

From: nola firth [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 7 August 2001 3:15 PM
To: ecita.sen@aph.gov.au
Cc: Barry Firth
Subject: ABC Board enquiry

The Secretary,
Senate Environment, Communications Information Technology and the Arts Refernces
COMmittee,
S157, Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Madam/Sir,

I am encouraged to hear of the Senate enquiry into the composition of the ABC Board, and that the terms of reference are the development and implementation of options for methods of appointment that would enhance public confidence in the independence and representativeness of the ABC as the national broadcaster. Despite massive fund cuts to the ABC and their disastrous ramifications, I have heard of no opposition to this situation from the board, and I do not therefore have confidence in the board, nor in the method of its composition.

I am in no doubt that the funding cuts have seriously damaged the ABC and its positive influence on production and dissemination of quality Australian made cultural products. I am concerned at the cuts in library, production and training facilities at the ABC. I am concerned in the decrease in quality Australian made drama and documentaries on ABC television. I am not enjoying the British fill-in shows such as "Can you do without?" which showed at prime time in the evening. I am concerned at the rumours of cut backs in coverage of women's and other lower status sport events. I am concerned that due to financial constraints, the ABC is being pushed towards commercialisation and compromise of its independence.

The negative ramifications this dismemberment of the national broadcaster for Australian society are major. They include a decline in availability and influence of the richness of the highest Australian talent and perceptions, loss to future generations of previously built up expertise and high quality resources, further marginalisation of lower status aspects of Australian society such as women's sport, and erosion of the democratic cornerstone of media independence. That these things are being allowed to occur is irresponsible in the extreme. The board of the ABC is responsible for what happens at the ABC, yet there has been no effort to arrest the demise, and no protest by the board.

In the light of the above, it is clear there is something seriously wrong with the current ABC board membership and structure. As a taxpayer and shareholder in the ABC, I would like to see the resignation of this board and of the Managing Director. I also would like to see the new board composed of members who are appointed or elected on the basis of merit and commitment to independent and comprehensive national broadcasting, and not on allegiance to any political party. The ABC has the immensely important national democratic responsibility to be fearlessly independent and to serve the national interest. It is therefore essential that board appointments are independent of the political influences of governments of the day. I would like such a system of appointment or election to the board of the ABC to be devised by this inquiry, and for this to be recommended to the parliament for adoption.

Yours faithfully

Nola Firth

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