

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: 56

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Written, 12/02/2016

Topic: ABC's Editorial Review

Senator Abetz, Eric asked:

Reference is made to the ABC's Editorial Review no. 6 Content conduct and panel composition of Q&A program (February-June, 2015).

- (a) How much did this review cost in total?
- (b) How much was Ray Martin paid?
- (c) How much was Shaun Brown paid?
- (d) Were secretarial and research services provided to Messrs Martin and Brown?
 - (i) If so, by whom? and
 - (ii) At what cost?
- (e) Why was the review commissioned?
- (f) When was it commissioned?
- (g) By whom was the review commissioned?
- (h) Has QandA been transferred for oversight to a new section of the ABC?
- (i) In what area was QandA originally placed?
- (j) Was accuracy, fairness and balance considerations in the written guidelines for that particular area?
- (k) Given Mr Martin's comments as reported in the Fairfax media (Sydney Morning Herald on the 7th July, 2015) about the ABC and its programming, did the ABC consider it appropriate to seek an alternate reviewer?
- (l) Given the views expressed, how could anyone be assured of impartiality?

Answer:

1.

- (a) The review cost \$98,400.
- (b) Ray Martin was paid \$30,000.
- (c) Shaun Brown was paid \$68,400.
- (d) No additional secretarial or research services were supplied.

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- (e) In December 2013, ABC Chairman, James Spigelman, announced that a series of independent editorial reviews would be held on a regular basis covering a range of program topics.

These reviews are conducted by persons of relevant experience who are not employed by the ABC. They reinforce internal review work that is regularly undertaken which assesses content for quality, impact and compliance with editorial policies.

Q&A was selected by the Board as being a suitable topic for one of these reviews.

- (f) The review of Q&A was proposed on 1 June 2015. The proposal was discussed at the ABC Board meeting on 3 June and a brief for the review was provided to the ABC Chairman on 9 June.
- (g) Consistent with the normal process, the review was commissioned by the ABC Board.
- (h) Q&A was transferred to the ABC News division at the commencement of the 2016 production year.
- (i) The ABC TV division.
- (j) All ABC divisions must adhere to the same Editorial Principles and Standards, which include expected standards of accuracy and impartiality.
- (k) No.
- (l) As the ABC made clear at the time, Mr. Martin was selected as one of the reviewers because of his journalistic experience and his reputation for independence. His comments, which were made prior to him receiving the formal brief and terms of reference for the review, were in relation to the politics surrounding the Zaky Mallah appearance and the subsequent ban on Government ministers appearing on the program. That specific appearance was not the focus of the review – the terms of reference of the Q&A review were for programs broadcast from 2 February 2015 to 29 June 2015 - <http://about.abc.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/TermsofReferenceQAReview.pdf>.

The ABC believes that Mr. Martin, together with Mr. Brown, were capable of conducting the review in an appropriately independent and rigorous manner.