

Silly season switched off

DEBBIE SCHIPP

CHANNEL Ten's aggressive early attack in the 2012 ratings war has prompted rival networks to call an abrupt end to the traditional summer "silly season" of stale re-runs. Nine has scrambled to respond to the blockbuster line-up announced by Ten's new boss James Warburton last week.

It will bring forward reality weight-loss show *Excess Baggage* to January 30 — a fortnight before official ratings start.

Excess Baggage, with a cast of overweight celebrities, will air from Monday to Thursday at 7pm — a week earlier than expected.

With network executives holding urgent strategy meetings about the best way to respond to Ten, Seven will air *My Kitchen Rules* and a Greek mother reality dating show called *Please Marry My Boy* as soon as it pulls clear of its Australian Open tennis commitment in late January.

Its centrepiece *Packed To The Rafters* will return soon afterwards.

Although Nine is contending with an extended international



Nine will launch *Excess Baggage* early as the ratings war for 2012 begins

cricket season, the early start for *Excess Baggage* shows network supremo David Gyngell is standing firm on his promise of "owning" the 7pm timeslot in 2012.

The Block and *Celebrity Apprentice* will follow hot on the heels of *Excess Baggage* in the 7pm slot later in the year.

Ten's new head of news and current affairs, Anthony Flannery, starts work tomorrow, less than a week after Warburton called time on Ten's failed 90-minute news experiment, abandoning 6pm bulletins and moving *The Project* to

6pm, its third timeslot in three months. It will also air for half an hour on Sundays.

It is believed one of Flannery's first moves will be to reinstate Ten's late night news.

Nine's 6pm news and *A Current Affair* are to ramp up pressure on Seven's news and *Today Tonight*.

Nine was rumoured to be shifting *Excess Baggage* to 7:30pm to avoid clashing with Ten's long-running weight loss reality show *The Biggest Loser* but they will go head-to-head at 7pm, with *The Biggest Loser* launching on January 23.

Balloon safety fears

MORE than 80 ballooning mishaps — including 15 powerline strikes — have been recorded by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau in the past five years as safety fears heighten in the wake of the New Zealand balloon disaster which killed 11 people.

The bureau said 86 incidents, from minor injuries from basket falls to serious crash landings, were investigated. In the worst, a basket flipped on landing and burners reignited, scorching passengers, in 2009.

Phone thieves go quiet

A PROGRAM that makes stolen phones inoperable is deterring thieves.

The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association says a 25 per cent drop in phone blocking in seven years shows thieves are getting the message that stealing mobiles is a waste of time.

When a customer reports a mobile lost or stolen to the phone company, it is blocked using the handset's unique electronic serial number.

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