



Monday 13 February 2023

Senator the Hon Sarah Henderson
Senator for Victoria
C/o -

Sarah

Dear Senator ~~Henderson~~,

I refer to your letter of 5 February 2023 in relation to the ABC's reporting of the Alice Springs town meeting on 31 January.

ABC News has acknowledged that the *AM* story that morning was incomplete when it was broadcast. It ought to have included further perspectives and context concerning the meeting. Over the course of 31 January, the ABC ensured that those perspectives were reported in subsequent radio current affairs programs and on other platforms including *News Breakfast*, the News Channel, local radio and News Online.

ABC News management takes responsibility for the *AM* story going to air in that form and stands by the reporter, who provided important perspectives on complicated issues.

After reviewing the story and the actions leading up to its broadcast it became clear that logistical and editorial management breakdowns had contributed to an incomplete report being aired, and the ABC has apologised to audiences and drafted an editors note which linking to stories containing a broader range of perspectives.

The ABC Ombudsman received 18 complaints about the original *AM* report. On February 10, the Ombudsman shared her preliminary findings with ABC News Management. ABC News Management had already commenced re-editing and reposting the original story. The *AM* story now has the following editor's note on the ABC website.

Editor's Note

This report includes the views of some people who attended the community meeting and their immediate reaction. Those views were reported accurately. However, this report should have included a broader range of perspectives expressed at the meeting and further information about what was discussed. The story also included an inaccurate estimate of the number of attendees at the meeting.

The story has been edited to correct the error and to include extra context and a wider range of perspectives. ABC News apologises to audiences for initially providing an incomplete picture of the event. ABC News management takes responsibility.

Some of this additional reporting is available [here](#) and [here](#).

We accept that we should have publicly recognised the flaws in the *AM* package earlier and apologised to audiences.

Notwithstanding the weaknesses in the *AM* package, we stand by the ABC's overall coverage of the event, including those reported later by the *AM* reporter. Those reports included segments by her on the News Channel and a longer more complete story on the situation in Alice Springs which was broadcast on *730*.

The ABC has covered extensively the escalating violence in Alice Springs on all platforms, including on radio current affairs programs both before and after the meeting.

The perception of racial tension in Alice Springs is the honestly held opinion of some Alice Springs residents. That perspective, including the description of "white supremacy" is significant and it would be remiss of the ABC not to report it, if that is what we are being told. As noted above, the views of the organisers and other participants should also have been in the *AM* story.

We stand by the *7pm News* package of Wednesday evening, which did include all relevant perspectives. It has been criticised for including a grab that suggested that young offenders (clearly meaning Indigenous youth) should be taken out into the 'scrub' and left there. That was evidence that there were racist undertones at the meeting as well as explicitly racist views expressed after the meeting. It was appropriate to report that.

The comments by Professor Nareen Young on *The Drum* were her own opinions and were not endorsed by the program. It was included in one comment in an

approximately 16-minute segment, which was clearly framed by the presenter as a discussion of the alcohol restrictions and the wider issues in Alice Springs, not the meeting. Professor Young brought up the meeting unprompted noting that she had seen a video of the meeting and her reaction was that there was 'racism and vitriol' in the room, and 'lack of regard for those people on their land'. Since it was not the main focus of the discussion and Professor Young was the only person who seemed to have seen the meeting, she was not challenged, and the presenter redirected the discussion back to its main themes.

Professor Young's view was informed by having seen a video of the meeting, and she was entitled to express her personal view on it. That is in keeping with the format of *The Drum* and given that it was peripheral to the main discussion there was no obligation to challenge or balance her perspective within the program.

In summary, we recognised that the *AM* story was lacking, we corrected it, and apologised. Notwithstanding this error, the ABC has provided the most comprehensive, accurate and balanced coverage of the ongoing issues in Alice Springs in the Australian media. We stand by that coverage and our reporters.

Regards,

David Anderson
Managing Director