

Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates Hearings May 2010

Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 13

Program No. 3.1

Hansard Ref: ECA15

Topic: Digital Switchover – digital transmitter

Senator Cormann asked:

Are you aware of any locations across regional Australia where commercial free-to-air services are provided in digital terrestrial form but where the ABC is either not available at all terrestrially or only available through analog self-help terrestrial transmitters that are not going to be upgraded to digital?

Provide a list of locations that will receive digital transmitters for the ABC and await funding approval from the government and include the dates when the transition is to take place.

Answer:

No.

There are 12 digital transmitter Implementation Plans that the ABC has submitted for funding approval (see site list below). The Federal Government has indicated it is reviewing its options for the provision of digital television services in the relevant licence areas. The ABC is awaiting further advice before providing transition dates.

State	Sites
South Australia	Hawker
South Australia	Marree
South Australia	Woomera
South Australia	Andamooka
Western Australia	Narembeen
Western Australia	Yalgoo
Western Australia	Mandurah
New South Wales	Tottenham
Northern Territory	Borroloola
Northern Territory	Galiwinku
Queensland	Karumba
Queensland	Normanton

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Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 14

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: ECA24

Topic: ABC Spark Awards – Lego Competition

Senator Abetz asked:

Can you provide:

- (a) Details as to whether the Lego was provided free of charge? If not, what was the cost?
- (b) How many “winners” were awarded vouchers as a result of this competition?
- (c) How many offices were provided with Lego/ used Lego?
- (d) Why was Lego decided upon? Did the ABC engage a consultant who advised you to use Lego?

Answer:

- (a) The Lego was purchased by the ABC. The total of the Lego cost was \$437.25 (11 sets at \$39.75 each).
- (b) There were two winners of the competition. One was awarded a \$100 ABC Shop voucher and the other was awarded a \$50 ABC Shop voucher.
- (c) A set of Lego was provided to each of ABC New South Wales offices (11 sets in total).
- (d) The Lego was selected as means by which to engage staff and encourage lateral thinking and innovation for a relatively low cost – \$39.75 per office. The ABC did not engage a consultant.

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Question No: 15

Program No. 1.3

Hansard Ref: ECA24

Topic: ABC – Project Bluebird alternate reality program

Senator Abetz asked:

When did Project Bluebird start, and how many people were involved?

How long had the project been worked on prior to its launch?

Answer:

Concept work and project scoping for Bluebird commenced in April 2009. Production work on Bluebird commenced in August 2009.

Within the ABC, six ABC Innovation staff and one part-time intern worked on Bluebird.

The project was launched on 27 April 2010, some 12 months after the initial concept development.

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Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 16

Program No. 1.3

Hansard Ref: ECA24

Topic: ABC – Project Bluebird alternate reality program

Senator Abetz asked:

What is the total budget allocated to the ABC Innovation department?

Answer:

The total funding for ABC Innovation in 2009-10 was \$9,640,120.

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Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 17

Program No. 1.2

Hansard Ref: ECA31

Topic: Re-employment of ABC journalist

Senator Abetz asked:

Could you provide the details as to whether Peter Lloyd's new position was advertised or whether it went through a competitive process?

Answer:

Peter Lloyd has returned to the ABC and is currently working as a producer/reporter on *Lateline*.

His employment, and the circumstances of his return to work at the ABC, were managed in consultation with Comcare and in accordance with the ABC's obligations under the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (SRC Act).

In accordance with clause 10.2(d) of the ABC Employment Agreement 2006-2010, Peter Lloyd's position was not advertised due to the ABC's obligations under s40 of the SRC Act.

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Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 18

Program No. 1.2

Hansard Ref: ECA31

Topic: Q&A audience

Senator Abetz asked:

Can you provide the audience break-up for Q&A for the past six months?

Answer:

2010 AUDIENCE BREAKDOWN – EPISODES 1- 15

Episode 1 – February 8 (Canberra)

Voting intention	Percentage of total
Coalition	33
ALP	39
Greens	13
Other**	2
Not Specified	13
TOTAL AUDIENCE	100

Episode 2 – February 15

Voting intention	Percentage Of Total
Coalition	37
ALP	36
Greens	12
Other**	1
Not Specified	14
TOTAL AUDIENCE	100

Episode 3 - February 22

Voting intention	Percentage Of Total
Coalition	38
ALP	38
Greens	14
Other**	2
Not Specified	7
TOTAL AUDIENCE	99

Episode 4 – March 1 (Adelaide)

Voting intention	Percentage Of Total
Coalition	43
ALP	38
Greens	11
Other**	1
Not Specified	7
TOTAL AUDIENCE	100

Episode 5 – March 8

Voting intention	Percentage Of Total
Coalition	30
ALP	29
Greens	13
Other**	3
Not Specified	25
TOTAL AUDIENCE	100

Episode 6 – March 15

Voting intention	Percentage Of Total
Coalition	29
ALP	39
Greens	18
Other**	1
Not Specified	13
TOTAL AUDIENCE	100

Episode 7 – March 22

Voting intention	Percentage Of Total
Coalition	34
ALP	34
Greens	15
Other**	2
Not Specified	14
TOTAL AUDIENCE	99

Episode 8 – March 29

Voting intention	Percentage Of Total
Coalition	35
ALP	35
Greens	15
Other**	1
Not Specified	14
TOTAL AUDIENCE	100

Episode 9 – April 5

Voting intention	Percentage Of Total
Coalition	36
ALP	31
Greens	16
Other**	3
Not Specified	14
TOTAL AUDIENCE	100

