

From: [REDACTED]
To: ecita.sen@aph.gov.au
Subject: Submission to Senate Inquiry on ABC Board Appointments

Ms Dallas Kinnear
"Lakeside Farm"
20 Jubilee Lake Lane
DAYLESFORD VIC 3460
PHONE: [REDACTED]

and

Mr Murray Winter
40 Bridport Street
DAYLESFORD VIC 3460
PHONE: [REDACTED]

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

Email: ecita.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Living in rural Victoria, we rely heavily on the ABC to keep us informed of current issues and able to enjoy some rich cultural programs without having to travel to a major city. We would find it difficult to enjoy our retirement in the country without it. Already we are missing the quality programs we used to enjoy such as Quantum and the old Media Watch with Paul Barry.

As people who wrote to the Mansfield Inquiry into the ABC in 1996, it saddens us to see the demise of the ABC under the present Board and Managing Director. We believe that the ABC is essential to Australia's culture and democracy. It must be maintained as a well-resourced and comprehensive national public broadcaster which is independent from commercial and political influence.

Democracy is a fragile flower and depends on having an informed electorate. To balance the often biased views put forward by the commercial media, we need a public broadcaster providing information that is well-researched and not beholden to any political or commercial masters.

The present system of appointments to the ABC Board is clearly unsatisfactory. It allows any government to stack the Board with people aligned with its philosophies and who act in its interests.

We were appalled when the Board's Chairman, Mr Donald McDonald, publicly supported Prime Minister John Howard prior to the last election - entirely inappropriate behaviour for the head of the ABC which is meant to be independent of government.

In addition, the Board sought only partial funds from the Government for the ABC's transition to digital technology. Instead of seeking to restore funds cut from the broadcaster's core operating budget, the Board applied for funds for specified new services, allowing the Government to pick and choose what the ABC will and won't do. It is disgraceful politicizing of the ABC.

The ABC Board has overseen: loss of talented staff, decline in quality local production, increased 'repeats', the news and current affairs budget cut, and loss of important programs.

The ABC's focus has been diverted from producing quality programs to raising funds from outside commercial sources in ways which risk the ABC's independence. There are even plans for user-pays services.

No wonder the Government has nothing but praise for The ABC Board and Jonathon Shier. Whilst many people decry the Government cuts to the ABC's budget, the Board and Chairman have seldom protested at them, or at the Governments's regular attacks on the broadcaster's integrity and independence.

We feel cheated, let down and very angry.

Like many others, we have lost confidence in the present Board and Managing Director of the ABC, and believe they should resign immediately.

We call on the Senate Inquiry to recommend that the Parliament introduce a system which ensures members of the ABC Board are appointed on the basis of merit and commitment to independent and comprehensive national public broadcasting, not allegiance to the government of the day.

We suggest a panel to appoint members of the ABC Board - a panel of people who are seen by the public to be people of integrity who are independent of and above any commercial and government interests, a panel based on expertise in appropriate fields and which also has representatives of the various stakeholders. We believe that the government of the day should not have any say in who is appointed. Such a process of selection would, we believe, "enhance public confidence in the independence and representativeness of the ABC as the national broadcaster."

"The best way to predict the future is to help create it". An independent ABC can help us all to work together to build a more democratic future - one that is tolerant and diverse, socially and economically just, ecologically sustainable, and which values local communities - a vital task which our commercial media appears to have been unable to fulfill.

Yours faithfully

Dallas Kinnear and Murray Winter