

**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: 571**

**Program No. Australian Broadcasting Corporation**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Social Media Policy**

**Senator McGrath asked:**

1. Does the ABC have a social media policy for its employees?
  - a. If so:
    - i. When was this policy introduced?
    - ii. When was this policy last reviewed?
    - iii. What limits are placed on ABC employees with respect to the use of private social media accounts, such as Facebook and Twitter?
    - iv. Are there any topics that ABC employees are not permitted to comment on?
    - v. Are there particular restrictions that the policy places onto ABC presenters who appear on TV and radio?
    - vi. Would it be a breach of the policy for an ABC presenter to promote anti-Government protests over ABC funding changes via Twitter?

If not, why not?

**Answer:**

1. The ABC has a "Use of Social Media Policy" which covers all of its employees.
  - (i) It was first introduced in November 2009.
  - (ii) It was reviewed, amended and re-issued in September 2011. It was reviewed again in 2013, but no changes were made to the policy itself. Further guidance notes were issued to assist staff in following the policy.
  - (iii) The policy is publicly available and can be found here - <http://about.abc.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/UseOfSocialMediaPOL.pdf>  
The policy makes it clear that "personal and professional use of social media by ABC staff and contractors must not bring the ABC into disrepute, compromise effectiveness at work, imply ABC endorsement of personal views or disclose, without authorisation, confidential information."

The policy then goes on at length to provide guidance and advice on the policy, including setting out the following four key standards:

- "1. Do not mix the professional and the personal in ways likely to bring the ABC into disrepute.
  2. Do not undermine your effectiveness at work.
  3. Do not imply ABC endorsement of your personal views.
  4. Do not disclose confidential information obtained through work.
- The ABC will enforce the four standards as and when appropriate."

**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**

The additional guidance to staff on the use of personal social media accounts was issued in October 2013 and is publicly available here - <http://about.abc.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PersonalUseOfSocialMediaINS1.pdf>

- (iv) The policy does not identify specific topics that are “off limits”. It expects all treatment of all topics to comply with the principles and standards of behaviour outlined in the policy.
- (v) The policy applies equally to all ABC staff, regardless of whether they are presenters, on air staff, content makers or support staff. However, the judgements about individual behaviours likely to bring the ABC into disrepute or breach the policy in other ways will differ according to the role and responsibilities of the individual person. The Guidance Note strongly suggests that staff do not comment on issues they are either reporting on or professionally involved with.
- (vi) It would depend on the specific circumstances. The Guidance Notes suggests that presenters should be particularly cautious in their social media activity.