

Submission to Senate Inquiry into the ABC

I write to express my opposition to changes to the ABC which would lessen its independence. I have travelled to New Zealand recently and realised how precious a tax payer funded independent media provider is. Without this vital institution Australians' reliance on electronic media will be subject to commercial considerations that will have the effect of lessening the free and fair reporting of news. Recent revelations with regard to the Murdoch Media in the United Kingdom have demonstrated the very real dangers to our Australian way of life that are posed when commercial media becomes too powerful.

I would go so far as to say that any diminution of the independence of the ABC poses a real threat to the quality of our democracy and the very freedoms so hard won and safeguarded in war. This means I want an ABC which is focussed on quality and diversity and not commercialism, the market or ratings. When I consider some of the major changes for the better that resulted from current affairs programmes on the ABC; eg. A Royal Commission into the Queensland Government after a Four Corners Programme, I feel that only by protecting and strengthening an independent ABC can we be sure that there will always be the dedication and commitment required for the kind of investigative reporting which keeps our institutions, public and private accountable. These are not things which are usually provided by the commercial media.

Funding needs to be adequate to build high level programming, on line, radio and TV. If programming is not supported the quality we require cannot be assured. I understand that for many politicians the ABC has proven troublesome, especially to those sitting on the treasury benches. With the commercial media almost all being unduly influenced by a political elite, a cashed-up ABC is the people's protection from undue influence.

Funding needs to come to the ABC without strings attached, unless they are focussing on quality and independence. A reliance on funding from outside sources endangers the ability of the ABC to make programmes which cater to the needs, interests and priorities of the Australian community.

In these days of slogan driven politics Australians rely on having an independent media provider that will inform us and make our institutions accountable. If it is not the ABC then this function will not be performed. SBS has been so badly compromised by its need to gain advertising and sponsorship that the ABC's role is now an unique part of our media landscape.

Hans Paas JP