

Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories? 2.0

First report card into TV news' cultural diversity journey reveals a mixed bag, with a long road ahead

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In partnership with the University of Sydney and University of Technology Sydney, Media Diversity Australia (MDA) has released a **'report card'** on **Indigenous and cultural diversity in television news**, with insights into what has changed, what has stayed the same, and opportunities to lead the charge toward greater diversity.

Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories? 2.0 examines the Indigenous and cultural diversity of Australian news and current affairs television media – and asks - **"Does Australian news and current affairs represent the society they serve?"** given the latest Census data revealed Australia is more diverse than ever.

“*The short answer is no, it doesn't even come close. However, there has been some progress in parts of the media and an opportunity for Australian newsrooms to leverage best practice and become world leaders. This will not only attract more viewers, but will also yield economic dividends,”* says lead academic **Associate Professor Dimitria Groutsis** from University of Sydney's Business School.

The report card comes two years after MDA released the landmark report *Who Gets To Tell Australian Stories?* The 2020 research provided **baseline findings** on the stark lack of cultural diversity in television news and current affairs, both on and off screen, which made headlines across the nation and around the globe.

Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories? 2.0 has **three parts**. Parts one and two provide evidence from five studies combining qualitative and quantitative data on the (i) cultural diversity of **reporters and presenters**, (ii) the diversity of network **boards and television news editorial leaders**, (iii) a survey of **attitudes of journalists** working in newsrooms, (iv) interviews with regional newsroom leaders and a (v) representative sample of Australian viewers who were polled about their views on representation in news and current affairs.

This round of research compared results from *Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories* (2020) to **evaluate progress and identify the opportunities for improvement**. This report also investigated some additional areas providing evidence on **regional newsroom leaders** to identify some key representation challenges, given this is often a talent pipeline for metropolitan newsrooms, and an **audience attitudes poll to map insights from viewers**.

Part three of the report provides an **international comparison** drawing on a literature review and an examination of what broadcasters abroad are doing to address the lack of diversity and inclusion, with clear recommendations on how newsrooms can, and should, do better.

“Clearly there has been some work done in the public sector entities, but the commercial sector seems yet to understand the business case for both Indigenous and other forms of diversity, on boards, in leadership roles, on our news screens. It’s very disappointing given the focus in most other areas of business and industry. They’re well behind,” said

Professor Nareen Young, Associate Dean (Indigenous Leadership and Engagement) at UTS Business School.



“Given the spirit of the times, commercial television needs to get behind the well established push to recruit, support, and promote Indigenous people at the networks. There’s massive amounts of research they can draw on to help them with their business case,” she said.

Who appears on our screens is more Anglo Celtic, however there are pockets of progress

- The overall share of appearances on television by presenters and reporters of Anglo-Celtic background increased from 2019 to 2022. The **Anglo-Celtic category remained vastly over-represented on television**, across all states and territories.
- The share of appearances on television by presenters and reporters of **Indigenous background improved overall but was inconsistent** across networks.
- The share of appearances on television by presenters and **reporters of European cultural backgrounds declined**.
- Australia’s **non-European population is at least 19 times greater than the representation on commercial networks (where it was no more than 1.3% of on-air talent)**
- The non-European category remained the **most severely under-represented**, particularly on **commercial networks**.
- **Nine** is the only network to **decrease** its portion of **Anglo-Celtic** on air talent.
- **The ABC** is the only network to show an **increase** in **non-European** on air talent.
- Researchers were unable to identify a single Indigenous reporter or presenter at the Seven Network which has the **least on air cultural diversity**.

In TV news leadership positions there’s slightly better gender representation, but cultural diversity remains poor

- **SBS** remains the **only network board** to have representation of **Indigenous, Anglo-Celtic, European and non-European** members. Its board now has two Indigenous members, up from one in 2020.
- In terms of the gender mix, there has been some progress albeit inconsistent across the networks. Evidence showed a **greater gender balance on the boards of the ABC, Network 10 and Nine**.
- Concerningly, Indigenous representation and cultural diversity among **television news leaders**, is even **worse than the board profiles**.
- Two free-to-air networks (the ABC and Nine) appear to have **exclusively Anglo-Celtic senior television news leadership teams**.
- Other than **NITV** which has an all-Indigenous leadership team, **Network 10 has the most diverse leadership**.

Non-European Australian audiences have least trust in news and most concerned about representation

- A majority of respondents **agreed that Australia's cultural diversity is well-represented** in news and current affairs.
- However, a clear majority of **non-European background respondents say they would like to see more cultural diversity** represented among presenters and stories told – indicating that cultural diversity may not be as well-represented as asserted.
- There are also variances in **non-European respondents' trust in news** with a higher proportion saying they had stopped consuming news or current affairs sources because they **thought it was biased**.

Newsroom staff more positive about industry's attitude to diversity

Encouragingly, there has been a **more positive response** by staff to the perceived representation of Indigeneity and cultural diversity in the media industry overall from 2020 to 2022.

Concerningly, there has been an **increase in perceived barriers to career progression for Indigenous and culturally diverse staff behind the camera**.

“Our findings show that there is a significant way to go, with a serious need for media leaders to support meaningful, informed adjustments, and strategic interventions to build a more representative industry,” Groutsis said.

Regional newsroom often seen as a talent pipeline, but diversity issues even more stark

- Interviews were carried out with 19 editorial leaders across **several regional newsrooms**, all leaders had an **Anglo-Celtic background**.
- While there was an understanding of what cultural diversity brings and desire to increase representation, most believed the **change required was beyond their resources and scope**.

Now in its fifth year, MDA has chapters in Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales and recently, the ACT. In addition to commissioning research, the not for profit has launched a **membership model for media outlets** who want strategic diversity, equity & inclusion **consulting** and support. Other **programs** include summer fellowships, 12 month women of colour mentorship program, journalism secondments, networking events and a **talent hub** of diverse journalists looking for work.

“MDA is working towards creating a representative media landscape that looks and sounds more like Australia. We not only hold up a mirror to the industry but crucially, we also provide practical and evidence-based solutions.”

MDA's CEO Mariam Veiszadeh said.



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