



SENATOR THE HON MITCH FIFIELD

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SENATE
MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS
MINISTER FOR THE ARTS

Ms Michelle Guthrie
Managing Director
Australian Broadcasting Corporation
Via Email:

Michelle

Dear Ms Guthrie

I write in relation to your Chief Economics Correspondent Ms Emma Alberici's coverage across multiple ABC platforms of the Government's corporate tax policy.

This coverage contains multiple factual errors and misrepresentations in breach of the ABC's editorial standards. It is neither fair, balanced, accurate nor impartial. It fails to present a balance of views on the corporate tax policy.

I understand that both the Prime Minister's and Treasurer's offices have been in contact with Ms Alberici for a number of weeks, seeking fair coverage of the Government's corporate tax policy. I also understand that the Treasurer's Office facilitated a briefing for Ms Alberici by the Australian Taxation Office.

Despite this, stories dated 14 February 2018 on the ABC website, on radio and television display a lack of understanding about the tax system, and have failed to accurately present the facts or the range of views on this issue with appropriate balance. Her coverage ignores the extensive evidence and expert opinion in support of the Government's corporate tax policy, which would enable fair treatment of this issue.

I understand that the Prime Minister's Office has discussed these concerns with the ABC's News Director, Mr Gaven Morris. Rather than address the concerns raised, Ms Alberici 'liked' and retweeted a politically partisan attack on the Government by the Opposition Leader.

I consider that Ms Alberici's coverage on this occasion falls well short of the standards set by the ABC's editorial policies, especially as it relates to independence, accuracy, impartiality and diversity of perspectives.

I ask that you investigate this issue as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely

MITCH FIFIELD

14/2/18

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ABC
Australian
Broadcasting
Corporation

Office of the
Managing Director

ABC Ultimo Centre
700 Harris Street
Ultimo NSW 2007

GPO Box 9994
Sydney NSW 2001

Tel. +61 2 8333 5342

Fax +61 2 8333 5172

abc.net.au

Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield
Minister for Communications
Minister for the Arts
Manager of Government Business in the Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

I write in response to the concerns that you have raised in relation to the recent reporting on company tax by the ABC's Chief Economics Correspondent, Emma Alberici.

As I'm sure that you are aware, Ms Alberici's news story and analysis piece, published on the ABC News website on 14 February 2018, have been the subject of complaints from the Prime Minister's office and the Treasurer's office, and an editorial investigation by the ABC's Audience and Consumer Affairs unit is underway into the concerns that have been raised.

While it would be premature to predict the outcome of the investigation, I acknowledge that in this instance our editorial processes failed. While both pieces went through the online sub-editing process, they were not upwardly referred to more senior editors prior to publication. This was a lapse and one ABC News and Editorial Policies have taken steps to avoid in the future.

Within 90 minutes of the stories being published, ABC News Director Gaven Morris read them and expressed some editorial concerns. The reports were subsequently reviewed and amended as there were some accuracy and contextual issues with the news story. As the analysis piece could have been interpreted as an opinion piece and therefore a possible breach of ABC impartiality guidelines, it was removed from the website, rewritten and then reposted.

This naturally prompted News' leadership to review the internal handling of stories. Today News employees were briefed on changes to some roles, with a greater focus on editorial standards. I am confident the changes will strengthen processes, improve accountability and boost the quality of our digital and broadcasting coverage. We are also creating a new digital unit within our existing Business Reporting Team to enhance quality control and increase oversight of daily news coverage.

No media organisation is infallible, but the important thing is that we scrutinise our coverage, investigate when things go wrong, fix our processes, and move forward. However, these instances will not deter us from holding individuals and institutions to account, and we will continue to independently shine a light on stories that need to be told. That is why more than 80% of the Australian public trust and value the ABC.



I trust this answers some of your queries, and I will write to you again when our investigation has been finalised.

Regards,

Michelle Guthrie
Managing Director