

Honourable members of the committee:

I have been employed by the ABC for ten years. I work in Content Services, formerly known as Archives, and so I get to spend my days in the vaults working with all the programs the ABC has produced since 1956—dramas, comedies, documentaries, sports, arts, current affairs, children's programs, and much more.

The old timers talk of a time when internal production was happening everywhere. Walking from one building to another at Gore Hill, you might pass a spaceman, and then a woman in a hoop skirt, and then someone in a gorilla suit. Television was being made all around you, and everyone felt like they were a part of it—even the accountants, security guards, lawyers and archivists.

At that time, the ABC served as a training ground for the Australian film and television industry, both through on-the-job experience and accredited training programs. Many of my older colleagues owe their technical expertise to the organisation, as do many people currently working in Australia's independent production sector. One great example is Don McAlpine, who started out as a camera assistant at the ABC in 1962 and went on to win an Oscar in 2001 for his cinematography on *Moulin Rouge*. That, to me, seems like an appropriate contribution for the ABC to make to the independent production sector.

Funding, however, does not. There are already Federal and state organisations whose job is providing funding to Australian productions. I do not believe that it should be the ABC's role.

But that raises the question about what exactly the ABC's role is, and more urgently, who makes decisions about the direction the organisation takes. At the moment, far-reaching decisions are being made by two people—the Managing Director Mark Scott, whose background is in journalism, and Head of Television Kim Dalton, whose background is in film finance. Their decisions presumably have the imprimatur of the Board of Directors, which currently does not have a staff-elected representative on it.

Shouldn't there be a wider range of people making such major decisions about the ABC? Shouldn't the staff of the ABC have some say about changes as fundamental as the ones being currently put forth? Shouldn't the Australian taxpayer? Or the Australian Parliament? Are Mr. Scott and Mr. Dalton accountable to anyone?

Much of Mr. Dalton's career has been in film finance, at the Australian Film Finance Corporation, Beyond International and the Australian Film Commission. He has stated that he always felt that the ABC managed partnerships poorly. This does raise some ethical questions about whether there is perhaps a conflict of interest in Mr. Dalton's now being in a position to decide where the ABC's funding gets directed. Does he genuinely have the ABC's best interests at heart?

Decisions about ABC programming should not be based on ratings or audience share. The goal is not to steal viewers away from the commercial networks—quite the opposite, in fact: it is to create programming for those Australians who are not interested in watching *MasterChef* or *Simpsons* reruns. And there are no advertising rates to set, which is the main purpose of ratings.

I think we need to see more transparency, accountability and consultation where major decisions about the ABC are being made, and I feel strongly that the ABC should have a genuine mixed production model that includes robust internal production.

Kindest regards,

Jon Steiner