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Subject: Submission to Senate Inquiry - ABC Board

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The ABC is the primary institution and reference point which embodies (or should embody) Australia's culture and democracy. It performs a vital role culturally and economically in an increasingly knowledge based world, providing an essential and cost effective means of keeping the population informed, and abreast of change and new possibilities. It is a key forum for national debate and exchange of viewpoints. It is not a business but neither should it operate without proper governance and checks and balances to ensure that public funds are expended efficiently and effectively in fulfilling its charter. It must be maintained as a well-resourced and comprehensive national public broadcaster which is independent from commercial and political influence.

The present system of appointments to the ABC Board does not enjoy public confidence and is clearly unsatisfactory. It prejudices ABC's independence and reduces the trust of the Australian people that they are receiving a balanced perspective. It allows the perception that any government can stack the Board with people aligned with its philosophies and who act in its interests.

The Senate Inquiry should recommend that the Parliament introduce a system which ensures members of the ABC Board are appointed on the basis of merit and represent a range of experience and viewpoints which demonstrably equip the ABC to fulfil its charter. Other essential qualifications for Board members are that they understand the unique nature and role of a public broadcaster in ensuring the successful evolution of a democratic nation in a knowledge based world. Board members should also have a firm commitment to independent and comprehensive national public broadcasting.

Trevor and Joan Lipscombe