

**AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS (QUEENSLAND DIVISION) INCORPORATED
SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY ON THE AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING
AMENDMENT (FAIR AND BALANCED) BILL 2017**

Introduction

1. The Australian Democrats (Queensland Division) Incorporated is the organization which historically has represented the Australian Democrats in the State of Queensland. We welcome the opportunity to make this brief written submission to the Inquiry into the Australian Broadcasting Amendment (Fair and Balanced) Bill 2017.

Proposal

2. It is understood the proposal is to amend the ABC Charter to require the organization's news services to be fair and balanced.

Conceptual challenges

3. The concept that the news services of a public broadcaster should be fair and balanced seems reasonable. There are, however, some conceptual challenges with this:

- a) The notion of fairness can be notoriously subjective. This is especially so in the highly contested area of political reporting. Who determines what is fair, and what criteria are used?
- b) The notion of balance similarly may be equally problematic. Does balance mean that fringe groups with little scientific or intellectual support should be able to demand equal coverage from the ABC on any issue?

4. There may be a legislative way of dealing with such challenges, although we do need to be clear about what we are trying to achieve with fair and balanced reporting.

Structural challenges

5. Let us assume that there is some way of drafting legislation to deal with the above challenges. Even then, however, there is the structural challenge of how to implement such a change to the ABC Charter. Specifically, some compliance mechanism within the ABC needs to be established to scrutinize whether the news services of the organization are indeed fair and balanced, and to deal with potential complaints.

6. Such a compliance mechanism within the ABC would also need to be properly funded. There is little point in having objectives if there is no means to put such objectives into practice. We should note that all this is within the context of reductions in

the funding of the ABC in recent years, despite solemn pledges from Governments that this would not happen.

Conclusion

7. Amending the Charter of the ABC to require the news services of the organization to be fair and balanced may well be a laudable objective. However exactly what is meant by this needs to be defined, and the means for achieving this needs to be properly established and funded.

The Secretary, Dr J. Page,
Australian Democrats (Queensland Division) Incorporated