Episode 10 - April 12

Voting intention	Percentage of Total
Coalition	31
ALP	31
Greens	13
Other**	9
Not Specified	16
TOTAL AUDIENCE	100

Episode 11 – April 19

Voting intention	Percentage Of Total
Coalition	34
ALP	32
Greens	16
Other**	3
Not Specified	15
TOTAL AUDIENCE	100

Episode 12 – April 26

Voting intention	Percentage Of Total
Coalition	34
ALP	33
Greens	15
Other**	2
Not Specified	16
TOTAL AUDIENCE	100

Episode 13 – May 3

Voting intention	Percentage Of Total
Coalition	35
ALP	36
Greens	14
Other**	2
Not Specified	13
TOTAL AUDIENCE	100

Episode 14 – May 10

Voting intention	Percentage Of Total
Coalition	32
ALP	30
Greens	17
Other**	2
Not Specified	19
TOTAL AUDIENCE	100

Episode 15 – May 17

Voting intention	Percentage Of Total
Coalition	33
ALP	32
Greens	15
Other**	1
Not Specified	19
TOTAL AUDIENCE	100

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Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 19

Program No. 3.1

Hansard Ref: ECA32

Topic: Digital equipment costs

Senator Ludlam asked:

Could you provide us with the modelling of how much faster digital equipment turnover will be and the costs of running and maintaining this equipment?

Answer:

The ABC has undertaken modelling to get an understanding of the expected life of digital versus analogue assets. The modelling has looked at total gross book value of technical assets and total individual technical asset annual depreciation amounts. This information is drawn from the Fixed Asset Register (NB annual depreciation for each individual Technical Asset is calculated by dividing its Cost/ Revalued (i.e. Gross Book) value divided by its useful life).

Using this methodology, it was identified that there had been a decline in technical asset life from just under nine years to just over eight years (comparing data from 2009 with 2001). This is a 7 percent decline in average asset life. In some asset classes, such as those most impacted by the introduction of digital technologies (broadcast studio equipment, presentation equipment, cameras and accessories, program communications), modelling has shown a greater decline of up to four years in asset life.

The asset register does not provide the complete picture of the change in asset life. Modelling of specific asset classes provides a more complete picture. For example, some analogue assets such as television cameras and editing facilities remained operational for significant periods after their book value had reached zero.

Given the transition to digital assets over recent years and the changing nature of media processes (eg the recent introduction of file-based technology to replace tape), the modelling is subject to ongoing review and analysis.

As the ABC does not have metering systems in place to measure individual facilities and rooms within each location, it is unable to provide specific data on the cost of running digital equipment. The Corporation's electricity costs have increased markedly in the past two years, due principally to increases in pricing. Despite operating digital equipment over a larger asset base requiring more cooling and heating, overall electricity consumption has remained relatively constant due to an increased focus on energy conservation.

The main factor leading to increasing maintenance costs for digital compared to analogue equipment is the increasing reliance on the manufacturer to maintain assets, for example through the greater prevalence of proprietary systems and black box solutions rather than utilising internal expertise. This has led to an increased reliance on external maintenance contracts. Previously, high levels of internal maintenance contributed to the extended operational life of analogue assets. In addition, much of the digital equipment asset base now has a software component that may have a generation life of as short as 18 months. Support for software is also predominantly externally provided with the requirement to either upgrade or face increasing support costs.

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Question No: 20

Program No. 1.3

Hansard Ref: ECA34

Topic: Audio description trial

Senator Ludlam asked:

Could you provide details as to how the ABC would fund an audio description trial?

Answer:

As noted in the ABC's submission to the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy's Discussion Report on Access to Electronic Media for the Hearing and Vision Impaired, the ABC is willing to further investigate the feasibility of an audio description (AD) trial.

In relation to costs, the ABC submission stated (at page 8), "*there are likely to be additional costs, including capital expenditure associated with the broadcast of AD content. The ABC will therefore require funding to meet the costs of conducting an AD trial.*

The ABC is aware that should such a trial proceed and be successful, it is likely to raise questions about the cost of delivering an ongoing service, spectrum availability and the legal issues regarding AD."

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Question No: 21

Program No. 1.2

Hansard Ref: ECA34

Topic: ABC documentary *Hope in a Slingshot*

Senator Ludlam asked:

Could you provide details of as to why this documentary was not broadcast? What is the process for reviewing content against the ABC editorial policies?

Is it correct that it was not broadcast because the ABC would have to broadcast a pro-war documentary to “balance” it?

Answer:

The documentary *Hope in a Slingshot* deals with a matter of deep and continuing contention, the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. The documentary was assessed by ABC TV as ‘opinion content’ within the meaning of the ABC Editorial Policies. *Hope in a Slingshot* was assessed as taking a pro-Palestinian perspective, not a pro-peace perspective as is contended by the filmmakers.

Section 6 of the Editorial Policies requires that the ABC present a diversity of perspectives on matters of contention. This can be achieved by providing content of a similar type and weight in an appropriate timeframe.

It is in the nature of the TV production industry that multiple documentaries of the requisite quality that explore any matter of contention from opposing points of view will rarely, if ever, become available for acquisition by broadcasters at the same time. ABC TV made the judgement that it could not acquire a documentary of such quality that, in combination with *Hope in a Slingshot*, reflected and addressed the appropriate diversity of perspectives within an appropriate timeframe.

The Editorial Policies allow for a discussion program to be presented in association with a point-of-view documentary, so that a diversity of perspectives other than the documentary’s point of view can be expressed and the audience can make up its own mind. ABC TV decided it could not present a discussion program in association with *Hope in a Slingshot* because, broadcast on its own, *Hope in a Slingshot* does not address this most contentious issue in a manner that was sufficiently transparent and comprehensive in order to set an appropriate foundation for a discussion program of the standard this issue requires.

