

ABC ALUMNI LIMITED:
ADDITIONAL NOTE TO APPEARANCE BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE
6 MARCH 2019: ABC ADVISORY COUNCIL

THE ABC AND ITS PUBLIC

At today's hearing (Wednesday 6 March 2019), the possibility was raised of more direct, formal audience involvement in the ABC – for example, by the addition to the ABC Board of a member drawn from the audience.

As we indicated, ABC Alumni considers this would be unworkable in view of the difficulty of identifying an appropriate method of nomination/selection/election, and the question of whether one individual could be expected to 'represent' the multiplicity of ABC users. Moreover, a board appointed by a proper process, and meeting the criteria we have outlined elsewhere, should be able, and trusted, to put the interests of ABC audiences ahead of those of any other group or entity.

However, we inadvertently neglected to mention the **ABC Advisory Council** and would like to take this opportunity to draw the Committee's attention to the existence of this body.

The ABC Advisory Council was established in 1983 under the provisions of Section 11 of the ABC Act to provide advice to the Board on matters relating to the Corporation's services.

The ABC invites applications to join the Council through promotions on ABC Radio and online twice a year. The Board appoints the 12 members of the Council for a period of up to four years. To ensure continuity on the Council, members are appointed for staggered terms.

The Council is expected, either on its own initiative or at the request of the Board, to advise the Board on matters relating to the Corporation's services.

The Council is an important point of contact between the ABC and its diverse audiences. We note that the current membership of the Council reflects a wide range of experience and background. <http://about.abc.net.au/who-we-are/abc-advisory-council/>

In addition to attending meetings, Council members are expected to undertake a range of individual activities, including

- viewing, listening and accessing ABC programs and services in order to understand and appreciate all aspects of output
- reading and considering reports and papers provided by the ABC.
- seeking community input on matters relating to ABC programming by canvassing community views and providing a written report to the Council
- attending community events held by the ABC

From time to time, the Council has proved invaluable in raising with the ABC Board issues and concerns that its members have deemed crucial to audience interests. These might include matters of which Council members have special knowledge and experience, such as rural and regional programming or programs for young people; and issues directly related to the Committee's inquiry such as funding cuts, the effect of staff cuts on programs, and apparent threats to the Corporation's independence.

ABC Alumni recognises the significant value to the ABC of the Advisory Council as a means of direct contact with, and feedback from, its audiences. We strongly support both its operations and the current system of appointing and maintaining it.

AUDIENCE RESEARCH

We also note that the ABC undertakes regular and detailed audience research by means of:

... a series of online surveys conducted three times per year requesting information from a nationally representative sample of people aged 18 to 75. The program provides insights into community perceptions and beliefs about the value of the ABC's contribution to Australian society. (ABC Annual Report 2017-18)

The ABC also monitors and analyses the work of other organisations working in audience research relevant to its own services.

Submitted on behalf of ABC Alumni by Helen Grasswill & Matt Peacock, directors