

ABC managing director Michelle Guthrie has hit back against critics with a Deloitte Access Economics assessment that the public broadcaster contributed more than A\$1 billion to the Australian economy in the last financial year.

This was on a par with the public funding of the organisation, she told the Melbourne Press Club, in an address coming days after the Liberal Federal Council urged the ABC be privatised – a call rejected by the government.

Far from being a drain on the public purse, the audience, community and economic value stemming from ABC activity is a real and tangible benefit," she said. The Deloitte study was commissioned by the ABC; Guthrie said its report was still being compiled and would be released next month.

Of the \$1 billion, "more than a third is economic support for the broader media ecosystem. Far from being Ultimo-centric, the ABC is boosting activity across the country," she said, giving as examples the filming of *Mystery Road* in the Kimberley and the production of *Rosehaven* outside Hobart.

Deloitte calculated the ABC was helping sustain more than 6000 full-time equivalent jobs across the economy. "It means that for every three full-time equivalent jobs created by the ABC, there are another two supported in our supply chain – local artists, writers, technicians, transport workers and many more.

"In hard figures, the research shows that the ABC helps to sustain 2500 full-time equivalent jobs in addition to the 4000 women and men who are directly employed by the public broadcaster.

"When broken down this equates to more than 500 additional jobs in production companies, over 400 jobs elsewhere in the broadcast sector, and close to 300 full-time equivalent jobs in the professional services.

"Amidst the debate over the ABC's purpose and its funding we should all remember that there are 2500 jobs outside public broadcasting at risk in any move to curtail our remit and activities".

Read more: [*View from The Hill: Threat to the ABC is not sale but more bullying*](#)

Addressing the critics' argument that the ABC's about \$1 billion funding wasn't well spent, Guthrie pointed out that the broadcaster's per capita funding had halved in real terms in three decades while the demands on it had increased, and that this financial year 92% of its budget would be spent on making content, supporting content makers and distribution.

"Thirty years ago, the ABC had five platforms and 6000 people working around the country. Today, Your ABC has two-thirds the number of people operating six times the number of platforms and services with half the real per capita funding".

Guthrie argued that the claim that the latest 1% efficiency dividend could easily be accommodated ignored the accumulation of efficiency takes over the past four years, and the fact these efficiencies robbed the organisation of its ability to finance new content and innovation.

She rejected what she described as two other "fallacies" - that the ABC should be stripped back to servicing gaps in the market, becoming a "media failure operator", and that the ABC served only sectional interests.

Referring to the ABC charter, she said that "as the independent national public broadcaster, our purpose is to provide a balance between broadcasting programs of wide appeal as well as specialised interest".

Public broadcasting was "about providing the distinctive programs that Australians young and

old, left and right, rich and poor, in Bourke and in Brisbane, both want and need”.

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She attacked those commentators and politicians who liked “to pigeonhole our audience as being of a particular political bent or social strata.

“In the two years since I’ve been in this role, I have been constantly reminded how wrong that is”, she said, citing the 12 million Australians who would watch ABC TV this week, the nearly five million who’d listen to ABC radio, and the 13 million ABC podcast downloads that occurred every month.

“If all those listeners and viewers were on the one side of politics, there wouldn’t be much politicking left to do.

“I note also the findings of the recent Reuters Digital News Report. Australia may have an increasingly polarised media sector, but ABC television attracts viewers from across the political spectrum for its news coverage”.

Guthrie said that Australians regarded the ABC “as one of the great national institutions” and “deeply resent it being used as a punching bag by narrow political, commercial or ideological interests”.

Michelle Grattan provides commentary for the ABC.

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ABC contributes as much to the economy as it costs the taxpayer: Michelle Guthrie

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Read more <http://theconversation.com/abc-contributes-as-much-to-the-economy-as-it-costs-the-taxpayer-michelle-guthrie-98553>