In addition, and quite separately from considerations relating to the ABC Editorial Policies, ABC TV's judgement after acquiring *Hope in a Slingshot* was that, as an advocacy piece on a particular issue, it was of insufficient editorial integrity, weight and quality for broadcast or to serve as a platform for a broader discussion program.

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Question No: 22

Program No. 1.3

Hansard Ref: ECA35

Topic: *The Drum* - Professor Carter

Senator Abetz asked:

Could you provide details as to:

- (a) why was this article by Professor Carter not published?
- (b) whether Professor Carter's article was commissioned and paid for by the ABC?
- (c) who was chosen over Professor Bob Carter and were they paid?

Answer:

- (a) Professor Carter was approached as one of a number of people to respond to series of articles by Clive Hamilton (February 22-26, 2010). Professor Carter supplied a written piece to the ABC in early March 2010.

The piece was not published due to a judgment made under ABC editorial guidelines. Principally the first part of the article and a central premise implied that well known NASA scientist James Hansen, an early advocate of anthropogenic climate change, had done an about-face on the presentation of climate change evidence. The editors concluded the Carter piece took a small extract from a 2004 Hansen essay out of context to construct a misleading impression that Mr Hansen had undergone "a conversion to honesty". Mr Hansen's essay itself reflected no significant change of heart. Discretion was exercised under ABC editorial guideline 9.4.10. ("...where the ABC is satisfied it is necessary or appropriate, it may exercise its discretion to edit, remove or clarify UGC [non ABC content] that contains an error or is otherwise false or misleading.")

Editorial staff replaced the Carter piece with one that made similar points.

- (b) Professor Carter was asked to provide a piece to be considered for publication. After we declined to publish the piece, Professor Carter had the piece published elsewhere. He was not paid by the ABC.
- (c) The piece the ABC ran in place of the proposed Professor Carter piece was written by atmospheric scientist and climate change sceptic Professor Garth Paltridge ("Overselling Climate Doom"- March 5, 2010). Professor Paltridge was paid for this piece.

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Question No: 23

Program No. 1.1

Hansard Ref: ECA36

Topic: Commonwealth Day address – Robyn Williams

Senator Abetz asked:

Could you provide details as to:

- (a) Whether ABC management were aware of Robyn Williams' speech and sanctioned it, prior to it being given?
- (b) Whether there might be a conflict of interest in giving this speech?
- (c) Was there any vetting by the ABC of this speech?

Answer:

- (a) Yes. ABC Radio National management was aware of Robyn Williams' intention to give the 2010 Commonwealth Day Address and authorised this external activity.
- (b) ABC Radio does not believe there was a conflict of interest in Robyn Williams' giving this speech.

Robyn Williams is a well-known and highly regarded science specialist whose expertise is regularly sought for speaking engagements on matters relating to his knowledge and expertise. His position on the issue of climate change is well known publicly. As an ABC Science specialist, when presenting key science programs, most notably, *The Science Show*, he has a responsibility to reflect the principal relevant viewpoints on contentious issues.

- (c) The ABC did not review the full address which was considered by ABC Radio Management to fit with Robyn Williams' specialist expertise.

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Question No: 24

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: ECA37

Topic: Complaints about systemic bias

Senator Abetz asked:

Can you tell us the number of complaints that have been upheld for the years 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10, and of those that have been upheld, which ones of those have gone to the board?

Answer:

The number of complaints upheld across all editorial standards is as follows:

- 2007-08 – 508 complaints
- 2008-09 - 2,496 complaints
- 2009-10 – 565 complaints.

The ABC does not disclose details of board deliberations.

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Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 25

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: ECA38

Topic: ABC time sheets

Senator Abetz asked:

Is it correct that it is a legal requirement for the hours entered into the time sheet to be a true reflection of actual times worked?

Could you find out whether or not there have been any examples where a, a fill-in person, who may have been engaged to cover for Kerry O'Brien and Tony Jones when they were on leave, had time sheets filled out indicating work on a Monday when they in fact did not present for work on a Monday?

Answer:

Under the *Fair Work Act 2009* Part 3-6, Division 3, Subdivision 1, an employer is required to keep records relating to hours worked by employees as follows:

- In the case of a casual or irregular part-time employee who is guaranteed a pay rate set by reference to time worked, a record of the hours worked by that employee
- For any other type of employee, the record must specify the number of overtime hours worked each day, or when the employee started and finished working overtime hours (but only if a penalty rate or loading must be paid for overtime hours actually worked)
- A copy of the written agreement if the employer and employee have agreed to an averaging of the employee's work hours.

The ABC is aware of an example of timesheet anomalies related to an ABC staff member who was engaged to cover for Kerry O'Brien and Tony Jones. Upon detection of the anomalies, adjustments were made to the employee's entitlements which related to the anomalous time sheets. The anomalies were not entered by the employee personally and it is not considered that the anomalies were entered with a view to accruing excess entitlements. No excess entitlements were taken or used.

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Question No: 26

Program No. 1.2

Hansard Ref: ECA38 and In Writing

Topic: ABC program *Insiders*

Senator Abetz asked:

Are journalists paid to appear on *Insiders*?

Are they paid an appearance fee and travel allowance?

If so please provide details of pay rates? If not, what is the going rate? Is the journalist's travel expenses paid? If so, how much is paid? Are any other costs reimbursed as part of, or outside of, the appearance fee? If so, please provide a detailed explanation.

