

JG Estiot

I don't know if I will get around to writing a full-on submission but there are a couple of points worth making. First, my name is Jean-Georges Estiot, I am 41, Editor of Media-Watch Interactive and resident media expert on RRR's "The Media Circus".

One aspect of competition your inquiry should look at is the relationship between Free To Air (FTA) operations and PayTV. There was a suggestion that a healthy competition between FTA and PayTV would ensure some sport would remain on FTA. The bidding war has not eventuated and the cynics like myself suggest a collusion between PayTV and FTA. And when you take a close look at the shareholding of Optus Vision and Foxtel, the FTA operators still benefit from losing some of the sport to PayTV. At the end of the day, the public is the great loser. They lose out on the West Indies tour, they lose out on the French Tennis Open and so on. The trend is towards the "blue chip" live sport events migrating to PayTV. Our politicians gave us the undertaking that this would not happen. They were wrong.

Now to another point. I do not believe that you can or should regulate media ownership. With the convergence of technology it is now impossible. The Age newspaper offers video and sound while the ABC Online publishes written articles. The issue of ownership has always been a red herring. The problem is not who owns the media, the issue is what they do with it. To regulate media ownership is to accept that unethical media behaviour and interference by owners cannot be stopped. Instead of wasting your time wondering how to share the pie, you should first work out how to stop it from rotting. Media operators should be accountable, particularly when it comes to news and current affairs. The current system of self regulation simply does not work. Well, it works for some but hardly cuts the mustard when it comes to public interest. The unpunished level of interference with news in Australia is shocking. Media ownership itself is not a problem because in theory, we should not mind having all of the Australian media owned by one person as long as he/she does the right thing. The problem is contents. In real terms, those who publish the content are currently not accountable to anyone. You could have 10,000 media owners in Australia and still have no diversity of opinion, no diversity in the source of news and no diversity in the type of culture fostered. If you could magically create 100 TV stations in Australia today, I guaranty you that each of their newscasts and Current Affairs programs would be based on the same market-driven formula used by Channel Nine and Channel Seven. They would also engage in the same level of protection of their advertisers and owner's interests. At the end of the day, the public is the great loser.

Cheers,

JG