

From: David Littlewood [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 10 August 2001 9:53 AM
To: ecita.sen@aph.gov.au
Subject: Senate Inquiry on ABC Board Appointments

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9 August 2001

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the issue of the ABC Board. 80% of our radio and television usage is sourced from the ABC and consequently we have a strong interest, particularly as retired individuals with time to listen and watch, in the management of the ABC. It is in the interests of a vibrant and sound democracy and Australia's cultural identity that we should have a well-resourced and independent public broadcaster; the ABC has proved, that with adequate resources, it can deliver programs that no commercial operator would dare or contemplate because of the imperatives of the market. It has also a proven track record of 'training' personnel who have been head-hunted by commercial broadcasting sector which clearly respects the quality of the ABC's staff and programing judgements.

At the moment we have lost confidence in the Board and its capacity for one reason or another to sustain a strong ABC, and in its chief appointee, Mr Jonathon Shier. It is time for a new Board, but one that needs to be appointed under more satisfactory guidelines.

At present, there appears to be no criteria for appointment of individuals in terms of experience and expertise, the Board is accountable to no-one but the Government, and its decisions remain less than transparent. The Senate's review has to find mechanisms for:

- appointment that cease the cycle of appointments which are or are perceived to be political ones
- some accountability to the Australian community.

It is time to look to a stronger role of the Parliament in the process. We would like to suggest that all appointments should require the support of both Houses of Parliament, a procedure which would require more cross-party approval. Such a procedure is not in the

traditions of the Westminster System but it is time to review some of our government procedures.

We are not fully informed on current reporting procedures, but we would advocate a requirement for a detailed annual report to Parliament by the ABC Board. This report should inform Parliament and through it the Australian public, the shareholders, of Board and management policies and strategies, reports on programming, resource allocations across programs, and staffing policies and changes. No doubt there are other areas. We would suggest that the Senate Inquiry could propose a set of reporting requirements and indicators.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission.

Yours sincerely

David Littlewood
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