Answer:

Yes.

Guests are paid travel allowance when travelling from interstate.

The rate paid varies according to the circumstances of individual guests, including their availability, the level of commitment, their expertise and seniority. In all cases, the rate for an appearance is in the order of a few hundred dollars. These rates are individually negotiated with the talent, and cleared with news management.

Certain costs such as taxi fares, economy flights when required, as well as accommodation in a standard room in a nearby hotel, and an allowance for meals are covered by the ABC.

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Question No: 27

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: ECA38

Topic: Wage buyouts and penalty rates

Senator Abetz asked:

- (a) What is the percentage of ABC employees currently in receipt of a buyout for overtime and penalties?
- (b) Can you confirm in 2004 over 90% of FTE Sydney journalists in the ABC received 25% buyouts? What has occurred since 2004?
- (c) Can you provide a state-by-state breakdown of the percentage of the FTE employees that are in receipt of buyouts and how this differs from the historical figures—2003 to 2009?
- (d) Does this buyout apply to *7.30 Report* reporting staff?

Answer:

- (a) 12.33% of ABC employees are in receipt of a buyout for overtime and penalties (as at 23 May 2010).
- (b) Yes. Figures showing the percentage of Sydney News journalists on buyouts between 2004 and 2010 are as follows:

2004 – 69.40%
2005 – 72.39%
2006 – 66.85%
2007 – 66.54%
2008 – 67.11%
2009 – 63.99%
2010 – 63.59%

(c) Following is a state-by-state breakdown of the percentage of the FTE employees that are in receipt of buy-outs for each year 2003- 2009:

Employees with Buyouts as percentage of FTE

	2003 %	2004 %	2005 %	2006 %	2007 %	2008 %	2009 %
ACT	12.88	15.12	11.33	16.89	18.24	19.31	19.72
NSW	12.08	13.08	12.93	13.37	12.20	12.97	12.41
NT	5.67	3.99	3.04	3.17	3.77	3.15	3.83
O/Seas	100.00	100.00	98.21	98.23	93.73	87.10	67.57
QLD	10.47	10.10	11.92	8.38	8.51	9.21	9.82
SA	8.70	9.63	9.28	8.34	8.80	9.51	10.11
TAS	3.54	3.54	6.43	6.02	5.50	3.71	4.20
VIC	12.20	13.44	10.58	11.05	13.03	12.61	11.19
WA	12.30	12.12	11.01	14.37	12.80	13.98	14.32
Total	11.65	12.39	11.88	12.21	12.05	12.40%	12.04

(d) Yes. 85.68% of 7.30 Report staff are in receipt of buyouts.

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Question No: 28

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: ECA40

Topic: ABC Superannuation - 1970s

Senator Xenophon asked:

In the 1970s there were a number of ABC journalists who were not informed of their eligibility to be a part of the Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme.

Can you tell me:

- (a) What action the ABC has taken or will take to support these staff getting compensation for the money that they have lost as a result of the incorrect advice they were given?
- (b) Will the ABC consider an alternative dispute resolution mechanism, so that these staff do not have to seek remedy in the federal court?
- (c) Would the ABC be prepared to meet with these staff to discuss this matter?

Answer

- (a) The ABC is aware that claims by 15 former ABC employees are being assessed by the Department of Finance and Deregulation (DoFD), including a former journalist employee from South Australia. Details for this employee and two other non journalists have been provided to Finance who will assess the claims and determine eligibility. The ABC will continue to cooperate fully with DoFD in processing these and any further claims.

The ABC, together with the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), is seeking to ensure staff and former staff are made aware of the possibility of a claim arising from the Cornwell case and how such claims are to be handled.

- (b) As advised in (a) above, claims for superannuation entitlements are being administered by DoFD. Any dispute arising from a claim must be handled in accordance with the procedures set out by DoFD. The ABC is not able to provide an alternative dispute resolution process.
- (c) The ABC is prepared to meet with staff members who believe they may have a superannuation claim. However, as pointed out in (a) and (b) above, such claims are handled by DoFD. The ABC does not have control of the administration of any claims.

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Question No: 29

Program No. 1.1

Hansard Ref: ECA40

Topic: ABC Local radio stations and broadcasting on public holidays

Senator Fisher asked:

- (a) Have ABC local radio stations been asked to cut local programming on public holidays?
- (b) Can you provide details as to the number of ABC Local radio stations which have carried networked programs on public holidays?
- (c) Can you provide the percentage of network programs that were carried by local radio stations on public holidays for the last 12 months?

Answer:

- (a) No.

ABC listeners' listening patterns on public holidays are notably different from those on other days. ABC Local Radio has implemented a system of shared programming on public holidays among regional or state stations. This system represents an optimum use of available resources and minimal audience impact. It also provides the opportunity for ABC staff to benefit from the public holiday, and for ABC radio to showcase local presenters around the country.

- (b) All ABC Local Radio stations have broadcast shared programming on public holidays over the past 12 months. The amount of shared programming will depend on the type of public holiday.

National public holidays tend to feature special programming at a national level. On ANZAC Day, many stations cover multiple services and events linking to and from these around the country, frequently on a state or national basis depending on time zones and geography.

A public holiday confined to a particular State may involve that State's local stations sharing some elements of special programming, but would not affect local programming on Local Radio stations outside the State.

- (c) It is not possible to provide a percentage overall across Local Radio stations. Some stations share more programming than others due to their geographic proximity.

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Question No: 30

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: ECA41

Topic: ABC Manager of Emergency Services and Community Development

Senator Fisher asked:

Can you provide details of his role and responsibilities?

