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The Secretary
References Committee S157
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Members of References Committee S157,

We understand that your enquiry terms of reference are: "The development and implementation of options for methods of appointment to the board of the ABC that would enhance public confidence in the independence and representativeness of the ABC as the national broadcaster."

We have a long-standing concern at the slow financial and political strangling of the ABC.

The value and merits of the ABC are far from lost but, by political and management attrition, it is a reduced service from what it can and should be; used to be; and to what the Australian people deserve and are willing to pay for.

Only through a fearless and passionate Board (with fearless and passionate Board appointees) can the independence, quality and intellectual reach of the ABC be restored and developed to what the Australian people deserve and are willing to pay for.

A proper method of appointment of board members is the first requisite if the ABC is to achieve independence, quality and intellectual reach.

With terms of reference such as yours, it does not look promising. It is enough for us to wonder if the Senators are serious in their desire to act for the Australian people they represent (in the broadest context), or whether there are other's agendas at work.

For many of us who live outside the political mindset that generated these terms, we read them to be "how will we make it look OK on the outside, while perhaps doing nothing practical to make the Board accountable to the ABC's audience, the Australian people".

If the committee is to be of value, it must turn its efforts to developing only those options that can lead to appointment of truly passionate independent Board members that are capable of enabling the ABC to become a national broadcaster with independence, quality, geographic and intellectual reach.

The committee must also recommend and argue their preferred option. It is not enough to provide the political parties with a smorgasbord of "options for methods".

Particular criteria that we propose for appointment to the ABC board include:

- 1 A passionate and steadfast belief in a politically independent ABC.
If by dealing fairly, the ABC upsets the politicians of the day (of diverse groupings), then that will be fine.
- 2 A passionate desire to reveal the breadth of opinion that exists amongst the Australian people.
Not a filterer, but a revealer of the diversity and range of beliefs and aspirations for good amongst the people. By public debate, we begin to see the integrity or sophistry of the participants.
- 3 A passionate desire and belief in promoting multi-partisanship between Australia's people and their political and other representatives.
Unity of the people, and accommodation between them is vital for Australia's success in all things. This does not require homogeneity, but we must work and argue together, not work and argue apart.
- 4 A belief in the past and future role of the ABC in promoting the best aspects of Australia, and excellence both within and without Australia, through (for example):
 - News
 - Current affairs
 - Educational services to all ages
 - Music, drama, and the other arts programs
 - Science and technology
 - Oral and other history

- Regional and international affairs
 - Consumer affairs
 - Cultural programs that enrich our lives, and widens our horizons.
- 5 A passionate and steadfast belief in developing and broadcasting locally made Australian content.
Put the "A" for "Australia" backs into the "ABC". Where obtaining programs from overseas, select on the basis of excellence (as with Australian made programs) and complementarity.
 - 6 Cunning and determination to achieve long term and sufficient funding. Restore minimum funding at least equal to the real value of funding in 1995/1996. What we Australians want, we must pay for.
 - 7 An unconfused understanding that to meet the ABC's objectives requires dedication, independence, and freedom from commercial compromise, indebtedness or taint.
 - 8 Respect.
Respect from the Australian people.
 - 9 Fighting spirit.
 - 10 Fairness to the people.

By keeping these criteria foremost, we trust that you will devise a suitable mechanism for appointment of Board members to the ABC.

Yours sincerely,

Ken & Betty Walters

ps. The same criteria should be applied to the existing Board members also. To judge by the recent decline in the ABC (that has occurred during the present Board's stewardship) such application would likely require much change.