

Keya McGeown

Lawyer, SBS

Anna Glen, Lawyer in the Disputes & Litigation team at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), sits down with **Keya McGeown**, Lawyer, Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), to discuss her career and thoughts on International Women's Day. Keya is an award-winning in-house media lawyer at SBS, specialising in pre-publication, production, and Indigenous cultural intellectual property. Keya was awarded the Rising Star – In House in the Lawyers Weekly Women in Law Awards 2022 and earned her place in the Legal500 GC Powerlist – Rising Stars Australia 2022. She will happily chat your ear off about netball, theatre, arts and music, and her puppy Arthur.

ANNA GLEN: What does a typical day look like for you?

KEYA MCGEOWN: I am a new 'dog-mum' so it will always start with a walk and some play at the park with my puppy, 'Arthur'. Then a short stroll to my home study, or a longer drive across the bridge to the SBS office to start the workday. From there, *not to sound too cliché*, but like many in-house lawyers there is no typical day. My day could be spent drafting, and reviewing production, commissioning, and content acquisition agreements, progressing long-term projects, or advising on SBS and NITV content. All of this is often punctuated by the breaking news of the day, advising the newsroom or any number of SBS's 63 language programs.

ANNA: Did you always want this job? How did your career path lead you here?

KEYA: No, not at first. I was studying a Bachelor of Laws/Bachelor of International Studies at UTS, but I had always envisioned myself working in the Arts and Entertainment sector having been inspired by my late aunt, Lyndell. In my penultimate year of study, I was certain I had made the wrong choice, that I would never practise law and I'd need to transfer to a different degree. I remember feeling isolated when my peers were seeking clerkships in those traditional pathways, and it just didn't feel right for me. Then, in 2018 I was presented with a choice to: (a) undertake a yearlong cultural exchange in France, or (b) accept an offer to be the Indigenous Legal Cadet with SBS's in-house legal. In January 2018, I commenced my role in the SBS team and have never left. I was promoted to Lawyer upon my admission in September 2019. My role at SBS has given me the chance to harness my love for the industry and honour my aunt's memory, while discovering a new passion for the empowerment of

Australian storytellers and Indigenous cultural intellectual property. Opportunities like this weren't visible to me during my degree, I didn't know that in-house was a viable career path or how to break into it. I believe you can't be what you can't see, so I think it's crucial for all law students to see that there are a diverse array of roles out there for lawyers, not just the traditional corporate or criminal law roles.

ANNA: What recent events in the Australian media law landscape most affect your organisation?

KEYA: Engaging with one of Australia's most trusted newsrooms and the highest quality journalists, there exists a critical element of protection and empowerment in my role. Since 2018, Australia has had a steady and staggering decline in press freedom, manifest in the 2019 AFP raids on News Corp journalist Annika Smethurst and ABC Ultimo over stories that revealed disturbing allegations. This rupturing of the fourth estate shepherded in the start of my career as a lawyer at SBS. The start of my legal practice also coincided with several high-profile defamation proceedings that had an immense chilling effect on the industry. These various moments marked the start of my career and, inevitably, greatly impacted the way I give pre-publication advice, training and advocate for my clients at SBS. SBS, as a publisher of important stories that inform the cultural identity of Australia, has to be on the front foot in its understanding of and compliance with various reforms and decisions. With it now being almost 3 years since the 2020 PJCIS report into the *'Impact of the Exercise of Law Enforcement and Security Powers on the Freedom of the Press'*, it has been encouraging to see the Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus refocus on government commitments to improve protections for journalists and the critical role of media freedom in Australia, though we have a long way to go.



ANNA: Are there any law reforms in your sector that you think are desperately needed? If so, what are they?

KEYA: Working in the ever-evolving landscape of Australian media there is always a long list of changes you hope for. For me, it is unnecessary to articulate which of the many necessary reforms is most important, it is instead critical that the proposed reforms happen sooner rather than later. With the rise of new media, such as FAST, the sector is heaving with newness and can often be volatile and unbalanced in its regulation. One thing I think many in the industry will agree is that reform is often slow to the starting block while, *to carry on the sport metaphor*, consumer habits, technology and media strategies are onto the next event. The Stage 2 Defamation reforms are an exciting prospect that may reset the balance disturbed by innovative and responsive technology trends. A critical element of reform for the sector is platform neutrality and responsiveness.

ANNA: What's the best work-related advice you've ever received?

KEYA: Back yourself. This advice was offered to me quite recently and I didn't realise how much I needed to hear it until I did. I am so grateful to the colleague that offered me that guidance because I hold them in such high esteem. What I took from this advice is that you earn trust, from your colleagues and your clients, and that you need to acknowledge your accomplishments as benchmarks rather than heights you can fall from.