Answer:

The ABC Manager of Emergency Services and Community Development provides leadership and advice on emergency broadcasting, and liaises with external organisations and the broader community.

The Manager of Emergency Services and Community Development manages Local Radio's emergency broadcasting, including procedures and compliance, on air quality and sound, relationships with service providers and organisations, training including appropriate safety and OH&S training and follow up support of staff.

The community development focus of the role is on maintaining and strengthening relationships between Local Radio and community and service organisations.

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Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 31

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: ECA41 and 42

Topic: Managing a public emergency

Senator Fisher asked:

In respect of managing a public emergency, what arrangements does the ABC have in place to ensure that a suitably qualified announcer is, say, within 10 minutes of the microphone?

Do you have a formal system that ensures that a local broadcaster is always on hand to handle local emergencies?

Answer:

The ABC considers its role as the emergency broadcaster as a matter of the highest priority. The ABC is committed to ensuring the provision of our services to the community. Our focus is on the need to provide accurate and timely information and continuity of broadcasts during emergency situations to our listeners, readers and viewers across ABC platforms.

ABC Local Radio has established Emergency Broadcast Plans in 59 regions and metropolitan centres. The Emergency Broadcast Plans provide guidelines on emergency warnings and emergency coverage and outline how broadcasters should perform before, during and after emergencies.

Emergency Broadcast Plans are signed off by the Heads of Local Radio and place authority for emergency broadcasting in the hands of the Local Content and Online Managers in each State and Territory.

In times of emergency, it is ABC practice to broadcast from the nearest and most practical local studio for as long as possible at the height of any event. Local Radio staff are placed on standby in the likelihood of an emergency, such as an impending cyclone or threatening bushfires. If the emergency is ongoing, ABC staff will be brought in from outside the local area to assist local staff. A list of staff is maintained for such purposes with the first priority being to roster staff who have lived recently in an affected region.

All live broadcasts can be interrupted to broadcast warnings. This ensures that warnings can be issued within a matter of minutes in daylight hours on all Local Radio programs.

In the event that a studio or office is threatened by an emergency, the ABC will make arrangements to ensure staff safety and to broadcast from the next nearest facility. For example, during recent storms, the ABC's Mackay office was closed and programs were broadcast from ABC Bundaberg, Rockhampton and Brisbane to cover the outage and ensure ongoing communication to the community.

In instances of emergency, the ABC is committed to providing information to the community. For example, the ABC "forward deploys" its flyaway transmitters in cyclone prone areas during the cyclone season to be better able to maintain services. An example of forward deployment was the provision of a flyaway transmitter at St George in Queensland in March 2010 when flooding of the Balonne River posed a threat to local ABC radio services. In addition to maintaining the general ABC radio service, this was to ensure ABC local radio continued to be able to provide the local community with up to the minute flood warnings.

Given the potential for emergency conditions to impact upon transmission and reception, the ABC works to ensure delivery of emergency information across the various ABC platforms. If one service is affected by an outage, our audience may be in a position to receive information on another ABC platform.

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Question No: 32

Program No. 1.3

Hansard Ref: ECA43

Topic: Twitter - hashtags

Senator Cormann asked:

What guidelines does the ABC have in place regarding the use of Twitter and the use of Twitter hashtags?

Answer:

The ABC has a Social Media Policy which provides advice around specific platforms, including Twitter and Twitter hashtags.

In relation to hashtags, the Social Media Policy states (at page 16):

What are #hashtags?

A hashtag is simply a subject identifier for a tweet, whereby a hash symbol (#) is placed before a word or phrase to give that word/phrase particular significance. For example, using #newinventors means that the subject of the tweet refers to the television program. If a number of people all use the same hashtag it is possible, in a number of ways (such as tweetdeck, twitterfall and search.twitter.com), to follow conversation thread being contributed to by any number of people discussing a given topic. If using an active account, you can choose to add people to your follow list who have shown an interest in the subject.

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Question No: 33

Program No. 1.3

Hansard Ref: In writing

Topic: ABC – Q&A television program

Senator Fisher asked:

On 22 February, John Roskam appeared on Q&A. Two days after the appearance, the transcript of the program went up on the website with the following “correction”:

**Correction: It has been brought to our attention that John Roskam incorrectly attributes this claim to Prof Phillip Jones the director of the Climatic Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia (UEA). What Prof Jones actually said was that the data shows a rise in temperature over that period, but the rise is not statistically significant at the 95% significance level, because of the short time period involved in the comparison. Read his comments in this BBC interview.*

- (a) On what basis was this correction made?
- (b) Who issued the instruction to make the correction?
- (c) Was the correction the result of a complaint or complaints? If so, who made the complaint(s)?
- (d) By what process does the ABC assess the accuracy of statements made by panellists?
- (e) Has Q&A ever made such a correction to any other transcripts? If so;
 - For which episodes?
 - Whose comments do they relate to?
 - What was the nature of the comment corrected?
- (f) Did the ABC or Q&A consider corrections to the transcript of the episode aired 8 February, featuring the Prime Minister?
- (g) Did the ABC or Q&A consider corrections following reports in *The Australian* on 10 February that a number of the Prime Minister's statements were inaccurate?

