

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings 2015

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 155

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 11-12, 30/11/2015

Topic: Political Bias complaints – Statistics

Senator Reynolds, Linda asked:

CHAIR: But isn't editorial quality quite a different thing from political bias? For the quality of your editorial content it seems to me that you are talking apples and oranges. You are talking about measuring editorial standards, but isn't that different from perceptions of political bias?

Mr Scott: I do not think so, because I think good journalism in this context is journalism that is fair, balanced and impartial. We have quite clear guidelines around contentious matters, that a range of perspectives be viewed, if not in that program then over time we can come back and review that. That is good journalism. If, in fact, we are failing tests of political bias—and I must say I have received allegations of political bias at the ABC from the right and from the left from time to time—then they are failures of tests of good journalism.

CHAIR: When I was having a look at this, the figures I got was that in 2012-13 there were 2,139 complaints of political bias. Have you got any later figures on the last financial year?

Mr Scott: I will take that on notice.

CHAIR: If you could take that on notice and also do an analysis for me on whether it is up or down. From what you have just said you can clearly work out whether it is bias—that it is too left or too right.

Mr Scott: I must say I have been amazed. I sometimes tell the story that when I started at the ABC Kerry O'Brien did a robust interview of John Howard. I asked the day after and I was told there were a lot of complaints. I said, 'How many complaints?' There were about 200 complaints. How did the complaints breakdown? Well, about 100 people were asking why Kerry O'Brien was so tough on John Howard, and about 100 people were asking why Kerry O'Brien went easy on John Howard.

CHAIR: Mr Scott, I appreciate that, but that does not quite go to my questions. First of all, you have taken my questions on notice. If you can break them down, because you have indicated before that you get ones that are complaining about different perceived biases, so if you could provide us with—

Mr Scott: I will see what break down we have on the data.

CHAIR: And how it compares with previous years.

Mr Scott: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Answer:

As reported in the ABC's 2015 Annual Report, there were 1,905 complaints of political bias in 2014-15.