

**Mr Balding**—At this stage I believe it is necessary because of the actual environment that we are in in respect of the election. Secondly, there is also a greater awareness of the ABC and its need to ensure that it continues to deliver programming that is fair and impartial. To me, it is just another issue of improving our corporate governance processes.

**Senator MACKAY**—You have not caved in, have you, Mr Balding?

**Mr Balding**—In what way?

**Senator MACKAY**—To the sort of pressure you have been under from the coalition.

**Mr Balding**—No.

**Senator Kemp**—I think you are trying to lead the witness there.

**Senator MACKAY**—There is no standing order about leading a witness.

**Senator Kemp**—That is what I detect. I detect an element of attempting to lead the witness there. It is a shocking suggestion too, by the way.

**Senator MACKAY**—So, Mr Balding, you can assure the committee that it is not as a response to what seems to be a fairly orchestrated Liberal Party campaign; this is just something that popped into your head as being not a bad idea because we are currently in what you term an election environment? That stretches credulity a bit, I have to say.

**Mr Balding**—Let me assure this committee that it is a management initiative that we have decided to bring it forward. As I said, there was no direction from the board. There was no board resolution with respect to this matter. It was obviously discussed at a number of board meetings. I saw a benchmark, if you like, in the delivery of the federal budget as an appropriate time to start, given the environment we are operating in at the moment.

**Senator MACKAY**—Was the ABC subject to criticism by people in the coalition prior to the last election?

**Mr Balding**—In respect of the election coverage or—

**Senator MACKAY**—No, just more generally than that.

**Mr Balding**—I think the ABC has been subject to criticism by all parties over a period.

**Senator MACKAY**—Yes, that is right. That may be so, but I am asking just about coalition members.

**Mr Balding**—I would assume so.

**Senator MACKAY**—Why didn't you do it last election?

**Mr Balding**—Last election was a period when I had just moved in as acting managing director. It had not come to my mind at that stage.

**Senator MACKAY**—Why did it come to your mind this time around?

**Mr Balding**—I have outlined to this committee a number of times what we are doing to improve our governance processes and again to demonstrate as far as we can to the parliament and to the Australian people that the ABC does conduct its election coverage, and it does have proper processes in place to ensure its programming is, in a fair, balanced and impartial way. We are in election mode. I do not think anyone is going to deny that. There is heightened political activity, and it is important that the ABC not only is fair and impartial but is seen to be fair and impartial. The corporation over the past couple of years has introduced a number of improvements to its corporate governance. Complaints handling is one of them. This is just another improvement that we are introducing.

**Senator MACKAY**—I guess the old adage 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' comes to mind. Are you responding to concerns? It seems to me you are responding to concerns that have been raised. I do not think you can deny that you are.

**Mr Balding**—I would like to think I am being proactive rather than responding to concerns that have been raised.

**Senator MACKAY**—You can say that, but I do not think anybody here would necessarily buy that line in isolation of circumstances surrounding—

**Mr Balding**—It is up to individuals how they interpret it.