

Mr Balding—I think we need to have a look at the definition of ‘terrorist’. I think that what John Tulloh would be trying to do is provide some guidelines and a style guide to ABC journalists to assist them. I am more than happy to have a look at that and provide comments to you.

Senator SANTORO—In the first edition of *Media Watch* for 2004, broadcast a week ago, host David Marr fired a broadside at the Hutton report just published in Britain, claiming that the BBC’s report on prewar allied intelligence on Iraq’s weapons capability that sparked that inquiry was essentially correct. I notice that your letter in the *Australian* newspaper today, and the one from Ms Levy, like Mr Marr in his program, ignored the central fact that the claim that Iraq could use weapons of mass destruction at 45 minutes notice was not put into Prime Minister Tony Blair’s House of Commons speech by members of the British government but by intelligence officials. Given that *Media Watch* has the role of monitoring the media for exactly the sort of obfuscation that Mr Marr himself perpetrated last Monday, is it appropriate in your view that he is allowed to continue to use the program as a publicly funded soapbox for his personal views?

Mr Balding—I will pass the question of the detail to Sandra Levy, but the issue of *Media Watch* was discussed, obviously, at the last Senate committee hearing. I believe that the actual program itself is a very worthwhile and justified program. For the actual details of what is contained and what is not contained, and as far as Monday night’s episode is concerned, I will pass the question to Sandra.

Ms Levy—I do not believe that *Media Watch* is a soapbox forum for Mr David Marr. We support the role of *Media Watch* as a critique of media coverage of key events.

Senator SANTORO—But, when he proceeds to ignore a central fact and puts forward an opinion that is directly contradictory to the central facts and one of the central findings of the Hutton inquiry, how would you describe it? If you do not describe it as using the program as a publicly funded soapbox, how would you describe ignoring a central fact or, in fact, misrepresenting that central finding? Why don’t you give me your description of Mr Marr? Are you trying to tell me and this committee that Mr Marr reported that finding by the Hutton inquiry accurately?

Ms Levy—Mr David Marr reported on the media response and the media attitudes to the Hutton inquiry—that is, the reporting and coverage of it and the subsequent events in England. *Media Watch* has a long and proud tradition of providing a critique of the media and I believe Mr David Marr does an excellent job in that long tradition.

Senator SANTORO—Do you believe that that finding by the Hutton inquiry is inaccurate?

Ms Levy—It is not our role to judge the Hutton inquiry. We have no role in participating in the Hutton inquiry. It was a UK inquiry and it was completed. However, *Media Watch* does have a role in evaluating the media’s response and style of reporting of the Hutton inquiry, and I believe that is what it did.

Senator SANTORO—Mr Balding, I am interested in Ms Levy’s answer. Has the ABC studied the findings of the Hutton inquiry in relation to activities real or alleged by the BBC?

Mr Balding—We have, and we are continuing to study it. In actual fact, I have commissioned a report that will go to the editorial policy committee of the board at the end of March. It will go through the Hutton inquiry report and it will parallel issues in Hutton and compare how the ABC applies its governance process and procedures to see if there are any lessons that the ABC can learn from it and if there are any areas of exposure or risk to the ABC. So we are going through that in fine detail right now. It will, as I said, be in a report to the editorial policy group of the board at the end of March.

Senator SANTORO—What were the terms of reference of that review?

Mr Balding—I have just asked for a full review of the report, as I said, identifying where the report identifies the BBC as being in error, particularly in respect of its processes and procedures, and comparing that to the current ABC processes and procedures to see if we are satisfied that ours are of such rigour to avoid a similar situation occurring at the ABC. At the moment we are fairly confident that our processes and procedures would stack up—again, this is through the enhancement of our complaints-handling process—but nevertheless it is appropriate and quite proper that we go through that report and report in detail to the board.

Senator SANTORO—Would you be prepared to make that report public?

Mr Balding—I will have a look at that. Again, it is forming the basis of a board paper. Can I please take that on notice?

Senator SANTORO—Yes.