



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

SPEECH

Monday, 16 March 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 March 2015
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Questioner
Speaker Chesters, Lisa, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (12:59): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) has announced it will end its television coverage of the Women's National Basketball League (WNBL) at the end of the 2014/15 season;

(b) this decision will end a 35 year partnership between the ABC and WNBL;

(c) the ABC has been a leader in the broadcast of women's sport, which has provided a significant boost to the development of women's sport in Australia;

(d) any decision to cancel the television broadcast of women's sport will have a detrimental effect on the participation in the sport, which will reduce the pool of talent available within Australia and therefore the strength and viability of women's sports such as the WNBL; and

(e) the basketball statement on the ABC/WNBL partnership on 24 November 2014 as a result of the Australian Government cuts to ABC funding, means that the 2014/15 Wattle Valley WNBL season will be the last shown on ABC TV live around Australia;

(2) recognises the strong role models elite women sports athletes are to young women and the positive value this has on young women, and that without such television broadcast coverage such positive role models will disappear; and

(3) calls on:

(a) the Australian Government to restore the \$254 million in budget cuts to the ABC budget; and

(b) the ABC Board to continue the television broadcasting of women's sport including the WNBL.

A few weekends ago—and I note the member for Herbert is here in the chamber with us today—the Bendigo Spirit went head to head with the Townsville Fire in their third grand final in a row to compete for the title of the WNBL premiers for the 2014-15 season. Unfortunately it was not the Bendigo Spirit's year. We had won the two previous grand finals but, in this grand final, the Bendigo Spirit, after a spirited game, went down to the Townsville Fire. I congratulate and commend the Townsville Fire for their very strong performance. The game itself was a showcase of women's elite sport. It demonstrated once again to this nation why in women's elite basketball Australia does really well. The Opals coach has said on repeated occasions that what underpins a strong Opals team is a very strong domestic competition, the WNBL.

I will also note to the House—and this is why I have moved this motion today—that many fans in Bendigo who could not make the trip to Townsville were able to watch the grand final live on the ABC. That is because for 35 years the ABC has been broadcasting the WNBL. Unfortunately it was the last match of the WNBL that will be broadcast not just by the ABC but by any network. It is disappointing to note that not only did the Bendigo Spirit go down in that game but it was actually the last WNBL game that Australian fans of the sport will see being broadcast.

This decision, as I have said, will end a 35-year partnership between the ABC and the WNBL. The ABC have been a leading broadcaster of women's sport, and it has provided a significant boost in the development of women's sport in Australia. I believe that the cancelling of the broadcasting of the WNBL will have an impact on sponsorship. The Bendigo Spirit's coach, Bernie Harrower, has said repeatedly that this decision to axe the

broadcasting will drive out key sponsors and could strip teams of the ability to employ and pay half of their players. A local councillor has said that they believe that removing the national broadcasting of the WNBL will have an impact on showcasing regional sporting centres such as my own as elite sporting centres. This councillor said that we cannot underestimate the impact of simply mentioning Bendigo in a live broadcasting of a Bendigo Spirit game. I know from talking to members of the Bendigo Spirit board that the ABC broadcasting has brought in four major sponsors, with home games that are broadcast allowing them to attach an extra premium to broadcasting sponsorship dollars. This has allowed the team to build the strength that they have had that has allowed local women to compete in their home town. Kristi Harrower has said on many occasions that having a strong WNBL is one of the reasons she was able to come home and play the sport she loves.

What is disappointing—and this is why I have moved this motion—is that the ABC has said that its reason for making its decision is that the Australian government has cut \$254 million from its budget. That is what it has said. This is also what Basketball Australia have said. They have said in local media as recently as November that the decision is a direct result of the funding cuts made by this government. This is what Basketball Australia are saying. This is what the local teams are saying. This is what the local community is saying. That is why I have moved this motion, calling on the government to restore the \$254 million in budget cuts to the ABC budget and also calling on the ABC board to continue their television broadcasting of women's sport, including the WNBL.

Our young women should have the same opportunity to see their role models playing sport on TV as do young men. I call on the government to reverse this decision on funding cuts and restore the broadcasting of the WNBL.
(Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Randall): Is the motion seconded?

Ms Ryan: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.