



HUMANIST SOCIETY OF VICTORIA Inc.

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Standing Committee on Environment, Communications, Information Technology
 and the Arts References Committee
 Senate
 Federal Parliament
 Canberra

The members of the **Humanist Society of Victoria** believe that it is possible to lead an ethical, fulfilling and responsible life relying on human knowledge and experience. We are committed to the ideals of equality, social cooperation, individual autonomy, democracy, the rule of law and the right of all to lead an enjoyable and dignified life free from persecution and injustice.

SUBMISSION

The Humanist Society of Victoria strongly supports the role of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation as a national, independent and comprehensive broadcaster. We have previously written to the Minister of Communications, Senator Richard Alston, expressing our concern with, the government's lack of commitment to adequate three-year funding and decisions made by the ABC Board and management which contradict the ABCs charter.

We believe that while reducing funding has hampered the ability of the ABC to consistently deliver high quality programs, we also consider that the Board's appointment of Jonathan Shier as Managing Director, a person with little experience and commitment to public broadcasting, has further reduced the capacity of the ABC to deliver quality broadcasting. Shier's appointment is widely perceived as a product of a Board composed of members, many of whom have publicly identified links to the government. This marked politicisation of the Board's composition has greatly reduced public confidence in the objectivity of its decision making.

We therefore appreciate the opportunity to put our views on the ABC Board Appointments, and believe it is essential that new methods be put in place that increase public confidence in ABC Board and management decision making.

Victorian Humanists consider that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Board should direct the ABC to fulfil its charter of being a comprehensive, national independent broadcaster. Individuals appointed to the ABC Board should therefore be committed to this charter.

Those with an interest in the ABC are first and foremost the people of Australia. They are the listeners and viewers who look to the ABC:

1. to provide reliable, comprehensive local, national and international news.
2. to provide information programs on areas as the arts, history, science, business, politics, lifestyles, and life philosophies.
3. to transmit live broadcasts of sporting activities and other public events of community interest.
4. to provide entertainment in various forms including comedy and drama shows.

Second are those who work for the ABC, especially in a career capacity. These people are putting their work effort and creativity into ensuring that the ABC delivers high quality programs. They, therefore have a vested interest in excellence, both in content and management.

Third is the government who fund the ABC. They have an interest in assessing that taxpayers money is well spent.

The ABC is a statutory body set up to fulfil its charter independently of the government of the day. Thus the composition of the Board, including its Chairman, should be seen as truly independent.

RECOMMENDATIONS for ABC Board Appointments

1. That a parliamentary committee, whose membership accurately mirrors the proportional strength of the various political parties and non-party independents in both houses of the Federal parliament, be charged with appointing three-quarters the ABC Board members for three-year terms.
2. That this parliamentary committee be newly appointed after each election.
3. That this committee should make its choice from persons nominated through a public advertising process. This process should take the form of notices in newspapers, on radio and television and in other public platforms, inviting suggestions for Board membership.
4. That the people selected for appointment should demonstrate public commitment to the charter of the ABC.
5. That this parliamentary committee should annually review the performance of all ABC Board members, and have the power to terminate the appointment of any member who has been deemed, through their actions or words, to have compromised the charter of the ABC.
6. That this committee should annually report to parliament on its deliberations.
7. That those employed by the ABC should appoint by secret ballot a further quarter of the board members for three-year terms.
8. That the Chairman of the ABC Board should be selected by the board members, from among themselves for a three-year term, subject to review annually.

Yours sincerely

Rosslyn Ives
Submission Committee HSV