

ABC Programs

Dear Senate Committee

As an avid supporter, listener, and viewer of the ABC for over 35 years, I wish to comment on recent developments within the ABC that concern me.

I had hoped that the ABC would protect its remaining distinctive offerings after its unfortunate cancellation of the *The Religion Report* on Radio National a couple of years ago. It seems, however, that the shutting down of special interest programs is expanding into television.

I refer to the recent decision to terminate *Can You Help?*, *Collectors*, *Art Nation*, and *The Inventors*. None of these programs has an equivalent on the commercial networks. All of them deal with subject areas which are of particular interest and which can be easily justified under the ABC Charter. All of these programs are in my top ten favourite programs (along with *4 Corners*, *Catalyst*, *Australian Story*, *Spics and Specs*, *Media Watch*, *Compass*). I doubt I will be watching the programs scheduled to replace them. I won't be turning to commercial stations to view their offerings. There is very little on commercial TV that interests me. Against my will, I will be forced to reduce my consumption of the ABC.

Why is the ABC so hell bent on chasing ratings and competing with the commercial stations in areas that the ABC should sensibly avoid? It should concentrate on providing Australians with quality TV that is unavailable elsewhere. *Crownies* may have a popular following, but it's the kind of drama that's available on 7,9, and 10. Instead of concentrating resources on trendy drama, the ABC should be using our tax dollars to produce and protect the unique quality programming represented by the programs mentioned above.

Many subject areas which interest me have been catered for by the ABC. Producing specialist programming has been one of the most attractive features of ABC TV. It believed in what it was doing. Now, it seems determined to jettison this worthy practice. Its current purpose appears to be to gain high ratings and populist approval by offering the same bilge that cloy commercial TV. Why yearn for such a low objective? To base its programming choices on the desire for popular approval is akin to saying that McDonalds is our best provider of quality cuisine because it has the most customers. Rubbish.

I hope the ABC wakes up to itself to preserve its longstanding strengths and its responsibilities to its audience. Its value lies in its clear distinction from the other TV networks. I urge the Senate to use its influence to get the ABC back on track so that it can fulfill the foundations of its Charter.

Sincerely
Bill Wigglesworth