

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings October 2016

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 121

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Written, 20/10/2016

Topic: Four Corners – ‘The Forgotten Children’ - inquiry

Senator Bushby, David asked:

1. In regards to the *Four Corners* program aired 17 October, 2016, titled: “The Forgotten Children”, will the ABC hold an inquiry or review into the making of this program?
2. In a statement dated 18 October, 2016, the ABC said: "The interviews with the children were conducted remotely by Four Corners, and their stories were subjected to the program's usual rigorous fact-checking processes".
 - i. Can the ABC outline how that was carried out and if usual processes were followed – did the ABC approach the Government of Nauru for comment?
 - ii. Did the ABC approach the Department of Immigration for comment?
 - iii. Does the ABC really believe claims by groups such as Amnesty International, that an Australian Government would allow ‘torture’ of anyone?

Answer:

1. In accordance with the ABC’s Code of Practice, the ABC’s independent complaints handling unit, Audience and Consumer Affairs, investigates complaints that allege breaches of its editorial policies. ABC Audience and Consumer Affairs is currently investigating one substantive complaint in regard to the program. No other inquiry or review is being conducted or is required.
2.
 - i. All factual elements of the story were rigorously checked to the normal high standards of *Four Corners*. Fact-checking involved checking details with multiple independent sources and cross-referencing dates and other data with documents and electronic metadata.

The program did not approach the Government of Nauru. The primary focus of the story was the Australian Government’s policy on border protection and so it was an appropriate course of action to approach Australian authorities to respond to the substantive issues raised.

- ii. The Four Corners production team was directed by the Office of the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection to put all questions related to the program to the Minister’s Office rather than to the Department. The ABC complied with this direction.
 - iii. The ABC does not have, nor has it expressed a view on whether the claims by Amnesty International were accurate or reasonable. No such claim was made on the *Four Corners* program.