

Ethnic television gets poor rating after 13-week trial

By SUSAN MOLLOY, Ethnic Affairs Reporter

Ethnic television should have a strictly controlled commercial element and should be run by a statutory body, the ethnic television review panel has recommended.

The panel has also criticised the authority now responsible for ethnic television and radio, the Special Broadcasting Service, for "perceived insensitivity" to the needs and interests of ethnic communities.

In an interim report, the panel says that most of the people who answered its questionnaire and who wrote submissions were highly critical of the service.

Permanent ethnic television is not due to start until 1981.

The review panel's interim report concerns a 13-week experimental run which ended in late July.

It was prepared by the panel chairman, the Melbourne criminal lawyer Mr Frank Galbally, and has been submitted to the Prime Minister, Mr Fraser. The Herald received a copy of the document at the weekend.

The report says the Special

Independence pledge

The two ministers directly involved in ethnic television said yesterday that they were determined the Special Broadcasting Service would be politically independent.

There were "grave risks" for Australia if ethnic television and radio were brought under political control.

The Minister for Post and Telecommunications, Mr Staley, and the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Mr MacKellar, said in a joint statement that they were committed to developing the services free of political influence.

Broadcasting Service should not control ethnic television unless its structure is changed to allow greater ethnic input and unless legislation is changed to increase its public accountability and reduce the scope for ministerial intervention.

The service is under the

Mr Staley and Mr MacKellar said they deplored the attacks by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Hayden, on the ethnic radio station 2EA, the Special Broadcasting Service and the State and National Ethnic Broadcasting Advisory Councils.

Criticisms against the experimental ethnic television service had been endorsed by Mr Hayden, giving them a status which they did not deserve.

"We are committed to developing ethnic radio and television services which are professionally non-partisan and free of political influence."

control of the Minister for Post and Telecommunications, Mr Staley.

The report also says that the State and National Ethnic Broadcasting Advisory Councils were regarded by most respondents as being out of touch with ethnic communities.

Mr Galbally said the experiment did not provide an adequate basis on which definitive advice could be given about the permanent service.

But it had an unsuitable time slot — 8 am to 11 am on Sunday mornings — had no commercial content and the review panel was hampered by lack of independent expert advice.

The panel, the discussion paper and the experiment had been poorly advertised.

Mr Galbally said reaction from the ethnic communities suggested that a substantial number had not heard of or watched the experiment.

Some who had watched at the beginning had stopped because they had been disappointed with the material.

The material shown was criticised as presenting ethnic stereotypes, having a travelogue approach in programs about other countries and cultures which was designed to appeal to potential Australian tourists, and having program panel discussions which were patronising, amateurish and irrelevant.

Despite the relative lack of informed comment on the matter, Mr Galbally said, community preference tended towards control of ethnic television by a statutory authority with funding from commercial and public sources.

There needed to be a high degree of ethnic community involvement through the employment of competent ethnic professionals.

Programmers needed to pay particular concern to the needs of housebound women, children, the aged and shift workers.