

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice
Budget Estimates Hearings May 2014
Communications Portfolio
Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 3

Program No. Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 47-48 (28/5/2014)

Topic: Mr Ross – Broadband article

Senator Urquhart asked:

I want to turn to Nick Ross. Is Nick Ross the editor of the ABC's technology and games online gateway?

Senator URQUHART: Did Mr Ross publish two long articles analysing broadband policies in February 2013?

Mr Scott: He may well have. I do not have copies of them here. I am not particularly aware of them.

Senator URQUHART: Can you take that on notice?

Mr Scott: Yes.

Senator URQUHART: So do you know if this was the subject of a segment of *Media Watch* on 11 March 2013, which was critical of Mr Ross?

Mr Scott: Again, Senator, I will have to take that on notice.

Senator URQUHART: So at the time there were sharply different views of Mr Ross's original piece. Tech writer Rene Lemay said that Mr Ross represents fantastic value for the ABC's audience while the publisher of CommsDay Grahame Lynch said it was unbecoming of acceptable editorial standards. *Media Watch* said that the reports that Mr Ross had been disciplined were incorrect. Is that the case?

Mr Scott: I will have to take that on notice. This is over a year ago now. The coverage of the NBN has created some fevered commentary on all sides.

Senator URQUHART: But would you not be aware, Mr Scott, if someone was disciplined over a matter?

Mr Scott: Not necessarily. It was over a year ago. I do remember some controversy around the blog and NBN coverage, but the specifics of it are not at the top of my mind at the moment.

Senator URQUHART: You will take that on notice?

Mr Scott: Yes. I will take that on notice.

Senator URQUHART: There were no more substantial posts by Mr Ross on the NBN until 20 September. On the day after the election, he published a widely cited article that demonstrated the benefits from telehealth that would be enabled by the NBN. Was Mr Ross being prohibited on writing about the NBN before the election?

Mr Scott: No. Fundamentally, he is there to edit a website. That is his role. I will have to take that on notice.

Senator URQUHART: So you do not know whether he was prohibited?

Mr Scott: I think there has been some debate as to his role with the website. As I said earlier, we are having ongoing reviews on specialist websites. I think the ABC runs a lot of websites. I think our feeling is that we should be channelling more traffic to main websites and have more subsections of websites rather than standalone websites. So there has been some debate and discussion around those sorts of things. But on the specifics of Mr Ross, I will have to take that on notice.

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Answer:

Nick Ross posted a two-part article on broadband policy on the ABC's Technology and Games website on February 21, 2013:

- <http://www.abc.net.au/technology/articles/2013/02/21/3695094.htm>
- <http://www.abc.net.au/technology/articles/2013/02/21/3695152.htm>

He had previously published a long-form article on the issue in February 2012:

- <http://www.abc.net.au/technology/articles/2012/02/21/3435975.htm> .

The *Media Watch* episode of 11 March 2013 referred mainly to the two-part article published by Mr Ross in 2013, but also referenced the article published in 2012.

Mr Ross was not formally disciplined about his NBN coverage. The Head of Current Affairs raised with Mr Ross his editorial approach and the ABC editorial policies. Mr Ross has not been required by the ABC to cease publishing NBN content.