

Environment and Communications

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2023 - 2024

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

Committee Question Number: 25

Departmental Question Number: SQ23-004830

Division/Agency Name: Agency - Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Reference: Spoken, Page No. 60 (24 October 2023)

Topic: ABC - RMIT's Voice Referendum fact checks

Senator Malcolm Roberts asked:

Senator ROBERTS: I'm told that between 1 June and 29 September, according to ABC's financial statements, RMIT published 16 Fact Checks in relation to the Voice referendum and 94 per cent were in relation to the 'no' campaign. Do you consider this meets the ABC's editorial standards of balance and impartiality?

Mr Anderson: When I look across the entire coverage of the Voice referendum, I do think so. I do think that we have.

Senator ROBERTS: No. I asked specifically about the RMIT. You requested RMIT to check one 'yes' campaign message and 15 'no' campaign messages.

Mr Anderson: It's a good point. I will go back and respond to that on notice.

Answer:

Between 1 June and 29 September, RMIT ABC Fact Check published a total of 17 articles covering the Voice to Parliament debate.

The breakdown of the claims examined for each of the 17 articles is as follows:

- Two focused on claims made by the Yes campaign or Yes proponents
- Ten focused on claims made by the No campaign or No proponents
- Five focused on claims made by campaigners or proponents of both sides

13 of the 17 articles were web versions of Fact Check's newsletter CheckMate, which is published to the Australian Broadcasting Company's (ABC) News website. The purpose of this newsletter is to quickly respond to claims circulating on social, broadcast and print media in a timely manner. During the referendum campaign, CheckMate informed voters by providing important context for these claims, without labelling them with a verdict.

In the lead-up to the Voice to Parliament referendum, Fact Check monitored all forms of media for misinformation and disinformation as well as receiving tip-offs from the public. Checkable claims more frequently surfaced from proponents of No arguments than from proponents of Yes arguments. When a Yes claim surfaced which was checkable and important to the national debate, Fact Check made sure it was covered in a timely manner.