

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Additional Estimates Hearings February 2016

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 182(b)

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Written, 19/02/2016

Topic: Reviews

Senator Ludwig, Joe asked:

Since the change of Prime Minister on 14 September, 2015:

1. How many new reviews (defined as review, inter-departmental group, inquiry, internal review or similar activity) have been commenced? Please list them including:
 - (a) the date they were ordered
 - (b) the date they commenced
 - (c) the minister responsible
 - (d) the department responsible
 - (e) the nature of the review
 - (f) their terms of reference
 - (g) the scope of the review
 - (h) Who is conducting the review
 - (i) the number of officers, and their classification level, involved in conducting the review
 - (j) the expected report date
 - (k) the budgeted, projected or expected costs
 - (l) If the report will be tabled in parliament or made public
2. For any review commenced or ordered, have any external people, companies or contractors being engaged to assist or conduct the review?
 - (a) If so, please list them, including their name and/or trading name/s and any known alias or other trading names
 - (b) If so, please list their managing director and the board of directors or equivalent
 - (c) If yes, for each is the cost associated with their involvement, including a break down for each cost item
 - (d) If yes, for each, what is the nature of their involvement
 - (e) If yes, for each, are they on the lobbyist register, provide details.
 - (f) If yes, for each, what contact has the Minister or their office had with them
 - (g) If yes, for each, who selected them
 - (h) If yes, for each, did the minister or their office have any involvement in selecting them,
 - i. If yes, please detail what involvement it was
 - ii. If yes, did they see or provided input to a short list
 - iii. If yes, on what dates did this involvement occur
 - iv. If yes, did this involve any verbal discussions with the department
 - v. If yes, on what dates did this involvement occur

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3. Which reviews are on-going?
 - (a) Please list them.
 - (b) What is the current cost to date expended on the reviews?
4. Have any reviews been stopped, paused or ceased? Please list them.
5. Which reviews have concluded? Please list them.
6. How many reviews have been provided to Government? Please list them and the date they were provided.
7. When will the Government be responding to the respective reviews that have been completed?
8. What reviews are planned?
 - (a) When will each planned review be commenced?
 - (b) When will each of these reviews be concluded?
 - (c) When will government respond to each review?
 - (d) Will the government release each review?
 - (e) If so, when? If not, why not?

Answer:

1. As at 10 March 2016, the ABC has commenced two reviews since 14 September 2015. Both of these are editorial reviews – one a review into the ABC’s coverage of the Australia-China Free Trade Agreement and the second a more general review into the ABC’s business coverage.

	Australia-China Free Trade Agreement review	Business coverage review
(a)	Initial planning began during September/October 2015	Initial planning began during October/November 2015
(b)	Contract with reviewer was signed on 29 October 2015	Contract with reviewer was signed on 2 December 2015
(c)	Not applicable	Not applicable
(d)	Australian Broadcasting Corporation.	Australian Broadcasting Corporation.
(e)	This is an independent review of the ABC's editorial content.	This is an independent review of the ABC's editorial content.
(f)	See attachment A	See attachment C
(g)	See attachment B	See attachment C

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(h)	Peter Cavanagh, former Head of Television at SBS and former Chief Executive of Radio New Zealand	Kerrie Blackburn, an adviser to the BBC Trust and experienced international journalist and producer, with advice and input from former ANZ Bank CEO Mike Smith.
(i)	Not applicable	Not applicable
(j)	December 2015	The review is expected to be completed in the first half of 2016.
(k)	Approximately \$25,000	Approximately \$60,000
(l)	The review was made public in February 2016	The review will be made public

2. Yes

	Australia-China Free Trade Agreement review	Business coverage review
(a)	See 1(h)	See 1(h)
(b)	Not applicable	Not applicable
(c)	Mr Cavanagh was paid a an all-inclusive fee of \$25,000 to conduct the review.	Ms Blackburn will be paid up to \$60,000 as an all-inclusive fee to conduct the review
(d)	Mr Cavanagh conducted the review	Ms Blackburn is conducting the review
(e)	Not applicable	Not applicable
(f)	None	None
(g)	The ABC Board	The ABC Board
(h)	No	No

3. As at 10 March the Business Coverage Review was ongoing, this review will be completed in the first half of 2016. Please see question 2(k) for the cost of the review.

