

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Additional Estimates February 2017

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 100

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Pages 95-96, 28/02/2017

Topic: Media Watch reporting of comments by Keysar Trad

Senator Abetz, Eric asked:

Senator ABETZ: Are you able to explain why the horrid comments of Keysar Trad flew under the radar of the ABC without any mention on the bulletin, *7.30*, *Lateline*, *The World Today*, *Radio National*—you name it? Why were his horrid comments in relation to domestic violence being okay as a matter of last resort not deemed worthy by any of your outlets?

Ms Guthrie: I am glad that you clearly watched *Media Watch* last night. I must admit I watched with interest and I was glad that *Media Watch* had raised it. My colleague Mr Sunderland has more details, because we have done some work in identifying stories—the coverage that actually did occur. Mr Sutherland has those details.

Senator ABETZ: Time is very limited. If you could provide an answer to that on notice, but my concern is that, whilst I assume, Ms Guthrie, you do not micromanage each section of the ABC, what it highlights yet again is what I have referred to many times as the groupthink. The fact that all of the areas deemed it not worthy is indicative of a groupthink and a cultural set to ensure that these things are not covered. I will just make this comment before moving on to another lot of questions—

Ms Guthrie: Senator Abetz—

Senator ABETZ: If it were Cardinal Pell that said that, it would have led every single ABC news bulletin for 72 hours straight. There would have been a discussion on *7.30*, *The World Today* et cetera.

CHAIR: Senator Abetz, it is your five minutes to use, but if you have a question there, that would be helpful.

Mr Sunderland: Senator, it is really important just to state briefly—we will provide a detailed response to you—it was not ignored by the whole ABC; it was covered. It was covered on some of our outlets. Fundamentally, we are in agreement: we did not do a good enough job on it. We did not cover it as accurately and as comprehensively as we should have, and I agree with you.

Answer:

The comments made by Keysar Trad on *The Bolt Report* on the evening of 22 February 2017, were identified as a newsworthy story by ABC news outlets, including ABC NewsRadio. However, the comments were not selected as a story by other ABC news programs, including the 7pm bulletin, *7.30 AM*, *PM* or *Lateline*.

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Editorial decisions regarding which stories are selected for broadcast, the order of broadcast and the extent of reporting are appropriately made by each program team. This level of autonomy ensures that story selections are made in consideration of the particular audience and program brief.

One of the contributing factors to the decision by some ABC News programs not to air the Keysar Trad story was the prominence of other major stories at that time, including the Fair Work decision on penalty rates, the resignation of Ahmed Fahour as Chief Executive Officer of Australia Post and the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Nonetheless, ABC News management acknowledge that the story should have been given coverage across a greater number of ABC News outlets. The program teams have subsequently discussed this matter as part of regular editorial meetings.