

To whom it may concern

With respect to the 4 criteria under consideration by the Committee, I would like to submit my concerns for inclusion in the body of data that is collected for review:

- a. My wife and I are concerned that there is a real trend in recent years towards lowering of standards in speech and content on all networks, but my primary alarm concerns the ABC, which seems to be following the trend, rather than aiming to set a standard. Of course, I can only refer to the programs that I listen to and watch, but I have noticed a reduction of standards in general, and specifically in respect of our local ABC radio station's output (2CN). I have actually written to them about it twice. On the first occasion I received a reply, but on the second there was no acknowledgement - I assume they consider me a crank by now and not worth spending their time on, but this may be erroneous, as I have not spoken to them. I was on the point of writing to the ACMA when I heard about your review of standards.

Essentially my complaint is that 'gutter' speech and humour is allowed to be broadcast on public radio, and in particular on a 'family' program such as the breakfast show. I feel there should remain at least one carrier in society who is resistant to this lowering of standards and where a person can turn to if they want their entertainment untainted by such material.

I have enclosed a copy of the latest of my two letters for your information. I can supply the other one and the reply from 2CN if you wish. It did not really address my concerns, essentially implying that society is changing and so they are just 'keeping up', as it were.

- b. it seems to me that the current classification standards as an accurate reflection of the content contained in programs are not as effectiveness as they could be. I have now hard evidence available to support this, and once again can only rely on my own experience (one of which is cited above) to back me up. I do know that on two or three occasions in the past 18 months or so I have been very surprised when hiring a DVD with a 'G' classification for my children and discovering that some of the language and the themes to be much stronger and coarser than I would have expected at this level (eg. Pirates of Penzance, HMS Pinafore, and a number of others).
- c. I cannot comment on the operation and effectiveness of the complaints process currently available to members of the public, as I had not got to the point of trying it out, though I was about to. I imagine I will proceed in any case.
- d. I believe that there does need to be some review and maintenance of classification and censorship laws at a government level, because a system that merely relies on parental guidance is open to abuse. For example, many families, particularly those that might be labelled dysfunctional, provide an environment where many things pass on a regular basis that fall outside the guidelines, and the children that are affected by this are in danger of being affected in the medium to long term. We have friends who exercise no guidance at all to their children with respect to what they see and hear, and come across many other situations in the course of our work that appear to be similar. Once again, though, I can only relate my own experience, and this may be unrepresentative.

I strongly support the terms of reference that the Committee will address, and urge you to do all in your power to tighten up the existing processes, particularly with respect to public broadcasting codes of practice.

Bryan Hooley

December 21, 2007

The Station Manager
ABC 2CN
Cnr Northbourne Avenue and Wakefield Drive
DICKSON ACT 2602

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are only one family among many who listen to your station on a regular basis. In fact, my wife and I have been regular listeners to the 2CN breakfast program for approximately 25 years. We have felt that, in general, your programming has been interesting and informative.

Recently one of your announcers said that at the close of the year you were looking for feedback as you moved into a new year, so I have decided to go ahead and send you a letter I drafted some weeks ago and then decided to withhold, as I felt it would make no difference to the trends in public radio that concern me and some of my friends and acquaintances.

I want to raise two related issues that have alarmed me this year, the first of a general nature, and the second more specific, though related in content.

Firstly, there appears to be a growing drift towards regular use of vulgar and coarse language by your announcers. I notice this particularly with respect to the Breakfast Show team, but that is possibly because I listen to the program nearly every day, and only occasionally to other segments.

You will, no doubt, tell me that the language that is used merely reflects the language that is used in common speech in every day life. This may be true, but I would say that this puts the cart before the horse, so to speak. Irrespective of what is happening to the language amongst a large percentage of the population, and what you might hear if you were to listen to a commercial station, I understood that it was one of the functions of the ABC to hold up something of a standard, and to aim towards edification of its listeners, rather than follow them wheresoever they might lead. Perhaps I'm wrong about this and I need to look elsewhere for high standard radio, but I like to live in hope that someone in your august organisation may one day exercise some moral fibre and aim to set a high standard, rather than allow standards to be watered down.

Furthermore, there is a sizeable portion of the population who do not use coarse and profane expressions in their speech, and see no need to colour their communication in this way. It would be good to know that there are still one or two staff in your organisation who belong to this group, but from what I have heard, I am beginning to wonder.

I note that in recent years Messrs. David Kilby and Chris Uhlmann were consistently able to provide a very interesting, amusing and informative mix without having to resort to vulgar language and innuendo.

You will possibly say to me that that is the way the world is, and my reply will be a quote from the motion picture "The Mission", which is "no, that is the way we have made it."

Secondly, and more specifically, I was unhappy about your decision to promote Andy Griffiths and his wares back in November. Having looked at examples of his writing, I have come to several conclusions:

- I do not agree that his writing is of sufficiently high standard or tone to endorse over and above some of the better work that is currently available from the pens of other Australian authors such as Emily Rodda, Odo Hirsch, Jackie French and others.

- we feel that Mr Griffiths' preoccupation with the type of humour and subjects of the kind that he seems to specialise in is at worst detrimental to his target audience, and at best tiresome. The fact that many kids enjoy it is irrelevant. They can (and do) pursue topics of this kind without any help from popular authors, who would be far better employed seeking out subject matter that stretches and expands the mind, rather than dwelling on playground material.
- the argument that this style of writing will catch the attention of the target group and interest reluctant readers in reading may be partly true, but it isn't a justification. One might as well say that in order to interest high school boys in biology we should introduce a unit on pornography. Of course the subject would catch the interest of the target group, but it wouldn't be helpful for them in the long run.
- some children are unhappy with the subject matter in question (or at least the way it is dealt with in writing of this type), but laugh through embarrassment or so as not to be seen as different. We were alerted to the work of Mr Griffiths when our daughter came home from primary school to report that her teacher was reading one of the 'Bums' series, and that she would prefer not to participate because she felt very uncomfortable. There were others in the class in the same predicament.

Your promotion for the interview with Mr Griffiths implies that you are happy to endorse his work. I believe that this is an unfortunate position for presenters of an ABC radio program to place themselves in. You will no doubt consider my family prudish, but this is in fact not the case. The kind of subject matter that Mr Griffiths deals with is part of the ordinary and mundane, and many thinking people are content to leave it in this place. There are, however, some writers and comedians who realise that there is easy money to be made from 'gutter' humour and so tend to narrow their audiences experience instead of developing themes that broaden thinking and edify readers and listeners.

At the very least it would be good to hear similar interviews with authors such as Jackie French and many others whose writing takes their readers into places they may never have the opportunity to go and introduces ideas that they may never have considered on their own. And all this using language that expands the mind and the vocabulary, and widens literary and linguistic horizons.

I wish you and your team a restful Christmas and a worthwhile New Year. I trust that you will be willing to consider what I have said when in future you vet programs and select your staff for the excellent service they generally provide.

Sincerely,

Bryan Hooley