the sole arbiter of a good creative idea. Our commitment to diversity extends beyond our stories to the wide range of creative talent we use to tell those stories.

Indeed, in recent years SBS has become a very significant contributor to the independent production sector. We now commission all of our content externally apart from news, current affairs and sport. We create jobs, invest money and foster skills while at the same time preserving and promoting our cultural identity.

In the current financial year little old SBS invested around \$36 million with the independent production sector in Australia. That's eight times the amount we invested just six years ago. And when you add in the additional contribution from state and federal funding bodies, the scale of our activity rivals other wealthier broadcasters.

Recent SBS productions included the epic documentary series *First Australians*, two series of the drama, *The Circuit* which was filmed in Broome, the Melbourne based *Carla Cametti PD* and two series of *East West 101* which was filmed in Sydney's Western Suburbs.

This demonstrates the geographic spread of our productions and the distribution of their economic benefit. In these difficult and uncertain economic times, it is important that we do all we can to protect investment in our production sectors.

What's more we want to harness the creative resources of the Australian community and give our support to the best stories on offer - those that deliver Australian audiences something different, and distinctive.

SBS - a diverse broadcaster that broadcasts diversity

Let me focus more closely on the issue of diversity. Obviously it goes well beyond Indigenous content, particularly in the Australian community. Diversity is about ensuring an accurate portrayal of the multicultural realities of the community we serve and make content for.

Reflecting the true diversity of Australia is at the very heart of what SBS does; it is our remit, our reason for existing and how we measure and benchmark our success as a public broadcaster.

Telling diverse stories and reflecting diversity on screen is our *raison d'être*. Recently, in addition to the wide range of content we source from all corners of the globe, we have made a conscious commitment and investment in telling more Australian stories, some examples of which I will show you shortly.

We have even embedded our commitment to diversity in our organisational purpose and vision statements for SBS. Yes, this commitment is articulated in our Charter; but we have taken that even further and made it a part of *everything* we do as an organisation and as an employer.

Our overriding purpose at SBS is to tell stories that inspire all Australians to explore our multicultural and multilingual world and contribute to an inclusive society. And our vision is to be recognised as the world's foremost multicultural and multilingual media organisation. These may appear to be lofty ideals, but they are achievable.

SBS considers that reflecting diversity in our content is not only an obligation, it is a core strength and is what sets us apart as a broadcaster. We recognise that to succeed and connect with our audiences, we need to amplify our points of difference and value everything that is distinctive about us. I might add that the 'me-too' cloning of commercial broadcasting will, in my view, increasingly make distinctiveness a rare but essential ingredient in the survival of free-to-air television. In an increasingly fragmented market, the predictable, low-risk copying of past successes will be a recipe for death by indifference.

The SBS experience - our endurance as a force in Australian media - has shown that Australia's cultural diversity can be a source of inspiration, discovery and personal transformation.

And it can and does inspire the creation of radio, television and online content that informs, educates and entertains *all* Australians while reflecting the true multicultural heart of Australia.

We ensure that everyone's story is reflected in our creative and cultural identity, we give a voice to different sectors of the community in our national debates and we enable different voices and different languages and cultures, to be reflected back to all Australians.

Despite multiculturalism being embedded in Australian society, there is more work to be done to create greater cultural awareness, understanding and inclusiveness.

SBS has fearlessly championed the evolution of Australian multiculturalism, often times in the face of great criticism. By exploring multiculturalism and challenging cultural stereotypes in content that spans a range of languages and origins, SBS promotes inclusiveness and combats intolerance.

A White Australia policy

In my first year at SBS, I told a newspaper that other networks portrayed Australia as being “young, white and on the beach”. You probably recognise the image from Australian drama shown here. I immediately got a letter from a couple complaining – “we’re young, we love the beach and we emigrated from Sweden – you’ve stereotyped us!” I acknowledge the error of my ways.

But watching other Australian television networks you could easily be forgiven for thinking that we are a predominantly Anglo-Saxon community with a penchant for tree changes and sea changes.

