

## OPENING STATEMENT BY ABC MANAGING DIRECTOR

Thank you Chair for the opportunity to make some introductory remarks.

Since the last hearing, I have made some significant announcements about the ABC's strategy and structure.

The ABC is one of Australia's most important and trusted cultural institutions. At a time of major disruption in the media sector, its remit to inform, educate and entertain the nation cannot be understated. A vibrant, productive, effective ABC is more important than ever.

As a public broadcaster, the ABC must work within a fixed funding envelope. The ABC Act requires the Corporation to be both efficient and effective in discharging its responsibilities.

The changes I announced on 7 March are very much in keeping with those two key guidelines. They firmly align with the strategy set by the ABC Board and management. We are streamlining our structure and reducing layers of management with the proceeds to be translated into a tangible lasting return for ABC stakeholders. All that money saved will be invested in new audience-facing activities – telling compelling Australian stories.

I can report that we have made substantial progress in relation to this strategy. ABC Regional has begun recruiting 30 jobs across 19 regions – the first steps towards the creation of 80 new content positions in a \$15 million annual investment. We have expanded our regional radio streaming with seven new services, including Broken Hill and Port Macquarie. We have launched our Content Fund, open for our employees to begin pitching in the next few weeks.

Redundancies, while regrettable, are a necessary part of funding this work. In March, I signalled that that 150-200 positions would be made redundant. This includes the efficiency initiatives in Television and News, which resulted in a reduction of approximately 70 employees. The other projected 120 positions are primarily in senior and middle management and overwhelmingly Sydney-based. Consultations have begun with affected employees in some divisions and more will begin over the next few days.

While we will be addressing duplication in some content areas, our primary objective is to maximise the benefit for audiences. As part of that process, and separate to the Content Fund, I will be announcing tomorrow we are committing an extra \$2.9 million to our genre coverage in the key fields of arts, science and education. There will be a total of nine new digital positions across arts and science and we will devote an extra \$2 million to new programming as part of a dedicated cross-platform education strategy that has ABC Adelaide as a central hub.

At a time when other media organisations are abandoning these key genres, the ABC is stepping up its commitment to providing distinctive, quality local programming. In science, we had the remarkable success of *Stargazing Live* in early April. The ABC facilitated a fascinating and educative national conversation about the unique wonders of space and our cosmos. *Catalyst* will be returning to our screens later this year.

Our documentary series *War on Waste* has helped drive a national debate about an important topic. And this week's Four Corners focus on the Lindt café siege demonstrates the value that that ABC brings through its commitment to and resourcing of investigative journalism.

The ABC has a long and proud association with Anzac Day, informing and educating Australians about the experiences of our servicemen and women and honouring their service by broadcasting Anzac commemorative events across the country.

This year, we covered the Governor-General's Anzac address in Papua New Guinea, dawn services live from Gallipoli and Villers-Bretonneux, as well as the marches in each of the Australian capital cities. These events were viewed on the ABC by over 2 million people across the nation.

The ABC has also teamed with the Department of Veteran's Affairs in the creation of a series of interactive mobile applications that allow users, particularly children, to explore the theatres of World War One.

These apps show how effective the ABC has been in using the digital medium to inform, educate and entertain, as its Charter requires. I have no doubt that this Estimates session will further explore the ABC's digital role. But I need to make it clear that the public expect the ABC to make its full breadth of content, including the extraordinary journalism displayed on Four Corners, available to them on all platforms, including digital. The national broadcaster should not be used as a scapegoat for the problems that confront others in the digital media landscape.

In concluding, I would also like to note that the ABC family has suffered two significant losses in the last month, with the deaths of the great satirist, John Clarke, and acclaimed journalist, Mark Colvin. Both men are known to many in this room. I think we all appreciate the contribution they made to the community. They were great storytellers and have left a rich legacy.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.