

Submission on SBS Radio Services Review - Public Consultation

Introduction

The Chinese Australian Services Society Limited (commonly known as “CASS”) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on SBS Radio Services Review - Public Consultation.

As a long standing community organisation, CASS has been dedicated to assisting disadvantaged people from local communities and advocating on their behalf. We would like to share our view and experience with SBS on the Draft Language Selection Criteria 2016/17.

Our submission is a reflection on the viewpoints and concerns that we received from our service users and people in our community, as well as observation and conclusions we made while delivering services to our clients, who may be potentially affected by the review. This submission does not represent in any way the position of CASS as the organisation.

About Our Organisation

CASS was founded in 1981. Its main service objective is to provide a wide range of welfare services to the community, and assist migrants to settle and integrate into the Australian society. The comprehensive range of community services and activities provided by CASS includes residential aged care, home ageing services, disability services, vocational training, settlement and health, volunteering, and family and children services. Most of the services we provide cover the whole of Metropolitan Sydney, with some covering the areas down to Wollongong. We serve the Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, Vietnamese, people from other CALD communities, as well as mainstream Australians. More than 2,400 families access our services and activities weekly.

Our View For SBS

In a country with diverse cultures and community languages, it requires a diverse range of communication channels, languages and strategies. For a number of years, SBS has played an important role in this multi-cultural society and has made significant contribution to people’s life. CASS is pleased to see the efforts from SBS to support a multi-cultural community by providing radio programs in a vast diversity of languages. We also acknowledge that it is necessary to review these services in line with census data to ensure that radio services

are meeting audience demands and responsive to the changing demographic of Australia.

We support the Draft Language Selection Criteria 2016/17 in general, and believe that it will be a useful tool to help SBS make appropriate decision on the languages for the delivery of SBS Radio services. After servicing the Chinese community for over 3 decades, we have gained extensive insight into Chinese migrants, the largest group of migrant population from non-English speaking background in Australia. We would like to offer our comments as follows:

First of all, there are more factors needing to be considered in regards to the definition of “English language proficiency”.

We have observed that the percentage of English proficiency among European community is significantly higher than that of Chinese community. Many seniors in Chinese community have had little proper schooling and low literacy in their first language, therefore their source of information largely depends on radio services and programs in the community language.

It is also observed that some migrants have acquired adequate functional English to perform their daily work and household duties. These people might not have language barrier in general and are very likely to be categorised as proficient in English, however they are not actually capable of fully understanding information in a complicated context, particularly those in regards to policy, medical and educational service as well as social welfare. Information delivered in community language is still necessary and helpful to support and facilitate comprehensive and accurate understanding.

In addition to migrants who arrive recently with a need to settle in a new community, we see a tendency in which many Chinese migrants show a preference of acquiring information in Chinese, even when they have reasonably good level of English proficiency. It is natural the people are more accepting and responsive to the information delivered in their first language, and that they are able to process the information more quickly and efficiently. As a major mass media in Australia, SBS should seek to expand its influence among the entire Chinese community by providing services and programs in Chinese, regardless of English proficiency of the population.

Secondly, we believe that less weight should be placed in the recentness of arrival.

It is true that newly arrived migrants require support and orientation to Australian systems and society in their first language, but we have also observed many seniors in Chinese community, despite spending decades in Australia, are still not proficient in understanding English. The reasons may vary greatly, for instance some people may have financial difficulty for further study, and some may lack incentive due to low level of literacy in their first language, or due to that they are never required to be proficient in English in their workplace. While they may be able to speak and understand some English, they are unable to read and write fluently. Therefore, information transmitted orally in their first language with visual support where possible is still an essential way of learning the community.

Last but not least, we suggest that SBS adapt more direct and efficient mechanism to collect feedback from the community and the target population for future reviews. Taking the current review for example, although the message is delivered to the public in various community languages, the feedback form itself as well as the platform for the public to lodge submission are in English. It goes without saying that due to low level of English proficiency and literacy, those people who are the most in need of community language radio programs will not be able to voice their views and concerns as an individual. Although many community organisation, such as CASS, will voice for them, it will be much more efficient if SBS can engage the community by consultation channels in community languages and collect feedback directly from the audience.

Conclusion

In this submission, we have included the feedback that we received from people in our community, including our volunteers and staff members. We would appreciate if SBS takes into account the viewpoints and concerns raised in this submission. We are happy to have a further discussion to elaborate these viewpoints and concerns.