

The Secretary,
Senate Environment, Communications Information Technology and the Arts
Legislation Committee
Parliament House, CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senators

I am writing to express my concern and opposition to the proposed amendment of the ABC act to remove the Staff elected director from the board of the ABC. Far from being a position out of step with modern corporate governance, the existence of a staff elected representative on the ABC Board is in keeping with best practise and is both a legislative requirement and a common practise in EU countries such as Germany and most Scandinavian countries allowing for balance in decision making and ensuring that expertise and corporate knowledge is available at the highest decision making level.

The benefits for the ABC board and the people of Australia in having a board member with current public broadcasting experience is priceless, literally since the staff elected rep is not paid as other directors, saving the taxpayer a considerable amount. Ramona Koval has never been censured by the Board, nor has it ever asked for her removal; and it is puzzling that Senator Coonan would choose this time to take this step, particularly as the Board is singularly lacking in broadcasting experience in the rest of the directors and there are currently two vacancies that seem to be difficult to fill. The conclusion that may be reached is that in a crucial time for the ABC in regards to ongoing funding recommended by an independant report by KPMG, and debate about commercialisation, the government would prefer that only its handpicked board members are able to deliberate on these issues.

To the citizens of Australia, this move smacks of political interference in an organisation that many hold dear and will vigorously defend. The ABC has been repeatedly dragged through enquiries on bias and has endured many allegations regarding editorial content and these have been found to be false in all but the mildest of cases. I would challenge any privately owned media outlet in this country to stand up to such scrutiny and come out with its reputation intact. The existence of the ABC is a lifeline to all those wishing to have news and current affairs free of editorialising and interference by vested interests, those who value free and unbiased reporting and analysis. The abolition of the Staff Elected Director is but another attack by an ideologically driven conservative government too afraid of the people of Australia to trust them with the truth

Yours faithfully,
Maggie May