

The Secretary,
Senate Environment, Communications, Info Tech & the Arts References Committee,
S157, Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600.

Dear Sir/Madam

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Would you kindly place my attached submission before the Committee.

Thank you

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24 July 2001

Honourable Members of the Senate

Earlier in the year I wrote to the Chairman of the ABC, Mr. Donald McDonald concerning the corporate governance of the ABC and asking whether the Board saw it as its role to foster best practice in human resource management and governance.

Some weeks later I received a terse response from the Chairman. In the letter which did not address my fundamental question he told me bluntly that he did not need reminding of his obligations as Chairman. His tone was not that of a Chairman of a public corporation but was dismissive entirely. I have published his response throughout the parliament and the senate. I believe that you may have received communications on the topic of the ABC.

The Chairman's response to myself and the public persona he presents is the nature of communication between the Board and members of the public who are willing to take the time to communicate on what we see as important issues. We are denigrated by a person who has demonstrated debatable skills and effectiveness as a Chairman of such an important organisation. There is no essence or willingness to be accountable and the management of our public assets is on an ever - sliding scale into degradation.

It is now quite farcical for the Minister or for any member of any government to attempt to have the public believe that the ABC is not politicised or that the choice of the Managing Director is not subject to some form of subliminal or persuasive force. The fact that it is not written or formally put by the Minister is irrelevant to the public perception. Denial and the presentation of fiction as fact is simply the normal political manoeuvring and speak. The reappointment of Mr. McDonald is nothing more than stubborn arrogance and a contempt for the process of people putting forward views. We are dismissed summarily and then humiliated and lead to become enraged. This is not the manner of effective government and democratic process between the people and our Ministries and national government.

I feel that because the ABC has such a small audience it may be felt by the Minister and by cabinet that the larger number of people in Australia could not care and it is politically safe to badge and denigrate the loudest voices. Further the social mores of the parliament (House of Representatives) and government are no longer focused on quality and integrity as a means in itself for our public entities.

It is vital that the ABC be seen as a truly independent entity. It is also vital that it not be degraded like the rest of our public services (National Employment – CES, Telstra, etc).

Appointments to the Board including the Managing Director should be ratified by the Parliament.

This can be effected through having a Senate or oversight committee (of bipartisan make up) receiving nominations for the Board, after calling publicly.

Membership of the Board can be "craftfully" structured to represent interests and skills including arts, television, film, public broadcasting, marketing, education, staff and community.

The process of advertising and interviewing as well as finally appointing the Managing Director can be mandated in process with the final short list of contenders referred to the Committee for a 'one hour' presentation of their credentials and offerings. This presentation is taken in context with the Boards summary of interviews and recommendation.

As a person who has been a volunteer broadcaster in community radio for twenty years since the foundation of our association I have a passion for public media and for the ABC. I fail to see why everything we have that is quality, in Australia, must be denigrated and ultimately destroyed. In the case of the ABC it is primarily because a handful of people in powerful positions do not like its culture.

Kevin R Beck