Occasionally we have Asian or ethnic neighbours and friends - but they rarely stick around long enough to become central characters in our lives. Still, they are very nice people and very welcome in our communities.

For those of us who do not live in Summer Bay, Ramsay Street or Pearl Bay, the Australian reality is somewhat different.

Around a quarter of Australians were born overseas and more than a quarter of people born in Australia have at least one parent born overseas. More than 200 languages from overseas are spoken in the Australian community which indicates just how linguistically and culturally diverse Australia really is. Actually you need to double that number of languages if you also include the extraordinary range of indigenous languages spoken in Australia.

But these culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia are under-serviced and under-targeted by the mainstream.

I believe that broadcasters in Australia often make a conscious choice not to engage with those communities. Commercial imperatives often compel broadcasters to maintain and not challenge stereotypes, to preserve a comfortable, albeit mythical, representation of the national identity. I might add that the broadcasters’ choice might create a sense of comfort among some Australians. But many from a non-Anglo background are made to feel distinctly uncomfortable – even unwanted.

The ABC and commercial networks in Australia, as is the case here, have significant content deals with overseas distributors in the UK and in the US. This dependence on the output of Hollywood and London gives us a narrow outlook on the world and harks back to the days when even the ABC news was delivered in a faux British accent.

For many, SBS is an oasis in the desert of homogeneity that comprises most of the Australian broadcasting landscape.

Prior to SBS, diversity or ‘foreignness’ was presented as unpronounceable, unpalatable or incomprehensible in the Australian media landscape. Some would argue that the broader Australian media has done little to correct this imbalance.

To test our effectiveness, SBS recently conducted an audience and industry engagement study looking at two of our recent Australian television productions which I mentioned earlier - *The Circuit* (set amongst the circuit courts in Australia’s outback Kimberly region) and *East West 101* - a hard hitting police drama about a multicultural police squad in Lakemba, in Sydney’s western suburbs.

The independent research found that the cultural diversity messages of these programs were ‘potent and necessary’. Focus groups, which included ethnic and Indigenous Australians as

well as independent producers, said SBS was presenting a different and more balanced perspective on Muslim and Indigenous issues that is missing from commercial television screens.

Participants said by credibly portraying their cultures on television screens this SBS content had the potential to become a force for social change - it could increase awareness, acceptance and tolerance of cultural diversity.

Participants spoke of the content starting 'water-cooler' conversations about cultural diversity rather than the latest celebrity booted off a reality television show. They called the content 'brave' and said it didn't airbrush any of the social and cultural issues present in Australian society.

To continue to be relevant, SBS must be able to reinvent itself and find new ways of delivering its Charter which are both thought-provoking and appealing to audiences.

Multicultural society continues to evolve, and many younger culturally and linguistically diverse Australians do not participate in, or are frustrated by, long-standing forms of community representation or cultural identity. This is where our Australian-made content becomes critical in a continued effort to create a culturally cohesive society.

At a community consultation I hosted in Parramatta in Sydney last year a Muslim woman talked passionately about the positive impact the recent SBS comedy panel show *Salaam Café* had on her and her community.

She told me that for the young people in her community to see themselves portrayed not as a problem in the news but as lively, witty contributors to a humorous discussion in the Australian experience, was simply transforming.

In Australia, if you watch scripted programming such as dramas and comedy produced by the commercial networks and even the ABC, diversity is under-represented.

But conversely, if you watch unscripted, often reality programming, such as *Australian Idol* or *So You Think You Can Dance*, you get quite the opposite effect.

You get a true sense of the multicultural mix of Australia, particularly Australian youth. You have Pacific Islanders competing against second or third generation eastern Europeans or Indigenous competitors.

It is a cultural melting pot, live and on stage, unscripted and without contrivance. The form of reality television delivers us the closest version of cultural reality we can get on our screens in Australia; apart from SBS of course.