4. No.

5. The review into the ABC's coverage of the Australia-China Free Trade Agreement.

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6. The review into the ABC's coverage of the Australia-China Free Trade Agreement was made public in February 2016.
7. Not applicable.
8. The ABC regularly undertakes reviews into its business operations and editorial content as responsible governance practices.

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ATTACHMENT A

PROTOCOL FOR EXTERNAL EDITORIAL REVIEWS

1. The Board, via the Chairman, chooses the topic and the reviewer. Suggestions and recommendations may be provided by ABC management.
2. The Director Editorial Policies will develop a clear brief for the review, based on the topic as communicated from the Board.
3. This brief will be submitted to the Managing Director for approval by the Chairman on behalf of the Board.
4. The brief will then be forwarded by the Director Editorial Policies to the selected reviewer to confirm their availability and for a formal contract to be signed.
5. The relevant Divisional Director will be advised of the review, its brief and the identity of the reviewer, and will advise the relevant content or program area. The ABC may also choose to disclose publicly the same details as the review commences.
6. The reviewer will work independently to assess the content according to the brief, but may seek further information from the relevant content areas.
7. The reviewer will send a draft of their completed review to the Director Editorial Policies, who will forward it to the relevant content division or divisions for their response.
8. Content Divisions will be given 10 working days to respond to the draft report. These responses will then be passed back to the reviewer.
9. The reviewer will then have ten working days to consider the response from the relevant divisions, make any changes and finalise their review. Any extensions to the timelines in this protocol will be at the discretion of the Chairman.

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10. The completed review and the final comments from divisions will be forwarded by the Managing Director to the Board.

11. The Board (through the Chairman) will consider the review and the information provided by the content division and determine any actions that will follow.

12. The review will then be published on the ABC website along with the comments from the content division and any Board statement.

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ATTACHMENT B

Review of the impartiality and diversity of perspectives in the coverage of the Australia China Free Trade Agreement on selected ABC Radio programming

Background

The ABC Board has a statutory duty to ensure that the gathering and presentation of news and information is accurate and impartial: section 8(1)(c), *Australian Broadcasting Act 1983 (Cth)*.

The ABC Editorial Policies set out the editorial and ethical principles and standards fundamental to the ABC's gathering and presentation of content. Standard 4.1 of the Editorial Policies requires news and information to be gathered and presented with due impartiality. Standard 4.2 requires that a diversity of perspectives be presented so that, over time, no significant strand of thought or belief within the community is knowingly excluded or disproportionately represented. The principles underpinning the standards in section 4 explain that, in applying the impartiality standard, the ABC is guided by a number of hallmarks including that of providing opportunities over time for principle relevant perspectives on matters of contention to be expressed. The Guidance Note on Impartiality further explains the concepts in and application of Section 4 of the Editorial Policies.

Scope and Subject

On 17 June 2015, the Australian and Chinese Governments signed an in principle agreement in Canberra to put in place a new Free Trade Agreement.

In the weeks and months that followed, there was substantial public debate about the agreement as public awareness of the issues slowly emerged. The debate included both economic and social impacts of the proposed deal.

The issue has been extensively covered by the ABC, most notably in its current affairs programming.

The proposal is to review coverage of the agreement in particular on Radio current affairs programming as well as on Radio National's Breakfast and Drive programs.

The review would cover impartiality and diversity of perspectives, with a particular focus on opportunities over time for all principal relevant perspectives to be expressed, with no one view over or under represented.

Time span: 16 June to 16 October 2015.

Programs & Services: Radio National Breakfast, AM, PM, The World Today, Saturday AM, Radio National Drive.

Reviewer

The review will be carried out by Peter Cavanagh, former Chief Executive and Editor-in-Chief of Radio New Zealand, former Head of Television and Head of Television News & Current Affairs at SBS, and a highly experienced journalist and editorial leader.

