

Thank you Chair for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I was confirmed in the role of Staff-elected director on 1 May, following a hotly contested election managed by the Australian Electoral Commission.

I attended my first Board meeting on 17 May.

The Staff-Elected director has identical status to all other non-executive members of the Board. However, the role specifically exists to make sure that staff actions, attitudes and working conditions are described fairly and accurately to the Board, along with likely responses to key proposals.

The Staff-Elected director will also bring to the Board room a fuller understanding of the business, the history of the business and the broader media industry.

I have been at the ABC for the better part of 30 years.

I have been a content-maker, the Executive Producer of the Social History Unit and for 6 years, the manager of Radio National. Since 2011, I have worked in policy roles which have allowed me to develop a broad understanding of the ABC's operations and of global media trends.

In 2014 and 2015, I acted as head of the editorial policy unit for almost a year and have remained since then in the editorial policies team, working mostly with the Local and Regional division, where I advise and train content-makers on the myriad of ways through which the ABC protects its independence from not only political, but also commercial, sectional and personal interests.

During these decades at the ABC, I – like all my colleagues -- have known only change. Much of this change has been exciting.

Introducing new programs. Learning new technologies. Launching websites. Introducing podcasting. Building new digital radio stations.

And seeing generations of talented young people come into the organisation with new ideas.

However, other changes haven't been as much fun. The pressure to predict where audiences will go and how to move the organisation towards them is profound.

And I'm thinking also of successive budget cuts, some of them particularly harsh, resulting in restructures, redundancies, and the feeling experienced by

staff on either side of the microphones of being endlessly stretched and relentlessly scrutinised.

Throughout all of this period, the great constant within the ABC has been the commitment to the highest standards of independent public broadcasting, buoyed by the trust and support of the great majority of the Australian public, who recognise the value of a media organisation free from political agendas and commercial imperatives.

Earlier this year, I decided to run for the position of Staff-elected director because of my deep and growing concern over the leadership and some directions being taken of the organisation.

Despite that, I did not come on to the Board expecting that I would be involved so soon in something as difficult and tumultuous as the termination of a Managing Director and the resignation of the Chair.

It is the foremost duty of the Board to protect the ABC's two most precious assets – its independence and integrity -- and my own actions and decisions in recent times have been entirely guided by this duty.

These last two months have been difficult and demoralising for many staff. Nobody enjoys it when the ABC is in the news.

However, no matter how rightfully concerned employees have been at stages of this saga, they haven't missed a beat on air or online.

Throughout this period, the ABC has continued to provide its audiences, day in, day out, with invaluable content.

I shouldn't really single anything out, but just this week I've been so proud of the Don't Stop the Music series, a moving, entertaining yet serious program on the value of music education and some fine and important multiplatform reporting on problems surrounding the availability and use of medical implants and devices in Australia and the potential dangers which arise. And I've been thinking daily of colleagues in Queensland, stretched to the utmost providing emergency broadcasting to Australians affected by those dreadful fires.

However unedifying some parts of the last two months may have been, I believe that the ABC can now emerge in a stronger place.

I don't remember a period when we've seen a more intense debate on the value of the political and editorial independence of the ABC.

I hope this committee can make some solid recommendations on how to better enshrine and protect this independence.

As Acting Managing Director David Anderson said in the ABC's submission to the inquiry:

*Public confidence in the ABC and in its integrity is essential if it is to fulfil its role as the national broadcaster.*

*This level of confidence in the ABC can only be sustained through the protection of editorial independence, operational self-determination and budgetary security.*

*In order to ensure the ABC's statutory role is carried out and independence not only safeguarded but seen to be safeguarded, it is essential that the Commonwealth guarantee stable and sufficient funding for the national broadcaster.*

In conclusion, I appreciate that Senators will want to ask me about the events of the past couple of months.

I will do my best to answer them but as you are probably aware, Ms Guthrie has commenced proceedings against the ABC in the Fair Work Commission.

Because I am a potential witness in the proceedings I am limited in my ability to comment on matters concerning Ms Guthrie's termination from the Corporation. It is not in the best interests of the Corporation that I prejudice those proceedings.

I am also restricted in my ability to comment on Ms Guthrie's appointment, or any related matters that are subject to litigation.

Thank you.