SBS's content

In showing you some brief clips of recent SBS commissioned programmes, I want to make the point that in representing cultural diversity and dealing with multicultural issues, it is essential to avoid the temptation to focus only on documentary or factual genres. True representation also comes through drama, comedy and entertainment.

The first clip is from *East West 101*. This police drama series is based on a real group of detectives from the western suburbs of Sydney. It has had critical and audience acclaim in Australia and we are just putting the finishing touches on the second series.

Play East West 101 clip:

The second clip is from *Carla Cametti PD*. A private detective in Melbourne, this much lighter drama follows Carla through the ups and downs of her job, her romance and her Italian family.

Play Carla Cametti clip:

The next clip is from our popular food program *Food Safari* hosted by Maeve O'Meara. We have just concluded our third series of this program. Across almost 40 episodes Maeve has explored a myriad of cultures using food as a vehicle. This is a fantastic example of cultural exploration and diversity on screen using non-traditional means.

Play Food Safari clip:

And finally, SBS has been the home of the amazing genealogical series *Who Do You Think You Are?* from the UK and last year broadcast the first Australian series of the family history detective show. We took a diverse group of Australian personalities and sent them on a journey of discovery about their origins. This took them across Australia and often overseas. This episode charts the family history of singer Kate Ceberano.

Play WDYTYA? Clip

Watching those drama clips in particular I can't help reflecting that our accurate representation of Australian diversity is not only a hard sell in Australia. It's even harder to challenge the mono-cultural image of Australia held offshore. For instance, I'm not aware of any networks here buying the dramas I've shown today or the ones I haven't: *The Circuit, The Kick and Remote Area Nurse*. Not that there is any obligation to. But if New Zealand and other overseas audiences are only exposed to *Neighbours, Home and Away and Seachange*, then the myth of Anglo-Australia is perpetuated beyond its borders.

Actually, exporting content that challenges rather than perpetuates the myths has other pitfalls.

We recently made a drama series about a street in Melbourne with a typical multicultural mix of residents – Greek, Italian, Indian, Vietnamese and so on.

The title was *Wog Street* – well at least until our British production partners and one or two overseas actors objected. We had to accept that this Australian self-description stated with pride and defiance was deeply offensive beyond our shores. It went to air as *The Kick*.

Diverse broadcaster or ethnic broadcaster?

Let me talk now about the label 'ethnic broadcaster'. It is one that is often wrongly attached to SBS Television.

There is a great difference between being a targeted ethnic or single language broadcaster; and a broadcaster that is charged with reaching out to all Australians to reflect the true multicultural Australia.

Our Charter characterises SBS as a multilingual and multicultural broadcaster. Everyone knows that. But it seems to me that too few realise we also have an explicit and unambiguous directive to reach out to 'all Australians'.

By charging us with that responsibility, the Charter ensures that SBS *must not* and *cannot* be defined by its audience. Rather the Charter requires us to be defined by our content and services, reflecting Australia's multicultural society to all Australians.

Quite simply, I don't believe that we can reflect Australia's multicultural society by only showing programs from other countries. The Australian story of inclusiveness can only be fully reflected in *our* dramas, *our* documentaries and *our* entertainment programs.

The need to reflect Australia's diversity is the motivation behind one of the significant changes in SBS television– the commitment to make and show more Australian programs. And everyone here knows this shift also involves a significant investment of our scant resources, so we did not take that decision lightly.

SBS occupies a unique position in the Australian media landscape – for while we embrace cultural diversity, we are viewed by a mass audience. We are for all Australians.

For instance about 40 per cent of Australians watch SBS television each week. But over a month SBS reaches out to around 60 per cent of Australians. It is no more true to say that we exist for ethnic Australians than it is to say that all ethnic Australians watch SBS because they are ethnic. Such generalisations belittle all of us.

Clearly, Australians who do tune into SBS do so to rendezvous with our content and it is the quality of that content that keeps them coming back for more. And they do so in increasing numbers; we have almost doubled our audience share in the last 10 years.

Part of delivering Australians something different is ensuring SBS audiences can engage with content sourced from across the globe, as well as locally produced content. To enable this, SBS subtitles much of its content, drawing on the skill and resources of its award winning subtitling unit.

