

From: Noel MATTHEWS [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 31 July 2001 11:19 AM
To: ecita.sen@aph.gov.au
Subject: Senate Inquiry on ABC Board Appointments

The ABC is essential to Australia's culture and democracy, and must be maintained as a well-resourced and comprehensive national public broadcaster. It must be, and must be seen to be, independent of commercial and political influence.

There is a fundamental flaw in the present system of appointments to the ABC Board which has enabled successive governments to stack the Board with people sympathetic to particular causes who have acted in such causes and not in broader national interests. In particular the present Board plumbs the depths of these shortcomings and it, and its Managing Director, do not have the confidence of the public they are supposed to serve. It is difficult to seek to *enhance* something which has been eliminated.

The flaw is a structural one - the non-separation of the elements essential to an independent media. The integrity of the *program and content* functions of our national broadcaster should be kept *separate and apart* from the incursions of *political and commercial influence*. What is needed is a guarantee of editorial independence.

In particular the uncertainty about the ABC receiving proper, non-directional and 'no strings attached' funding must be eliminated.

This is even more critical given the spread and diversity of the ABC's media outlets - national TV, various radio networks, and the expanding on-line radio and TV services.

Because of this flaw we regrettably have a Managing Director who instead operates as a *bridge* between the influence and funding factors and the program and content roles, even to the extent of assuming editor-in chief aspirations! With no control over his directions ever likely to come from the present Government's tame cat Board!

What is needed is a *barrier* between influence/funding and program/content.

To remedy the flaw,

1. The MD's role should be confined to administration and corporate governance of the ABC group structure.
2. Control of programming and content should vest in the ABC's line managers.
3. Control of the various media channels should be vested in editorial positions, with each editor *responsible to the Board* for programming accuracy, fairness and completeness.
4. The ABC's financial requirements and functions should be the responsibility of the Board - this is basically a matter of dealing with the incumbent Government, and best this be done in a manner subject to public scrutiny .
5. All nominees for positions on the ABC Board should be submitted for approval of via a Senate Committee confirmation process, also observable by the public.

It is considered that re-structuring along the foregoing lines would provide an apolitical and ongoing solution to a situation which has currently reached an extremely serious state. It is strongly recommended for the Committee's consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Noel L Matthews