

Clare O'Neil

Director of Corporate Affairs, SBS

Josephine Booth, Lawyer at MinterEllison, chats with **Clare O'Neil**, Director of Corporate Affairs at SBS, about Clare's career, diversity and International Women's Day. Clare is an executive with 20 years' experience in media and communications across both government and industry. She joined SBS in 2016 as the Director of Corporate Affairs. In addition to being a member of the Executive Leadership team, her areas of responsibility include Regulatory & Government Affairs, the Legal Division, Codes & Guidelines, Engagement & Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Communications, and the SBS Board. Clare is the Executive Sponsor of SBS Access, SBS's Employee Advisory Group focused on the experiences of employees with a disability. Before joining SBS, Clare spent more than five years at the commercial TV industry body Free TV Australia as the Director of Legal and Broadcasting Policy. She spent the earlier part of her career in the regulatory and government sector, spending time at the ACMA, the ACCC and the Commonwealth DPP. She is passionate about the power of content and media to achieve positive social outcomes.

JOSEPHINE BOOTH: Hi Clare – thanks so much for chatting with us! Can you tell me about your career path and how it led you to where you are today?

CLARE O'NEIL: I never had the “be a partner in a big law firm by 30” mindset. I always wanted to be a lawyer – though rather than having a 5-year plan I've always looked for opportunities that are stimulating (for me at least) and have social or community value. It's served me well so far!

I did the summer clerkship thing and was a Federal Court Associate after finishing my studies. Both of these experiences were invaluable in forming significant friendships and networks that have stayed with me. My first job as a real lawyer was at the Australian Broadcasting Authority (as it then was) – working on everything from the prosecution brief for a prominent radio identity, advice on the Children's Television Standards, to community broadcasting licensing litigation. This included a brief secondment to the Commonwealth DPP (turns out criminal law was not for me), and was followed by a stint as a Director at the ACCC in the Communications Division, working on telecommunications infrastructure pricing.

I was still holding a candle for broadcast media so I jumped when the opportunity at Free TV came up. My role there as Director of Legal and Broadcasting Policy involved being across a myriad of policy issues (both Federal and State), advocacy in industry forums and Parliamentary inquiries, transforming the Commercial TV Code of Practice, consensus building across the commercial networks, and everything in between.

That body of work was the foundation for my current position as Director of Corporate Affairs at SBS, which has expanded significantly since I commenced in late 2016. Passion for the sector, experience gained across both government and industry, a fantastic team and a commitment to the values and purpose of the organisation have kept me engaged and motivated for 7 years and counting.

JOSEPHINE: Did you always want to work in media and communications policy?

CLARE: The idealistic high school version of me wanted to be a public defender, but that dissipated pretty quickly with a combination of evidence law, work experience and a thorough enjoyment of media law and IP subjects during my law degree.

I've always been an avid consumer of content, and I've been fortunate to spend

the last 20 years working in an industry that I love. Legal, policy and regulatory work in the media and comms space is stimulating because the industry is so dynamic. Since I started my career there has been an incredible transformation across delivery platforms, audience consumption and preferences – not to mention the sheer volume, variety and quality of content. There used to be five free to air channels. Now Netflix is competing with sleep.

JOSEPHINE: What is the best part of your job?

CLARE: Working with the incredibly talented and passionate team at SBS, who are all committed to our purpose and supporting a more cohesive society.

It's a privilege to contribute to vital national conversations through programs like Jess Hill's *See What You Made Me Do* or Rachel Perkins' *Australian Wars*, and supporting content in more than 60 languages to enable social, civic and economic participation for the many Australians who speak a language other than English.

Also, Eurovision. I love Eurovision.

JOSEPHINE: Conversely, what is the most challenging part of your job?

CLARE: Finding the time and resources to pursue every great idea and opportunity.

JOSEPHINE: What is the greatest risk you have taken as a professional?

CLARE: Turning down a graduate offer at a big firm after finishing my Federal Court Associateship. I didn't get the rotations I wanted and had another offer to work at the Australian Broadcasting Authority. It was media or property law. I made the right choice – for me at least...

JOSEPHINE: What advice would you give to your younger self?

CLARE: Embrace and learn from setbacks. You might be crestfallen about a missed opportunity, but that experience can often lead to something unexpected and better.

JOSEPHINE: If you could only read one book for the rest of your life, what would it be and why?

CLARE: *The Boat* by Nam Le (incidentally, also a reformed lawyer). An extraordinary collection of short stories, beautifully written and covering an incredibly diverse spectrum of emotions, perspectives and themes. Aside from being an amazing piece of writing, my formidable grandmother was an avid reader and book hoarder, and this was one of the last books she shared with me before she passed away.



JOSEPHINE: What does inclusion mean to you and how would you like to see it applied in the Australian media landscape?

CLARE: Inclusion is something we should aspire to achieve across all facets of our lives. To steal a formal definition, inclusion is the sense of belonging, value, respect and purpose that individuals feel when they participate on genuinely equal terms. Humans can be creatures of habit and can carry inherent and unconscious biases, so inclusivity requires a purposeful approach from both individuals and institutions, and a commitment to continuous improvement – there's always more work to be done and new concepts to explore.

From a media perspective I think inclusion is realised with the opportunity for every person to see themselves and their stories included in our cultural outputs – whether that's screen content, audio content, or the arts.

I'm very fortunate to work at an organisation that has inclusion at its core. We've implemented a range of initiatives to make our sector more reflective of the community, with targets to support diverse creatives both on and off screen, and internally focused initiatives like more women in technology. I'm proud to be part of the SBS Inclusion Council and the Executive Sponsor of SBS Access, our employee advisory group focused on the experiences of staff with disability, chronic conditions, and carers. It would be great to see other industry participants cheating off our homework.

JOSEPHINE: Tell me about a woman in your industry who inspires you and why they inspire you?

CLARE: That's a tough one.

I have been very fortunate throughout my career to have been surrounded by some incredible women and I couldn't name just one. I owe a debt of gratitude to those mentors and colleagues who generously gifted me their time, insights and experience. These women have certainly inspired me to actively devote time and energy to mentoring and sponsoring others in their career journey.

I am also pretty inspired by some of the new generation of women in our sector – leading challenging conversations and driving innovation.

JOSEPHINE: Thanks so much Clare! Happy International Women's Day!