

From: Paul Dempsey [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 7 August 2001 11:33 PM
To: ecita.sen@aph.gov.au
Subject: SAVE OUR ABC

Secretary,
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology & the Arts References
Committee,
S157, Parliament
House, Canberra ACT 2600.

The present Board and Managing Director of the ABC do not have the confidence of the public and should resign immediately.

I would like the Senate Inquiry to recommend that Parliament introduce a system that ensures that members of the ABC Board are appointed on the basis of merit and commitment to an independent and comprehensive national public broadcaster, not allegiance to the government of the day, whatever party is in power. I consider this arrangement would be in complete contrast to the present arrangement. It is plainly obvious that this government has an intense dislike of the ABC.

When I witness the mutually sycophantic and ingratiating dialogue between the Government members and the Board's Chairman, Donald McDonald and Managing Director, Jonathan Shier it makes me angry.

For instance, Mr McDonald publicly promoted Prime Minister Howard prior to the last election. Such behaviour is entirely inappropriate for the head of a major institution, meant to be independent of government. It is astounding, given that the Government cut the ABC's budget by 12%.

The present ABC Board has rarely protested at the government's ferocious cuts to the ABC, nor challenged the Government's regular attacks on the broadcaster's integrity and independence. The latest 'injury' was to see a former President of the Victorian Liberal Party and recent Liberal government appointee to the ABC Board lobby in favour of his former employer, Kerry Packer, and against the legal department of the ABC. How interesting that he suggested that the ABC should not pursue a certain course of action against his former employer!

Why did the Board only seek partial funding from the government to fund the ABC's transition to digital technology. It should have also been seeking the restoration of funds previously cut from the broadcaster's core operating budget. The attempts to cripple the ABC are transparently obvious when the public sees the Board applying for funds that are tied to new services. This is entirely inappropriate as the ABC then becomes the government's puppet and allows it to dictate to the ABC. Where is the independence?

The ABC Board has overseen the loss of talented staff, a decline in quality local production, an increase in repeats and cuts in funding for the news and current affairs budgets. What a tragic loss it is when a quality program such as Quantum is substituted with inferior, uninteresting low budget shows. The ABC suffers with management decisions that see sequels to former award winning shows such as Sea Change lost because of lack of support and resources.

The ABC's focus is increasingly being diverted from producing quality programs. Funds

are wasted on severance packages for acknowledged talented staff lost due to ill-informed management whims.

If misguided plans for user-pays services ever come to fruition then I feel the ABC is doomed.

I am distressed when I witness deliberate actions taken to progressively undermine and destroy the reputation of the ABC.

Please save our ABC.

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