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The Secretary
Senate ECITA References Committee
S1.57
Parliament House
CANBERRA 2600

Dear Senate Committee

I applaud the undertaking of your Inquiry into the development and implementation of options for methods of appointing to the board of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) that would enhance public confidence in the independence and representativeness of the ABC as the national broadcaster.

The ABC plays a crucial role in our Australian society and has a charter that is admirable. I believe that the ABC's effectiveness in meeting its charter has been compromised over the last decade or so because of funding cuts and political appointments to the Board.

Measures to reduce the level of perceived or actual political interference in the operation of the ABC via the Board membership and other means are necessary and overdue.

I have a proposed system which would meet the above aims. It is outlined in the following pages.

I can be contacted on [REDACTED] should any further details be required.

Yours Faithfully



Adele Doust

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Boards and committees need people from a variety of backgrounds to ensure they reflect the diversity and interests of the community.

An effective method for the appointment of people to the board of the Australian Broadcasting Commission is to provide a system for Board members to be elected rather than selected/appointed by the government or other body.

Such a system is already in place in other high profile organisations such as the National Roads and Motorists Association (NRMA).

While appointing people to a board may provide a greater likelihood of appointees having previous board experience, there are considerable disadvantages in this process. This system delivers perceived or actual political appointments. Appointees are often drawn from similar class, ethnicity, background, and gender. This system does not guarantee that appointees will possess the capability for a board position.

Holding a democratic election for Board appointments means that members of the community can choose their representatives in the same way as they can for parliament. This provides greater likelihood of the board being representative of the diversity of the community and the board being more reflective of the wishes of the community for their national broadcaster.

The Australian public has confidence in the capability of people from the general community to act in elected roles in parliament or to make important decisions in juries. Providing opportunities for people to act as board members is a similar responsibility; not something to be taken lightly but not beyond the capability of people either. Successful candidates would almost certainly possess an adequate level of capability for a board appointment to be elected (given that they have to do so on merit, not via a huge media campaign).

WHO WOULD BE THE VOTERS IN SUCH A SYSTEM?

Anyone who is on their State Electoral Commission electoral roll should be eligible to vote in the ABC Board elections.

To be notified of the ABC election process vote they must be placed on the ABC Board electoral roll.

This could be achieved by ticking a box on the normal electoral roll forms (for new voters), or by applying to be added to the ABC roll at any time prior to the closing of the roll before an election (eg two months prior).

HOW WOULD CANDIDATES BE IDENTIFIED?

Each state should have a number of places on the board, eg 2 per state/1 per territory.

Nominations should be able to be made from any Australian citizen with a given number of people sponsoring the nomination, as is the case in nominating for the NRMA Board or to run for parliamentary office as an independent.

Nominees must provide information on why they wish to be elected to the board, and what they can offer to the Board (details of their relevant experience). This is the process undertaken for the NRMA board elections.

These nominations would be compiled into a state candidate list and sent out to those on the ABC electoral role for a ballot.

PROCESS FOR ADVERTISING THE NOMINATION PROCESS

The extensive media reach of the ABC provides the possibility for nominations to be received from members of the Australian public from city, rural and regional areas of Australia, thus increasing the scope for balance and diversity in board membership.

Advertising would be undertaken via community announcements on the ABC network – television, radio and online- in the same way as the ABC currently do when seeking nominations to their community reference panel.

Utilising the ABC outlets has the benefit of being:

- ✓ Simple and cost effective
- ✓ Effective in reaching a target audience (ie of people interested in the ABC)
- ✓ Manageable in terms of delivery/coordination

PROCESS FOR ELECTIONS

I believe proportional representation style of vote counting is the fairest way to ensure a dynamic range of backgrounds and opinions. This counting style may prove difficult to implement given the small number of positions in each state and an expected wide range of candidates. It is worth investigating to see what other organisations such as the NRMA do in their Board elections.

Voting could be achieved via postal and online ballots (again, this is the system utilised in NRMA board elections).

The system must be structured to ensure against:

- People needing/wanting to spend a great deal of money in a campaign to get themselves elected.
- Elections being open to stacking by people with a set agenda

MANAGING/ SCRUTINEERING THE PROCESS

Having either the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) or a combined effort by the State Electoral Commissions (SEC) would ensure the integrity and independence of the electoral process.

WHO WOULD PAY?

| | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Advertising | Part of normal ABC programming budget |
| Receiving nominations | At nominee's expense |
| Coordinating nominations and preparing voting material | AEC or SEC |
| Distribution of voting material | AEC or SEC |
| Vote counting | AEC or SEC |

Minimising Costs

Board members could be either unpaid or receive only a minimal fee. This would keep costs down while ensuring that those nominating are not doing so in order to gain a form of employment. Travel expenses should of course be covered for board meetings.

Those nominating to be a member of the voting electorate could be asked to pay an annual fee (with appropriate concession rates) to be on the roll. This would cover the costs of the distribution of electoral material. Philosophical difficulties in terms of access to democracy would need to be considered in this context.

By adopting such measures, the main costs of having such a process would be the coordination of nominee material at the state level prior to the election and the counting of the postal votes at election time.

CONCLUSION

The system outlined above for the appointment of people to the board of the Australian Broadcasting commission would achieve the goals of:

- Enhancing the public confidence in the effectiveness and representativeness of the ABC as the national broadcaster
- Improving transparency in board appointments and reducing the perceived or actual problems of political interference
- Providing a means for members of the community to be actively involved in their national broadcaster