THE FUTURE OF THE SABC BILL

Category: Media and OTT
written by Ethan Van der Merwe | March 26, 2026



The South African Broadcasting Corporation ("**SABC**") has, for many years, been faced with significant financial strain and stress. A solution to this problem has plagued the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, with its ultimate solution being the tabling of the South African Broadcasting Corporation SOC Ltd Bill (B32-2023)[1] on 13 October 2023.

The Bill's intended purposes include repealing the Broadcasting Act 4 of 1999; regulating the continued existence of the SABC; and providing for the governance of the public broadcaster.[2] However, the Bill sparked a large deal of controversy within Parliament and the public at large,[3] and on 10 November 2024, Minister Solly Malatsi announced the Bill's withdrawal from Parliament, citing stakeholders and public submissions which outlined that the Bill would not be in the long-term interests of the SABC, or the public.[4]

A significant drawback of the Bill was the lack of a credible funding model.[5] The State broadcaster has faced years of financial strain, which resulted in a government bailout in 2019,[6] and a grim report for its 2025 operations. The SABC posted a net loss of R253.3 million in 2025, with its balancing dropping from R401 million to R59 million over the course of the year.[7] Without any significant changes to the SABC's current funding model, it is unlikely for the broadcaster to survive another financial year.

As it stands, the SABC's funding model is outdated. The model relies on the payment of television license fees, advertising revenue, and [8] A significant challenge for the SABC the non-payment of television license fees. Many reports have indicated up to 86% of viewers are not paying their television license fees to the SABC. To make matters worse, the SABC's other significant forms of income, in the forms of advertising and sponsorships, have also drastically decreased. All of this, together with the addition of legal claims against the broadcaster of up to R700 million for unfair dismissals and contractual disputes[9] means that the public broadcaster is in desperate need of a revision to its funding model.

This is where the soon to be updated SABC Bill comes into play. The SABC themselves have admitted that their business model is [10] and as such, a new, comprehensive change is needed. The recently removed Bill did not offer much of an improvement to the funding model, which has led to much anticipation regarding the new Bill which is to be tabled.

The expected Bill may be a light at the end of the tunnel for the SABC. In response to questions posed by the African National Congress Member of Parliament Tshehofatso Chauk[11] that the Bill is to be tabled in the 2026/2027 financial year. The Bill, according to the Minister, is set to contain a new funding model for the public broadcaster. [12] to develop the new funding model, with the new model being due by 6 February 2026. This due date was followed by a closed session between the Parliamentary Portfolio on Communications and Digital Technologies, BMI TechKnowledge[13] of February 2026. Although it is still unclear what the exact funding model will consist of, the managing director of BMI TechKnowledge has expressed a holistic approach to the problem, which would incorporate revenue, cost, and funding elements which would require legislative and regulatory updates, in order to rescue the broadcaster. The funding model itself will need to comprise[14] the SABC to achieve its purpose. Public funding options have included the suggestion of household fees, individual levies, government grants and 'innovative options'.

A suggestion was further put forward to guard against non-payment which included the use of collection agencies. Parties include municipalities, the South African Revenue Service, the media industry, financial institutions, third parties, and the SABC.[15] Whether these "third parties" are set to include legal institutions is yet to be seen, but may be an interesting albeit possibly contentious option.

One suggestion made by BMI TechKnowledge was that of removing red tape in terms of its regulations on specific content quotas.[16] Such a move would allow the SABC to commission its own content more easily, gain access to grant funding for local content, and allow the broadcaster to license its content more easily.[17] This could create greater opportunities for local television content producers while benefitting the SABC by providing the possibility of grants and lower licensing costs. It may open the industry in South Africa to more contracts and competition.

Following the presentation to the Portfolio Committee, the Committee went into a further closed session in which it assessed the representations made by BMI TechKnowledge.[18] What emerged from the session is that the option of the broadcaster receiving no taxpayer funding is an unpopular one, with a move toward the 'innovative option' for public funding being the popular choice moving forward.[19] What this 'innovative option' might be is yet to be seen and has certainly raised more questions than answers regarding the future and the success of the public broadcaster.

In the recent Budget Speech, the SABC was allocated roughly R700 million to repay part of its outstanding debt to Sentech.[20] The move was made to stabilize the public broadcaster during its ongoing financial turmoil, and to continue its operational adjustments.[21]

All these recent developments have left large questions looming over the public broadcaster. Is the current allocated amount going to be enough to sustain the struggling public broadcaster through the next financial year? When will the SABC Bill be tabled once more in Parliament? And most importantly, what will the revised 'innovative option' funding model suggested to form part of the Bill entail, and will this allow for the survival of South Africa's tortured public broadcaster? We will have to wait and see what the legislature has lined up.

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[1] South African Broadcasting Corporation SOC Ltd Bill (B32-2023).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Public Media Alliance, 'SABC Bill progresses, but critics still see threats' 3 November 2023 Jamie Tahana https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/sabc-bill-progresses-but-critics-still-see-threats/ accessed

10 March 2026.

[4] South African Government, ‘Minister Solly Malatsi withdraws SABC Bill to prioritise a funding model for the public broadcaster’ 10 November 2024 https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/minister-solly-malatsi-withdraws-sabc-bill-prioritise-funding-model-public accessed 10 March 2026.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Op cit note 3.

[7] allAfrica ‘South Africa: SABC cash crisis sparks fears of collapse’ 2 March 2026 Rorisang Modiba https://allafrica.com/stories/202603020560.html accessed 10 March 2026.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] MYBROADBAND ‘Saying goodbye to SABC TV licenses’ 7 February 2026 Miles Illidge https://mybroadband.co.za/news/broadcasting/628177-saying-goodbye-to-sabc-tv-licences-2.html accessed on 10 March 2026.

[12] MYBROADBAND ‘End of SABC TV licenses discussed in secret’ 8 February 2026 Jan Vermeulen https://mybroadband.co.za/news/broadcasting/628355-another-turn-for-the-end-of-sabc-tv-licences.html accessed on 10 March 2026.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.