Answer:

- (a) The correction was made in response to an audience complaint raising concern about Mr Roskam's statement.
- (b) The correction was made at the direction of the Q&A Executive Producer in line with section 4.3 of the ABC Editorial Policies and attached as a note to the Q&A transcript. Following a discussion with Dr Roskam, the Executive Producer agreed to modify the wording of the note as follows:

**Note: John Roskam attributes this claim to Prof Phillip Jones, the director of the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia. Viewers contacted us to say that this claim does not reflect Prof Jones' view: that Prof Jones told the BBC temperatures rose from 1995 to 2009, but the rise was not statistically significant at the 95% level of significance commonly relied on by scientists. You can read the BBC interview in full here and make up your own mind.*

- (c) See (a) above.
- (d) In this instance, the accuracy was assessed by the Executive Producer of Q&A comparing Dr Roskam's claim about Professor Jones' statement with the statement itself.
- (e) Q&A has not made other corrections.
- (f) Q&A will consider corrections to transcripts where a complaint has been lodged and upon review it is satisfied that the nature of the complaint has been substantiated.
- (g) See above at (f).

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Question No: 34

Program No. 1.1

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: ABC – Programming on public holidays

Senator Fisher asked:

Has the ABC conducted any credible research on the importance that regional Australians place on having a locally produced radio program broadcast in their communities on public holidays?

Answer:

The ABC has conducted no such research.

The ABC is not aware of any concerns from regional communities about programming on public holidays which would warrant undertaking such research.

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Question No: 35

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: ABC – Cost of separations and redundancies

Senator Fisher asked:

I note from your recent annual report that in the 2009 financial year the ABC's cost of separations and redundancies increased from 2008 \$2,871,000 to 2009 \$10,015,000, an increase of more than 340%. What is the ABC doing to minimise separation costs and reduce the loss of accumulated skills and experience?

Answer:

The ABC does minimise costs associated with separation. A business case assessment of impacts is undertaken prior to initiating any action regarding separation or redundancy. This includes assessment of identified operational and cost benefits.

A significant proportion of recent separation costs have been incurred by the ABC as it has restructured its business to ensure it has the ability to acquire and maintain the changing skills required in an evolving media environment.

Wherever possible, the ABC adopts positive alternatives to redundancy, and seeks to minimise the need for redundancies through workforce planning, employee development, and performance management strategies, backed by an active redeployment and retraining policy. Additionally, the ABC places significant value on developing and retaining a skilled workforce through a range of strategies including flexible working arrangements, relevant leave arrangement strategies, reward and recognition strategies, training and development programs.

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Question No: 36

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: Staffing - ABC

Senator Barnett asked:

How many permanent staff have been recruited since additional estimates (Feb 2010)?

What level are these staff?

How many temporary positions exist or have been created since additional estimates?

Since additional estimates, how many employees have been employed on contract and what is the average length of their employment period?

Answer:

A total of 56 permanent staff were recruited between 1 February and 20 June 2010 at the levels shown below:

Staff Levels	Full Time	Part Time	Total
Administrative/Professional Band 4	2		2
Administrative/Professional Band 5	2		2
Administrative/Professional Band 9	1		1
Director	1		1
Head Office Manager Grade 1	1		1
Program Maker Band 2	7		7
Program Maker Band 3	1		1
Program Maker Band 4	4		4
Program Maker Band 5	6		6
Program Maker Band 6	1		1
Program Maker Band 7	6		6
Program Maker Band 8	3		3
Program Maker Band 9	1		1
Senior Executive Band 1	1		1
Senior Executive Band 2	2		2
Shop Assistant		7	7
Shop Manager Grade C	4		4
Technologist Band 5	1		1
Technologist Band 6	1		1
Technologist Band 7	4		4
Total	49	7	56

As at 20 June 2010, there are 443 temporary positions.

Between 1 February and 20 June 2010, 49 temporary positions were created.

Between 1 February and 20 June 2010, 277 employees have been employed on contract (fixed term and specific task contracts). The average length of their employment period is 180 days.

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Question No: 37

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: Staffing – efficiency dividend/budget cuts

Senator Barnett asked:

Have staffing numbers been reduced as a result of the efficiency dividend and/or other budget cuts?

- Since the efficiency dividend was introduced?
- Since additional estimates?

If so, where and at what level?

Are there any plans for staff reduction? If so, please advise details ie. reduction target, how this will be achieved, services/programs to be cut etc.

If your Department/agency has been identified in the budget as delivering further efficiencies (savings), how will these be delivered? (for example, if the budget papers say ‘improvement to strategic work practices’ or similar, what are these and how will they be delivered?)

What changes are underway or planned for graduate recruitment, cadetships or similar programs? If reductions or increases are envisaged please explain including reasons, target numbers etc.

Answer:

The ABC refers to its response to Question No. 44 from Senator Barnett at Additional Estimates in February 2010. The ABC is not subject to the efficiency dividend.

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Question No: 38

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: Government Advertising

Senator Barnett asked:

What communications programs has the Department/Agency undertaken since additional estimates and what communications programs are planned to be undertaken?

For each program, what is the total spend?

(by 'communications program' it is meant communication of a government message to the public – possibly by advertising (print, television etc), possibly through the erection of signs, plaques etc, or through other mediums. The recent (current) Government TV advertising campaign on health reform and specific health initiatives are examples, BER signage is an example, advertising on the Government's proposed new tax system would be another example.)

A breakdown of how much was spent/is planned to be spent on each program/initiative should be provided.

Answer:

None.

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Question No: 39

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: Government Payment of Accounts

Senator Barnett asked:

Has the portfolio/agency paid its accounts to contractors/consultants etc in accordance with Government policy in terms of time for payment (ie. within 30 days)? If not, why not, and what has been the timeframe for payment of accounts? Please provide a breakdown, average statistics etc as appropriate to give insight into how this issue is being approached.)

