

Senate inquiry into ABC programming

Dear Senators,

As this is a slightly late submission to your inquiry into recent ABC programming decisions, I will be brief.

1. I regard the ABC as one of Australia's most significant public institutions: a lifetime educator, a source of information and understanding, and a platform for both the expression and the evaluation of our cultural life in all its diversity. It is a national treasure almost universally respected and supported in the community, and its integrity and strength derive from its freedom from government and commercial influence and from the calibre of its programs.

2. Programming is the responsibility of the ABC, not the Australian government. However it is the responsibility of the government to ensure that the ABC Charter continues to guide the national broadcaster. It is a concern that recent changes to programs may contravene the spirit if not the letter of the Charter that persuades me to direct your attention to the disturbing and harmful increase in outsourcing television programs. It appears that we will soon have an ABC that is largely a presenter rather than a producer of television programs other than news and current affairs and 'live' shows. The result is a decrease in the skills and creativity of in-house staff; a diminution of ABC control over content and presentation (despite management claims to the contrary, there is historical evidence to support this statement); and the criteria for the selection of programs increasingly dependent on their commercial on-sale viability - an example of the commercial tail wagging the public interest dog.

3. There is a possibility that there are those in ABC management who favour outsourcing for ideological reasons. However I believe that a key explanation for what has been called this growing 'privatisation by stealth' is the practical problem of insufficient funding to support a robust production culture. That is a difficulty directly attributable to inadequate government funding over many years. Doing more with less - a common defence by management for outsourcing programs - is unsustainable in terms of program quality, diversity and integrity. This is a problem the government can overcome by ensuring that its funding is sufficient to renew and support in-house production.

Sincerely,
(Dr) June Factor