In 2007-08 SBS subtitled 644 hours of programming, covering 89 languages, as well as a variety of associated dialects. More than 60 per cent of Australians watch subtitled content according to SBS-commissioned independent research - far more than in other English speaking country - and most of them watch it on SBS.

The SBS subtitling unit is a much lauded model in the media translation industry for its commitment to preserving the linguistic and cultural integrity of the programs it broadcasts, rather than dubbing programs in English.

We are an exemplar worldwide and our approach to subtitling demonstrates a commitment to the editorial integrity of our content, particularly when it comes to news and current affairs.

While the other networks will use a grab of a foreign leader or an interviewee speaking a language other than English and lower the voice of the talent and include a voiceover; SBS uses the original footage with subtitles.

We have a genuine respect for language and we also respect our audience and its ability to experience and appreciate the reality of the footage or content it is watching.

We also provide a national radio service across two frequencies on AM & FM. And this part of our service is directed at specific language audiences. We broadcast in 68 languages – many more than any other broadcaster, including the BBC. Each language group receives a service ranging from one hour a week to two hours a day – all original content.

Diversity on and off the screen

While SBS has a long and proud history of diversity in its content, I can acknowledge that behind the scenes we are open to criticism for not having enough cultural diversity in our management and programming teams. You would be surprised how much flak I get for including several Kiwis in my leadership team. But I make no apology for that.

I am not necessarily an advocate of quotas, they can often produce artificial results or give the impression that those who benefit from affirmative action have not got there on their own merits.

However, people in leadership positions both in New Zealand and Australia can and must do more to foster talent in the independent production sector and to entice talented people from Indigenous and multicultural backgrounds into the broadcasting sector in a range of roles.

Mentorship programs are often effective in skilling up young producers and giving opportunities to those who may not have access to the contacts and resources to make their big break.

To this end SBS recently announced the winner of the inaugural SBS Indigenous Television Mentorship Award - a producer from Western Australia, Eileen Torres.

This is a grassroots staff initiative as part of SBS's indigenous reconciliation action plan, the mentorship award includes travel to local and international festivals, conferences or markets; mentorship from experienced SBS television executives; and free legal advice from an arts law firm. In addition, Eileen will be exposed to influential industry contacts.

It is the cumulative effect of initiatives such as this, along with a range of cadetship programmes that will make a difference to the calibre of candidates who may throw their hat in the ring for commissioning and production jobs.

Diversity in our industry must become just as important and front of mind as diversity on our screens.

I am reminded of a speech British comedian Lenny Henry delivered last year to the Royal Television Society about diversity, and from which I've quoted before. He spoke candidly about the challenge of ensuring diversity both on and off the screen in the UK.

Lenny recounted how he got his first real acting job on a sitcom called *The Fosters*.

"It was the first all-black British sitcom," he said "made by an all-white production team! So we had a white writer, a white director and a white producer, all telling this black family how to behave ... all very nice people to work with, of course, but in no way did this show reflect a typical black household anywhere in the UK that I'd ever seen".

Conclusion:

So what are our measures of success when it comes to diversity? Is it the hours of television we produce that satisfy some rudimentary definition of diversity? Is it a quota system behind the scenes? I don't necessarily offer definitive answers today.

However, I would venture that we will know we have begun to succeed when we no longer need to think about or actively champion the diversity cause, because it has become a part of what we do every day, for every program that we acquire or commission.

We may never arrive at our final destination when it comes to diversity. Perhaps we should never even contemplate arriving, because our communities will continue to evolve and it is our duty to reflect that.

Lenny Henry ventured so far as to say that even making a change would be a start:

As producers he said: "when you can see past their foreignness - and just live with their talent and make a decision based on that and that alone, then we will have made a change".

No reira, e nga mana, e nga reo, e nga waka o te motu nei, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

(Translation: Finally, to one and all who have come here from around the country, my acknowledgements to you all.)

Thank you for your time today.