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Sent: Saturday, 11 August 2001 9:30 AM
To: ecita.sen@aph.gov.au
Subject: ABC submission to Enquiry

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

SUBMISSION

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.

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.

In my opinion, the present Board and Managing Director of the ABC no longer have the confidence of the public and should resign immediately.

I 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.

Background Information

The Government has nothing but praise for the Board's Chairman, Donald McDonald and Managing Director, Jonathan Shier.

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 the Government cut the ABC's budget by 12%.

This 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.

On the contrary, the Board has distracted attention from the government's responsibilities and its actions. The board sought only partial funds from the government for the ABC's transition to digital technology. Recently, 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 do and what it will not do.

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 such as Quantum and Media Watch and television's only dedicated book program.

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.

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