

An idea whose time has come: A 24 hour ABC TV channel dedicated entirely to sustainability issues

When Ted Turner came up with the idea of a 24 hour news channel, people at the time derided it as crazy and unworkable. But it proved a resounding success. It was the naysayers who had to eat humble pie. CNN's success bred a whole host of imitators and now we regard, say, BBC 24 hour News as just one of many such channels. Furthermore this idea spawned the mushrooming of many other specialty channels such as the history channel, national geographic channel, even the weather (!) channel.

There are now a profusion of individual sustainability programs and documentaries available, but they are widely scattered about in time and place. Such programs, gathered together, can easily fill several 24 hour dedicated channels. Let us in Australia start with just one sustainability channel.

Why? Because if we continue to live unsustainably, we will by definition fail to sustain our societies - our societies will crumble. There is growing irrefutable evidence of this creeping fact all around us. Everyone, especially the young, needs to be educated about this simple fact. About what the problems are and how we can deal with them and what we may expect if we fail to deal with them.

How? It should be funded from the public purse with no commercial advertising. There will be few other projects more worthwhile, more cost effective and more important, the best bang for the taxpayers buck. There is absolutely no doubt that the pursuit of sustainability is in the public interest, hence this channel should be a free to air public broadcasting channel.

Who? Those who select programming should choose material on the basis of scientific validity, on the basis of whether the assertions made have the backing of evidence and reason. BBC Horizon documentaries related to sustainability would be ideal material. This does not preclude an entertaining approach (such as channel ten's Scope program, one of the few commercially produced science based programs). There will be no place for lunatic ideas or for deceit perpetrated by sources such as the Marshall institute (who are the original tobacco-cancer deniers and global warming deniers) or the "Institute of Public Affairs", an industry funded pseudo thinktank which promotes commercial interests under a bogus banner. The chief scientist of Australia should be on the board of our ABC sustainability channel, perhaps chair the board. This board should mainly consist of experts in specific fields related to sustainability: conservation biology, climate science, resource depletion, steady state sustainable economics etc. Only those actively publishing / researching / teaching in their fields should be allowed on the board. Industry funded trojan-horse "scientists" such as those from the IPA must be screened for and actively excluded. Other board members should include those who work towards social justice initiatives and selected community leaders, because sustainability issues are intimately tied in with social justice measures.

When? The sooner the better. Yesterday.

Specifics:

1. We should start a letter writing and email petition campaign for an ABC sustainability TV channel. Swamp the government with strong demands for this channel: an antidote to the mindless, voyeuristic, consumeristic, gossipy drivel we see on the commercial "buy, buy, buy" channels. Write to your local MP, to your federal representative, to the Prime Minister. If you personally know any ABC executives, speak to them about it, write to them about it. If you don't have time, simply copy this letter and add your signature endorsing it.
2. ABC3 at present is not a 24 hour channel, it is off air much of the time. This free airtime should be filled with sustainability programming right now. It does not matter if good programs happen to be aired at 3am, sensible viewers will select and record their preferences anyway for later viewing. There will be no concerns about filling a children's TV channel with sustainability programs because firstly they are G rated programs and secondly the young audience are the most important audience to address in any case. If they by accident happen to view a program on renewable energy instead of Sponge Bob Squarepants, so much the better. The biggest mistake we can make is to underestimate the potential intelligence and wisdom of the youngest members of our community. The greatest task we can undertake is to nurture their intelligence and wisdom. These children can then engage their parents in discussion and teach the adults a thing or two.
3. As momentum picks up, transfer the sustainability programs from ABC3 to a dedicated 24 hour ABC sustainability channel.
4. Other (sensible) countries of the world will then follow suit when they realise what a good idea this is. Our ABC can then take credit for being the pioneer.

Let's get on with it! Please support this initiative. Please send this note out to everyone else in the sustainability network nationwide. Thanks for your attention.

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www.d3sj.org