

The Senate Inquiry into the ABC

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE ABC

As I understand it the ABC is a taxpayer- funded organisation with a particular Charter outlining its corporate functions to the public. It states among other things, a commitment to diversity, national identity, accurate dissemination of information and entertainment.

I have watched over the past 5 years or so with increasing dismay at the deterioration of a once highly principled, fair and informative journalistic approach to news, current affairs and debate on crucial issues that really matter to the public of Australia.

Accurate and Factual Debate on Critical Issues affecting the Australian Public

This Senate Inquiry must ensure that the ABC returns to the method of presenting debates of a critical nature with proper facts and distinguished peer reviewed science as much as they allow the sceptics and nay sayers to voice their opinion. The ABC should NOT develop a ratings mentality over proper informed and credible debate. The ABC is the only antidote to the reprehensible mainstream media we have in this country. It is very worrying that there are signs that the ABC is moving in a similar direction.

For example I was particularly angered by the ABC's portrayal in 2011/12 of the Carbon Price debate, choosing on many occasions to take the lead for its information from the Australian Newspaper and over exposing the debate of sceptics, merchants of doubt and climate change deniers. Examples of this fact can be seen time and time again on 7.30, Insiders, Q&A and the DRUM. People like Ian Plimer and Monckton for example were bestowed credibility by their over exposure in the media.

Only recently has the ABC decided to undertake a series of discussions on Channel 24 with what appears to be more peer reviewed science on climate change but perhaps this is too little too late.

On a personal note, as a person with disability climate change has far reaching implications. As the earth is warming and I am unable to "...cool off at the beach," a phrase some reporters use to trivialise the effects of global warming, the cost to me, and others like me, to survive these heatwaves, becomes expensive and problematic. It is offensive for ABC reports to minimise the scientific effects and environmental consequences of global warming at the expense of people's lives.

Other examples of where the ABC unashamedly takes its cues from the Murdoch press are the Peter Slipper Affair, The HSU affair and the AWU affair. Online publications such as the Independent Australia clearly forensically investigate these stories. The ABC has deliberately chosen not to take up the findings of Independent Australia as requested in an open letter to Mark Scott on some of these matters. Why? Is it that Mr Scott has an agenda to protect the truth about the Coalition's involvement in a number of these "scandals".

Recommendation

The Senate Inquiry to adjudicate that in future the ABC is seen to provide detailed and accurate analysis of any “scandal” from both points of view against any party instead of parroting only the views of the Australian.

Centralising the ABC

As a West Australian I am appalled at the lack of Western Australian representation of many of the ABC's programs. How often do we see WA being represented on major public programs such as The Insiders, Landline, Catalyst, Offsiders, Q&A just to name a few. Many of these programs due to the time difference are three hours in advance of WA making participation in tweeting activities problematic. How many times has Q&A for example visited Perth – twice I think.

This State with its economic growth and prosperity is supporting most of the East Coast and yet the ABC has over time axed the production of several programs and it seems likely that in 2014 the WAFL will end up with a commercial network adding yet another nail in the WA coffin. It is a travesty that the ABC's building in East Perth is now underutilised or hired out for external production companies like ScreenWest.

The ABC is Sydney centric or at least Eastern States centric. It does not represent the views of this vast state apart from spots on Australian story and Four Corners. We are the fastest growing state, we have a myriad of issues sometimes very different from those in the east and yet the ABC neglects to hear our voice. As Pam Casellas has written recently, in 1985 Western Australia had 7.8 per cent of ABC staff now it is just 5.4. Sydney on the other hand had 49.2 per cent of staff last year. It is not enough to be broadcasting nationally, the ABC needs to reinstate its mantra as a truly representative National Broadcaster.

The culture of ABC reporting

The culture of ABC reporting has deteriorated, particularly in the presentation and production of current affairs and news programs, to the point where it is now difficult to discern whether I am watching a commercial station or the ABC. The depth and accuracy of reporting that once distinguished the ABC from the tabloid press appear to be utilising many of the same techniques. For example in one report on 7.30 the journalist made a point right up front of mentioning how many times the Prime Minister mentioned Tony Abbott's name in a speech she had given that day. What relevance does this have to serious matters of state? The reporting should be on the details of the speech and how it might affect the country. This is not quality journalism, it is juvenile and trivialises important issues and only contributes to the dumbing down of our democracy, a very dangerous pastime by the media.

I am very concerned that the ABC is leaning toward commercialisation with its advertising of its own products. It appears Mr Scott does have an agenda to commercialise the ABC and if this happens this country will no longer have voice for true democracy.

Representation from other states - matching in weight

I welcome an intelligent and fair debate. However, on programs such as the DRUM, Insiders, Q&A, the weighting of the representations are far from even both in terms of geographical area and personnel. For example people like Judith Sloane, Amanda Vanstone, Tim Wilson from the IPA, Peter Reith, Piers Ackerman, Gerard Henderson and many others.

All these representatives have very strong links to the eastern states and to the Coalition and in many cases are ex politicians from the Federal Liberal Party. Many of them also work for the Australian Newspaper and we are all aware of its bias toward the conservatives. The predominance of their vitriolic viewpoint is not countered by the same level of representation from a variety of groups from other states who could present just as impassionate and possibly more accurate alternate views on issues such as climate change and the economy.

I believe Independent Australia has undertaken some research into the degree to which there is an overrepresentation of conservative think tanks on programs such as the Drum. I would like the Senate Inquiry to at least acknowledge this information in its deliberations.

Recommendation

That the Senate Inquiry investigates whether the ABC has intensified conservative representation on popular shows like the DRUM Insiders, and Q&A since Mr Scott's arrival.

Cuts to Tasmania

The ABC under Mark Scott seems hell bent on making cuts to the TV production in Tasmania. With the closure of the TV production unit Tasmania stands to lose a Tasmanian voice at the ABC, a risk to covering live sporting and cultural events, a loss of career paths for young Tasmanians wanting to eek out a career in the media and financial pressure on the local production industry that is very much reliant on the ABC for work.

Any decisions on this plan should be held off until the Senate Inquiry has finished its work.

I would like to know whether the establishment of Channel 24, which presents the same news sometimes over several days, albeit in different formats for 24 hours non-stop, has cost the Tasmanians a voice on the National Broadcaster.

Thank you for your time and effort. I wish you well in bringing our ABC back to its Charter and to quality journalism.