

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings November 2014

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 558

Program No. Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 29 (1/12/2014)

Topic: AM program interviews (China trade)

Senator McGRATH: On 17 November, a few weeks ago, the government completed negotiations on a landmark free trade agreement with China. On the *AM* program the next morning, there was a package by Naomi Woodley. In it, she only interviewed Margy Osmond from the Tourism and Transport Forum to get a reaction to the deal. Why were none of the representatives from the agriculture, mining and services industries—who really benefited from the free trade agreement—included in that program?

Mr Scott: We can come back to you on that, but—and Ms Torney may wish to add to this—we are operating, as I think we all understand now, on a 24-hour news cycle. We provided, I know, extensive coverage of the G20 and extensive coverage of the free trade deals and their impacts. I even noticed that the Minister for Trade was on *Insiders* last Sunday. Often, when you are coming back to a story the next day, you are taking into account that which had been covered and extensively broadcast in the media cycle of the previous day. If you are trying to maintain the engagement of your audience and take the story forward, it is quite important not to start the next day assuming that the previous day had not happened. In looking at who was interviewed on *AM*, I think you also have to look in and say: what angles were covered on *News 24* the previous day—the day of the announcement? On 7:30, on the 7 o'clock news, on *Lateline*, on *The World Today*, on our websites, because that is the full context of how the decision making around *AM* takes place. Also importantly, of course, at that hour of day, who is available and who you can track down and what other stories you are covering.

Answer:

The ABC provided coverage of the trade agreement with China across its many platforms and programs and throughout the negotiations, including the signing in November 2014. Assessing coverage based on a single program on one day does not accurately reflect the broad range of views canvassed on this issue by the ABC.

For example, on 17 November, the Minister for Agriculture spoke in favor of the agreement on *AM* and *The World Today* featured positive interviews with two different vegetable growers. On 18 November, 7.30 featured comments from the Prime Minister and an interview with the Trade Minister, Andrew Robb. There were industry responses on a number of programs, including comments from winemakers, the dairy industry and the cattle industry.

News Online and *The Drum* featured perspectives on the Agreement, including comments from Chris Berg, the Policy Director at the Institute of Public Affairs, and Professor Kerry Brown, the Executive Director of the China Studies Centre at the University of Sydney.