



CSIRO STAFF ASSOCIATION

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Submitted online

Submission into the inquiry into recent ABC programming decisions

Dear Committee,

Introduction

The CSIRO Staff Association is a section of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU). We represent approximately 3000 staff in CSIRO, including scientists, technical, support and administrative staff. The Staff Association supports CSIRO's education and communication activities and the roles and responsibilities of CSIRO's researchers under its Public Research Agency Charter (*CSIRO's 'Charter'*).

The CSIRO Staff Association endorses all recommendations contained within submissions into this inquiry from the Community and Public Sector Union (which includes the ABC Section) and from Science and Technology Australia. Our submission specifically pertains to science programming on the ABC and the impact that recent ABC programming decisions will have on the capacity to disseminate CSIRO science in Australia and deliver on CSIRO's mission and Charter.

CSIRO's mission and Charter

Under the *Science and Industry Research Act 1949*, CSIRO is required to '*collect, interpret and disseminate information relating to scientific and technical matters.*' It has an increasingly important and unique role, given the breadth and prevalence of science in providing solutions to assist the Australian community and industry as well as advising Government on national challenges like climate change, energy and food security.

CSIRO's good reputation is based on the independence, integrity and excellence of its mission-directed scientific research. Increasingly its role in Australia mandates that it not only disseminate information through scholarly methods including peer review, but it must also provide information and engage with public debates and the media.

CSIRO's Charter, enacted in 2008, recognises this evolving role through six key principles:

1. Open communication and dissemination of the findings of research
2. Encouragement of debate on research issues of public interest
3. Recognition of the role for researchers in such communication and debate
4. The contestability of ideas
5. Independence and integrity of public research institutions in their research activities
6. Government is accountable to Parliament and the people and is responsible for policy formulation and implementation

The CSIRO and the ABC

The CSIRO and the ABC have not dissimilar status in the Australian community in science and communications respectively. The ABC's independence and commitment to Australian production has ensured that ABC television has incorporated Australian and CSIRO science content on television. By example and contrast, Australian science is largely absent from commercial television, unless it pertains to news content.

The Australian community fundamentally trusts both the CSIRO and the ABC. It expects the ABC to promulgate public debate and discussion on our national challenges. It expects the CSIRO to tackle many of these same challenges and provide advice and solutions. We submit that internal production in the ABC is critical to ensuring that CSIRO's science is accessible to the Australian community on television.

The New Inventors

A consequence of the recent programming decisions by ABC management is the cancellation of *The New Inventors*, a program that uniquely provided exposure for Australian inventors and inventions as well as attracting and educating audiences on the invention process, from ideas through to research and commercialisation. No other program on Australian television provides this opportunity for innovation or educates the community about the invention process.

Recommendations

Given the above, the CSIRO Staff Association recommends that:

1. The ABC Charter be amended to include a commitment to broadcast Australian science content on television and other mediums;
2. CSIRO be encouraged to enter into a formal arrangement with the ABC to promulgate science content and debate on research issues of public interest on television and other mediums; and
3. *The New Inventors* program be reinstated and continue to be delivered through internal ABC production.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide a submission.

Yours sincerely,

Sam Popovski
Secretary