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Research Questions

The research questions to be answered are:

1. Were packaged reports, interviews and panel discussions impartial and constructed as objectively as possible, reflecting an appropriate diversity of relevant perspectives?
2. Were any perspectives either misrepresented or unduly favoured?
3. Were any relevant perspectives or context absent from the reports, interviews and discussions that should have been included in order to ensure appropriately accurate and balanced coverage of the issue?
4. Were the voices given a fair opportunity to express their views, having regard to the significance of the interest represented and to the amount of time given and prominence assigned to each interview?

Method

The Reviewer will be provided with a copy of the ABC Editorial Policies, with their attention specifically drawn to section 4 (Impartiality and Diversity of Perspectives). The Reviewer will also be provided with the Impartiality Guidance Note.

The Reviewer will be asked to watch each piece of content in the sample, all of which should be accessible online, and to consider the Research Questions. The Reviewer is also invited to make whatever additional comments they see fit about the content in relation to achieving appropriate impartiality and diversity of perspectives.

The Reviewer will produce a draft report and provide it to the Director, Editorial Policies.

Responses to the draft report will be sought from relevant Divisions and program teams, with those responses then provided to the Reviewer. The reviewer will consider those responses before submitting a final report.

The final report, together with any responses, will be made public.

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ATTACHMENT C

ABC News Business Coverage

This is a more extensive review designed to focus in particular on editorial policy issues related to the gathering of news and information: in this case, in relation to the way ABC News gathers and presents business news.

This review essentially remains focussed on the accuracy and impartiality of business reporting, but attempts to examine these issues more broadly by identifying missing elements in our coverage or inadequate coverage, that might together lead to failings in impartiality, diversity of perspectives and accuracy (including the crucial concept of context).

This review, like the Q&A review presently underway, is more ambitious in scope and will take longer to complete as it involves engaging not just with a selection of business content but also with the business reporting teams themselves, meeting with them to discuss their way of gathering content. I believe it has the potential to deliver detailed, focussed and useful recommendations.

The review would be conducted by Kerry Blackburn, who has already provided some initial suggestions in relation to the format and structure of the review.

Ms Blackburn is a highly experienced producer and journalist who has also been an editorial advisor to the BBC Trust for eight years, working on a number of editorial reviews and investigations for them.

Ms Blackburn has conducted independent external editorial reviews for the ABC in the past, and has significant experience in developing methodologies to assess editorial impartiality.

The review would examine a selection of business coverage in the ABC's key broadcast and publication platforms over a specific time frame, perhaps further limited in scope to a range of key topics or issues to aid the focus (for example, all stories relating to the domestic economy, employment and growth, as well as coverage of major companies and industries).

However, rather than simply assessing those stories item by item, the reviewer would combine a broad output analysis of the content with a series of discussions with the ABC program makers themselves to assess accuracy and impartiality by considering the choices made in the selection of stories, the sources relied upon to prepare those stories and the decisions made about which stories to pursue and not pursue.

This analysis would be supplemented by discussions and/or requests for written submissions from key elements within the business community about their views of ABC business coverage, as well as a review of how other media organisations covered similar issues.

Subject to budget and time constraints, it might also be possible to engage an independent senior business figure (for example, a recently retired CEO), to act as a consultant to the review.

In summary, the approach would afford a greater understanding of how a business story gets on air and will identify more accurately where there might be gaps in newsgathering or oversight which could ultimately affect the editorial standard of the business offering on the ABC.

The proposed terms of reference for this review (draft only) are:

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Scope and Subject: Business coverage in mainstream network news and current affairs programming to include specialist business programming and stories on the business pages of the ABC News website.

Time span: (to be confirmed).

Programs & Services: News and information programming across ABC1, Local Radio, Radio National, News Radio, ABC News 24 and ABC News Online.

Specific questions for review:

1. Is there a perceptible bias in the selection or treatment of business stories in favour (or against) any stakeholders (e.g. companies/consumers/trade unions)?
2. Does ABC business coverage contain adequate context to make it accessible to the broad ABC audience?
3. Does the ABC content include a broad range of interviewees in its business coverage?
4. Is business knowledge and expertise sufficiently present amongst ABC journalists as a whole in order to ensure accurate and impartial coverage?
5. Does the ABC gather its business news from a sufficiently diverse and representative selection of sources?