For accounts not paid within 30 days, is interest being paid on overdue amounts and if so how much has been paid by the portfolio/department agency for the current financial year and the previous financial year?

Where interest is being paid, what rate of interest is being paid and how is this rate determined?

Answer:

The ABC's standard payment terms are 30 days Commercial as stated on the ABC internet site under the section "Doing business with the ABC" unless otherwise agreed with suppliers.

30 Days Commercial means 30 days after the end of the month the tax invoice was rendered. An exception to this is payments to businesses that meet the Government's definition of a "small business" in *Finance Circular 2008/10*, which are paid 30 days after the date the tax invoice is rendered (A small business is defined as having less than 20 full time equivalent employees).

Between 1 July 2009 and 30 June 2010 (inclusive) the ABC made 35,000 payments to suppliers for operating expenditure and purchases of assets. Almost 29,000 or 82 percent (90% of the dollar value) were paid to suppliers on or before due date. Where payments were not made within the agreed or standard timeframe it was due to issues such as late receipt of invoices, items in dispute or other issues relating to the supply of goods or services.

The ABC does not pay interest on overdue invoices unless a tax invoice for the interest is received from a supplier. It is extremely rare for interest to be charged by a supplier as the reason for deferred payment is typically due to a mutual understanding (ie disputed charges etc).

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Question No: 40

Program No. 1.3

Hansard Ref: In writing

Topic: ABC Corrections Policy

Senator Birmingham asked:

On what basis were changes made to apply corrections to John Roskam's 22 February 2010 Q&A transcript?

What policy is applied to correcting statements of guests on ABC current affairs programs? If it is reasonable to correct Mr Roskam's transcript, will the ABC consider correcting the errors in the Prime Minister's transcript on Q&A on 8 February 2010, such as:

PM: Laptops, which is computers in schools, we said we would have a computer for every young person at secondary school from Year 9 and above by, I seem to recall, 2013 or thereabouts.

Reality: The original 2007 election commitment was for the laptops to be rolled out in four years (by 2011)

Answer:

See answer to Question on Notice 33.

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Question No: 41

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: ABC use of language

Senator Birmingham asked:

On what basis does ABC justify referring to Mahmoud al-Mabhouh as a Palestinian Resistance fighter (Trevor Bormann – March 16, 2010, *Foreign Correspondent*)?

On what basis does the ABC justify stating that the growth of Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank is “the biggest obstacle to peace (Anne Barker- March 10, 2010, *Midday Report*)?”

Have any of the reporters been counselled regarding their use of language in these circumstances?

Answer:

The ABC recognises that at times there will be individuals and groups within the community that disagree with the way an issue is reported and with the language used by the ABC.

In relation to “labelling”, ABC Editorial Policies provide that “the overriding objective for the ABC is to report the facts clearly, accurately and impartially to enable audiences to make their own judgements and form their own conclusions.”

The Style Guide reinforces this with particular reference to the use of words like “terrorist”, providing that:

Reporting terrorism and other contentious issues brings the need for fair and non-judgmental language into sharp focus.

Middle East reporting is a typical example. Generally, clear, thorough reporting is better than labels. Our reports should rely first on facts and clear descriptions of events, rather than labels that may seem too extreme or too soft, depending on your point of view.

Against that background, Trevor Bormann's report referred to Mahmoud al-Mabhouh using the following terms:

- "Palestinian arms dealer";
- " Hamas arms dealer"; and
- "The Palestinian resistance fighter was known to Mossad for buying weapons from Iran and notorious also for kidnapping and killing two Israeli soldiers in 1989."

These descriptions are in keeping with ABC Editorial Policies. The ABC did not consider that either a correction or counselling was required in this instance.

Ann Barker's report on 10 March 2010 related to a statement by US Vice President Biden, who had arrived in the Middle East to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Israel had just announced plans to build a further 1600 homes in East Jerusalem and Mr Biden issued a strongly worded statement, saying Israel's decision was a "dangerous decision", and that it represented "precisely the kind of step that undermines the trust we need right now."

Ms Barker's comment must be taken in context - that the announcement to build further homes was the biggest obstacle to peace in the context of the day's news events. It was not intended to be a sweeping statement on the history of the conflict in the Middle East.

The ABC did not consider that either a correction or counselling was required in this instance.

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Question No: 42

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: ABC Complaints/Bias

Senator Abetz asked:

Part A

The ABC has claimed that "it does not have a position, it does not have a point of view" (ECA Senate Estimates 25/5/2009).

Does the ABC maintain that this is also true in relation to its reporting on Israel?

If so, then how does it explain the following:

- (a) that the ABC has embraced both the language and the narrative of Israel's critics?
- (b) that the ABC is highly selective in what it reports and what it does not report in relation to Israel and its critics.
- (c) that in relation to Israel, ABC (acknowledged) factual errors and omissions skew one (anti-Israel) way.

Part B

The ABC has claimed that "it is highly scrutinised and that it welcomes that scrutiny" (ECA Senate Estimates 25/5/2009).

Does the ABC maintain that this is also true in relation to its reporting on Israel?

If so, then how does it explain the fact that the Independent Complaints Review Panel (ICRP) has advised that it lacks the jurisdiction to review:

- (i) The claim that the ABC's skewed factual errors proves that it is biased (against Israel).
- (ii) Any claims of bias that may result from the selection of newsworthy items.

Also, how then does the ABC explain:

- (iii) The ABC's denial of FOI requests in relation to complaints.

