

To the Senate Inquiry

*When I sent the article below, I was pushed for time and wished I could have been more specific.*

*But after reading in The Age yesterday, 10/09/2011, that the Book Show is to be replaced by a new program that deals solely with fiction, I am outraged. The Book Show is so diverse – from Mills and Boon to Encyclopedias, from classics to Kindle, and Ramona Koval is internationally respected for her skills as an interviewer who can respond with flair, wit and erudition to authors and publishers of all kinds. Ending The Book Show is sheer vandalism. Don't let it happen.*

*Virginia Burns*

I am in my seventies. ABC television and especially radio continue to provide some of the most satisfying experiences of my life. I am worried that the special strength of the ABC over the last seventy-something years are gravely threatened by current trends.

It was the ABC that provided training for writers, actors and producers of comedy and drama, and for intrepid and ethical reporting. The Commercial media, able to offer generous salaries for notable talent, often attracted these trainees, so that for decades the best of commercial media fed off the taxpayer-funded ABC graduates.

Today ABC In-house drama productions have been so greatly reduced that the outsourced products dominate out screens. Radio National struggles on valiantly, but relies too much on repeats to fill up its programs. The closure of some specialist programs e.g. the Religion Report, the Natural History Unit – has not been adequately or systematically compensated in some of the grab-bag alternative offerings. In numerous ways the independence of the ABC is threatened. More and more time is devoted to 'promos' and ads for the stuff at the ABC shop. Inadequate funding reduces the scope for innovation and genuinely experimental programming.

It is important that the ABC be protected from the prejudices of successive governments. Board appointments on the basis of media knowledge and experience is a step in the right direction. A truly independent ABC that honours the spirit of its Charter will not judge its success on the basis of ratings, but on the qualities of originality, creativity, ethical and fearless reporting, and on respect for the intelligence and diversity of the national and international audience. Don't sack the New Inventors!

Virginia Burns