**Campaigning for Audio Description on Australian Television: Talking points for advocates**

**Background:**

* Audio description (AD) is a service that involves the verbal narration of visual elements such as scenes, settings, actions, costumes and on-screen text.
* Audio description has been available on free to air television in all other English-speaking OECD countries for several years, while Australia continues to lag behind.
* Australians who are deaf or hearing impaired enjoy comparatively high levels of access. The Broadcasting Services Act now requires 100% of content that is broadcast during primetime to be captioned.
* The Government is currently progressing the adoption of a new broadcast and content reform package. This provides us with an opportunity to finally get audio description happening on free to air television.

**Help us get a permanent audio description service funded on Australia’s national broadcasters:**

* Australia’s public broadcasters have continually argued that audio description would be too costly for them to implement, stating that the government needs to allocate adequate funding to enable them to provide this service.
* One of the provisions of the new broadcast reform package involves an additional $30 million being allocated to fund more ‘niche’ sports programming on subscription television.
* The Government’s decision to Prop up subscription television at the expense of the rights of people who are blind or vision impaired does not align with Australia’s obligations as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
* I would like to see the government, through the Broadcast and Content Reform Package, commit the comparatively modest funds necessary to implement a permanent audio description service on the ABC and SBS.

**Help us get audio description introduced on commercial free to air television:**

* The reform package also proposes the elimination of broadcasting licence fees, which would instead be replaced with a spectrum usage tariff.
* This represents a saving of $90 million per year for commercial free-to-air broadcasters.
* I broadly support the elimination of licence fees as a method of levelling the playing field for Australia’s free-to-air television industry.
* I believe this proposal could achieve multiple goals that are of public interest by making the elimination of licence fees dependent on the introduction of audio description across free-to-air television.
* The introduction of audio description on commercial television, starting at a minimum of 14 hours per week, would come at a relatively minimal cost when looking at the overall savings the reform package proposes.
* I would also welcome the opportunity to explore options for targets for audio description on commercial television to be incrementally expanded over a number of years to provide the industry with time to adjust to these new requirements.

**Information about Australia’s human rights obligations:**

* The right to access information on an equal basis with others is clearly laid out under Article 21 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As a signatory to the Convention, the Australian Government has made a commitment to ensure information intended for the general public is available to persons with disabilities in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to their needs.
* Article 30 of the Convention also commits the Australian government to adopt measures to ensure television programmes are available in accessible formats, and can be accessed by people with disability on an equal basis with others.
* The Australian Government has laid out a plan for the progressive realisation of the rights set out under the Convention under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020, which is now entering its final stage of implementation. Under outcome area 1 (policy directives 1 and 5) of the strategy, the Government has committed to adopting measures to increase the inclusion and participation of people with disability in cultural and recreational life. These measures involve ensuring information and communications systems are accessible to people with disability and are responsive to their needs.