Answer:

In response to Part A, we note as follows:

- (a) The ABC has not "embraced the language and the narrative of Israel's critics".
- (b) Across all news and current affairs coverage, the ABC's decisions about reportage are guided by judgements of news value and public interest.
- (c) When the ABC makes errors, these are acknowledged and appropriate steps are taken to correct the record. The fact that an error occurs is not prima facie evidence of a bias or predisposition towards a particular viewpoint. The ABC has no viewpoint.

In response to Part B, the ABC receives a number of complaints about its coverage of Israel. In response a question from Senator Troeth about ABC's news and current affairs coverage of Israel the 2009 Budget Estimates hearings, ABC Managing Director Mark Scott noted that, "We are aware that coverage of issues that are as complex and as sensitive as the Middle East means that our coverage is highly scrutinised." The reference to the Middle East was intended to include Israel.

The ABC has a rigorous complaints handling process. This process gives dissatisfied complainants the opportunity to seek review via a number of mechanisms, one of which is the Independent Complaints Review Panel (ICRP). The ABC is not party to private correspondence between the ICRP and complainants. However, based on the Panel's most recently decided complaints:

- (a) it is not correct to say that the ICRP "lacks the jurisdiction to review ... [t]he claim that the ABC's skewed factual errors proves that it is biased (against Israel)". Most recently, a Panel report had this to say about its approach to allegations of this nature:

"... if alleged "systemic" bias is shown in and by a significant series of broadcasts or online stories then a complaint properly made in respect of each such claimed example of bias could, after completion of earlier procedures, bring the series before the Panel for determination of the bias issue in respect of each individual program or story. A series of adverse findings on bias in respect of a significant number of complaints in a particular timeframe might point towards a systemic problem. However, no such process has been followed in the present matter and no such case has been made".

- (b) it is also not correct to say that the ICRP "lacks the jurisdiction to review ... [a]ny claims of bias that may result from the selection of newsworthy items". The Panel's published findings demonstrate that it not only has this jurisdiction, but routinely exercises it.

The ABC is exempt from the requirement to provide access to certain documents.

Subsection 7(2) of the FOI Act relevantly provides that “The ... bodies ... specified in Part II of Schedule 2 are exempt from the operation of this Act in relation to the documents referred to in that Schedule in relation to them.” Part II of Schedule 2 of the FOI Act expressly states that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation is an exempt agency for the purposes of the FOI Act “in relation to its program material and datacasting content”.

The question of whether complaints about ABC program material fall within this exemption has been considered by the Federal Court. In *Australian Broadcasting Corporation v The University of Technology, Sydney* [2006] FCA 964, the Court held:

“If a document has direct or indirect relationship to program material, subject to one further matter, it is exempt... The further consideration is the condition in s7(2) that an agency is exempt in relation to the documents referred to in the Schedule ‘in relation to them’. That requires the documents to have a relationship not only to program material but also to the ABC. Letters of complaint about the ABC’s programs and responses to those complaints on the same subject as well as documents internal to the ABC on this subject are in relation to the ABC.”

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Question No: 43

Program No. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Hansard Ref: In writing

Topic: ABC Editorial Policies

Senator Abetz asked:

The ABC's Editorial Policies require that corrections of News and Current Affairs content be made in "an appropriate manner as soon as reasonably practicable". Please provide in detail the meaning of "appropriate manner" and 'as soon as is reasonably practicable" in layman's terms and what guidance, if any, the ABC will disseminate and to whom on their editorial policies with reference to correction of News and Current Affairs.

The Press Council requires that the publication promptly corrects a serious error in a manner that "ensures that the retraction, clarification, correction, explanation or apology has the effect, as far as possible, of neutralising any damage arising from the original publication".

On 6 May 2009, the ABC's *AM* program repeated the false UN claim that Israel had bombed an UNWRA school, when the ABC knew or should have known that this claim was false. The ABC "corrected" this false report on 22 May 2009 via an Editor's Note appended to the transcript of the program segment located on the ABC's web site.

Does the ABC consider that the ABC's correction of this damaging false report was made promptly and in a manner that neutralised the damage as far as possible?

Does the ABC meet the standards required by the Press Council? If so, how? If not, why not?

Answer:

Under the ABC's Editorial Policies, it is standard procedure, to correct errors in a timely and appropriate manner.

In determining the appropriate manner, the ABC considers whether an on-air or alternate form of correction is appropriate. In doing so, consideration of the following is made:

- Was it a major factual error which would mislead the audience if left uncorrected?
- Is it a matter which can be easily and clearly corrected on-air in a way which would be meaningful to the audience?
- Is an on-air correction the most efficient and practical way of correcting the record, given the nature of the error?
- Can it be done in a timely manner, while the original story is still fresh in people's minds?

Where most or all of these questions are answered in the affirmative, an on air correction is deemed appropriate. If the answers to some or all of these questions are answered in the negative, it may be more effective to include a written correction in a web version of a story, where the correction can be properly explained and put into context, and where it remains as a permanent correction to the record.

In relation to making corrections “as soon as reasonably practicable”, once the ABC has determined that an error requiring correction has been made, the ABC aims to correct it at the earliest opportunity.

Issues which might delay the correction process include:

- the time taken to investigate and confirm the error;
- the need to consider the best form and method of correction; and
- the need to conclude any formal legal processes which might be required before a correction can be aired.

The ABC is currently reviewing its Editorial Policies and is preparing a series of guidance notes for staff on key editorial policies. It is intended that one of these guidance notes will cover the appropriateness and timing of corrections.

The ABC considers that this correction was made promptly and in accordance with ABC Editorial Policies.

The ABC is bound by its Editorial Policies and Codes of Practice and not by Press Council standards.