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Subject: Board appointments to ABC

A SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO METHODS OF APPOINTMENT TO THE BOARD OF THE ABC

Like many people, I am concerned at the apparent shift in standards at the ABC. No doubt it is, in part, a result of funding cuts. However it is a striking thing that the current board of the ABC has been silent about the issue. In fact the board of the ABC has been conspicuously silent in the growing public debate about what is widely seen as the destruction of the ABC.

How can that be so? Board members of a company in private enterprise, faced with sustained shareholder dissatisfaction, would swiftly react to address shareholder concerns. The true stakeholders of the ABC are the Australian public. The ABC exists for the benefit of the public, and for the culture which is the heritage of all of us. It is not intended to be the plaything of government; it is not intended to be an underfunded rival to the commercial channels. The board of the ABC has not shown any interest in the complaints and concerns of its major stakeholders, the Australian public.

There is a widely-held view that each government in its turn ensures that a majority of the ABC board are in harmony with that government's views. A review of the present, and recent, boards does nothing to dispel that view. The silence of the current board, despite the current public protest, tends to confirm the view.

The board should be chosen in a way which ensures that the legitimate interests of the true stakeholders are preserved, not ignored. The current scheme for appointment of the board has failed to produce that result. The scheme should change.

In my opinion, board appointments should be made by a scheme of the following general sort (accepting that it may change in its details):

- 3 members appointed by the government
- 2 members appointed by the opposition
- 1 member appointed by the next largest minority party (eg Greens/Democrats)
- 1 member appointed by the Committee of Australian Vice-Chancellors
- 1 member appointed by the Australia Council
- 1 member appointed by ABC staff.

Such a scheme might increase the prospects of an ABC board which represents a cross-section of Australian thought and culture.

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