

Dear Michelle,

Welcome back to Australia and may I say how pleasantly surprising it is to finally have a diverse face at the helm of the national broadcaster.

Those of us, like me, who are part of the 26% of Australians who were born overseas, look forward to your promise for a more diverse ABC. As do those who - like you - are part of the [20 % of second generation Australians](#) with at least one parent born overseas who speak a language other than English at home.

Two years ago I wrote about the lack of diversity at the ABC for this website. I was thus a little surprised to read recently of the outgoing ABC managing director Mark Scott's "mea culpa" on the issue.

Scott told [Buzzfeed's Mark Di Stefano](#) that one of his biggest failures as MD was employing "too many Anglos". Contrasting Australia with the UK, he said:

When I watch and listen to the BBC when I'm in the UK I think the on-air talent really represents a diversity of modern Britain.

Scott had ten years to do something about this. Yet it could be argued that, apart from ABCNews24, the main channel got whiter and whiter under his stewardship. Was he unconsciously hiring people who looked and sounded like him?

Do you watch reality television Michelle? It's blind to colour. If you have the voice or the cooking skills, you can make it. Have you been watching My Kitchen Rules? Tasia and Gracia Seger, "The Spice Sisters," won. We got to meet their multicultural family – which has lived in Indonesia and India as well as Australia. There was even an Albanian woman cooking on the

show, delighting my mother, who has Greek-Albanian ancestry. And Dami Im, the Korean-born singer who won the fifth season of X Factor Australia, will [represent Australia at Eurovision](#) (to be broadcast by SBS).

Of course a more diverse ABC, one that truly holds a mirror to Australian society and tells all its stories, might make SBS less relevant. I wonder at the timing and urgency of this cultural diversity rhetoric? Is it just a coincidence that at Scott's final Press Club speech he again brought up the issue of an ABC/SBS merger?

Still, SBS broadcasts in languages other than English. And as migration patterns change, I'd argue it's more important than ever for migrants to hear news and programs in their mother tongue – both for social cohesion and their sense of belonging. I don't think the ABC can or will do that.

Apparently ABC radio is now forming a [diversity action group](#) to examine whether there's an unconscious bias against certain accents in the voices that are put to air. This is a great idea but cultural diversity by committee has already been tried. Two years ago, I wrote that ABC news and current affairs had formed a diversity action group too. I am not sure what it has achieved.

After my article was published in 2014, the ABC wrote to me and the editors at The Conversation. They were especially concerned about my comments regarding Australian Story. The program told such an overwhelming number of white stories, I wrote, that I sometimes felt I was watching Landline.

The ABC's Sally Jackson wrote:

Although the program pursues stories in a wide range of communities, it is the case that there is a higher failure rate in non-Anglo communities, i.e. stories are pursued but there is a reluctance to proceed – often, ironically, for cultural reasons. [...] The team is also seeking other ways to introduce more diversity, such as seeking out people from diverse ethnicities as guest

introducers.

This begs the question: why was ethnic talent pulling out of appearing on Australian Story? Was it an issue of trust? Or cultural insensitivity?

Australian Story, or “White Australian Story” as many of my multicultural friends facetiously call it, is a complex program to produce with very high production values. But it has failed to reflect diverse Australian stories.

For 19 years, it was run by its founding executive producer Deborah Fleming. In a [swansong interview](#) last year, she told Fairfax Media’s Paul Kalina that the show suffered from the “tyranny of pictures that can make or break any TV show, the format requires its subjects to have a good command of English.”

Under its new executive producer Deborah Masters, I recently watched an episode that contained a subtitled interview with the mother of Socceroos coach Ange Postecoglou. She was speaking in Greek. That was a refreshing change. I look forward to more such stories.

Look at what the Americans have done to make their television screens reflect the reality on the street. Look, too, at what the BBC is doing right now with its affirmative action policy.

The BBC has employed a [Head of Diversity, Inclusion and Succession](#), Tunde Ogungbesane. He says he never watched the BBC before because it did not reflect his reality. He will be tackling unconscious bias at the recruitment level by removing people’s names – and where they went to school – from their job applications.

The BBC has made available a two million pound Diversity Fund to help create new programs. It has created new internships and a new leadership development program so that diversity happens from the top down.

Michelle Guthrie should look to UK and reality TV to achieve a more diverse ABC

Written by The Conversation USA

The BBC has also pledged that half of its workforce will be women by the year 2020. The ABC's most recent [cultural diversity report](#) shows that 52.5% of all employees are women.

However only 11.8% of ABC employees were from non-English speaking backgrounds in 2015. This is down from 12.4% the year before.

And the numbers for content makers are even worse: 7.4% last year were employees from non-English speaking backgrounds – down from 8.2% the year before. It looks like Mark Scott was right – he did hire too many Anglos!

Let us hope that soon there will be more people who look like you making programs and appearing on our ABC.

Helen Vatsikopoulos worked for the ABC from 1982-87 and 2000-2009, and for SBS from 1988-1999.

Read more <http://theconversation.com/michelle-guthrie-should-look-to-uk-and-reality-tv-to-achieve-a-more-diverse-abc-58931>