

Phil Molefe gives details of SABC's ANN7 funding

By [Bekezela Phakathi](#)

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The SABC's relationship with ANN7, the Gupta-owned TV station, has come under intense scrutiny in Parliament, with evidence surfacing that the cash-strapped public broadcaster paid up to R1m for an episode of the TNA/Morning Live breakfast shows.



On Tuesday, the ad hoc committee probing the crisis at the SABC went through various responses to its draft report.

In his response, former SABC acting CEO Phil Molefe corroborated evidence that the public broadcaster footed the costs associated with the controversial breakfast briefings.

Molefe said in his submission that the shows came at a huge cost to the SABC, with technical equipment for one production costing R1m or more.

The SABC also covered flights, accommodation and food for production staff when the briefings took place outside Johannesburg.

While the SABC carried the costs, the TNA media group exclusively earned the revenue generated from the joint briefings, said Molefe.

Members of the ad hoc committee have indicated they want the deal to be reviewed and, possibly, cancelled.

In his submission, Molefe makes it clear that the contract for the breakfast briefings was signed when he was no longer acting SABC CEO.

It was signed by former CEO Lulama Mokhobo and then TNA CEO Nazeem Howa.

In December, the committee, which is pushing to complete its final report before the end of February, had heard from former contributing editor Vuyo Mvoko that the public broadcaster carried the costs of the production while all revenue went to TNA. At the time, Mvoko said the SABC was essentially using its own money and resources to build up ANN7.

However, former SABC board chairman Ben Ngubane testified in January that Mvoko was "not talking from knowledge when he claimed [the SABC] was subsidising the breakfast shows".

Ngubane said the SABC's airing of joint business breakfast shows with The New Age had benefited the public broadcaster and did not cost it money.

"It [broadcasting the business breakfast] came as an initiative from the news sections, which host a lot of outside broadcasts ... the show was flighted 16 times [before a board decision was taken to make it a regular fixture]. Because it was a regular feature we requested a business plan and the explanations were convincing and that is why we went with it," Ngubane told the ad hoc committee in January.

"For us it was about fulfilling the mandate of informing the community about government."

The breakfast shows usually feature high-ranking government officials.

In a written submission, Ngubane took exception to being "unfairly" treated by the committee when giving his testimony and questioned the credibility of some witnesses.

In its submission to the ad hoc committee, TNA dismissed the claims that it was being paid by the SABC, saying there was no cross-subsidisation of any kind between the organisations.

In December, Sipho Masinga, a former IT executive at the SABC, told the inquiry that Howa, the previous head of Oakbay, presented the SABC with a three-page document that detailed plans by the Gupta company to take over the public broadcaster's news department.

The plan failed.

The ad hoc committee was due to interrogate responses from the SABC and Communications Minister Faith Muthambi before drafting its final recommendations.

Source: Business Day