



GENERALNI KONZULAT REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE
CONSULATE-GENERAL OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
Sydney

7 May 20134

Mr. Joseph Skrzynski AO
Chair
Special Broadcasting Service Corporation
Locked Bag 028
CROWS NEST NSW 1585

Dear Mr. Skrzynski,

I am writing to you as migrant to Australia of some 54 years and a member of the Slovenian Community in Sydney since day one. As an active member of many facets of the Community activities all these years: Slovenian Association Sydney, Slovenian School's Committee of NSW – 12 years secretary, St. Raphael's Cultural and Cultural Centre, patron of HASA –NSW (Historical Archives of Slovenians in Australia-NSW, as well as The Good Neighbor Council in the earlier days, Foundation member of the Ethnic Community Council, to mention but a few.

By now you may be wondering why this introduction? This is because I intend to speak about the SBS Radio – Slovenian program, i.e. changes in broadcast frequency band (from AM to Digital) as well as new time allocations.

On Sunday, 5th of May, I attended the 9.30 mass at the St. Raphael's Slovenian Church in Merrylands. In attendance were some 120 people, mainly elderly. As usually after the mass, we gathered in the church's hall for some refreshments. I noticed that at a number of tables people were rather disturbed and concerned. Conversation centred on: What now, as we lost our Slovenian language broadcasts on Sunday and Tuesday mornings? Where will we get all the information on the community's activities - functions, masses, announcements of passing members of the community and their funerals, news from Slovenia and much more - they were completely at a loss. I enquired as to how many have obtained the digital radio and how many had listened to the program on the new Digital band and the rescheduled time slot on Friday, 3rd of May, from 5 to 6PM? Despite all the announcements, for many months, by presenters of the Slovenian language program of the anticipated changes, beside me, only two other persons had listened to the new broadcast.

Through conversation with these people I realised that this new arrangement won't work for our community. These are mostly elderly. The new technology is not one of their strong points. Digital radio is not a solution. Not many have digital TV either. What about the elderly in the nursing homes? Rescheduled time to Friday between 5 and 6 is also not suitable for those who work. They are either on the way from work or are driving – most cars have no digital band. People could not understand why was the Slovenian Community targeted and their language program abandoned? They lost two hours a week of the morning (8.00 to 9.00) broadcasting time on AM, which they got used to for so many years and became for them a way of life, to one hour in the afternoon (5.00 to 6.00) on a new Digital band. They could not understand why such a drastic change? I think they would understand and accept a reduction of

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the allocated time slot from two to one hour a week, but on the same frequency band – AM.

Why were the new language groups which received our time slot on AM band not allocated the Digital band and the 5 to 6pm time slot? Why was it taken away from a long existing ethnic group of mostly elderly members, who depended on these services? Wasn't the SBS established to service the ethnic communities, as is still stated in the SBS Charter? Why select and punish one of the pioneering groups? Members of the Slovenian Community were among the pioneers of the ethnic broadcasting in this state – in the times of 2EA, which later became SBS - as volunteers. They are proud that they have taken part and helped in establishing by now one of the most successful multicultural broadcasting stations in the world. But, why was the Slovenian Community never consulted about these changes? Yes, they were told what will happen by the Slovenian language presenters in their broadcasts, concentrating mainly on the quality of digital broadcasting. These programs do not need to be HI-FI quality.

As an excuse for these changes the last census was used – which show diminishing numbers of Slovenian language speakers at home. I know this is not the place to argue the census findings. However, census should have been based on the number of people of a certain ethnic origin and not language spoken at home. There are more and more mixed marriages, who speak English at home, but they still desire to listen and learn the language and culture of their parents and hearing of the happenings in their Communities – SBS language program is an excellent vehicle for that.

I do not expect that this letter will lead to any changes in your decision already made. I know the ambition of the present day Management is to grow SBS – Radio and TV even further. There is nothing wrong with that. The SBS – TV is as far as I am concerned the best TV station and my favorite. But it is also my opinion that the initial purpose in creating SBS – Radio has been lost and the present day management is losing sight. The management/The Board are all highly regarded and successful professionals in the field of broadcasting and business, which is good. However, it is my feeling that a little compassion and understanding of the needs for those smaller communities that were pioneers and contributed to the development of this great multicultural nation should also be considered and should not have been forgotten or taken for granted. For our Slovenian community, unfortunately, it is too late and I hope other ethnic groups in similar circumstances will not experience our fate.

With my best wishes for continuous success in the field of multicultural broadcasting,

Yours sincerely,

Alfred Brežnik AM
Honorary Consul General

C.C.: Mr. Michael Ebeid, Managing Director – SBS
Mr. Stepan Kerkyasharian AO, Chairperson, Community Relations Commission
The Hon. Victor Dominello, MP, Minister for Citizenship and Communities
Ms. Tania Smrdel, Executive Producer – Slovenian Audio & Language content,
SBS – Radio.