

The ABC - Australia's Cultural & Democratic Future

Friends of the ABC - Qld, Tas, Vic & WA

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The media has a significant impact on the life of the nation.

There is no organisation more important to Australia's future than our *independent* and *comprehensive* national public broadcaster. The ABC, accessible to all Australians, is a major producer and disseminator of culture and independent information. It is valuable educator.

Its significance as an alternative voice is vital in a country which has little media diversity left, and which is being swamped with programming and cultural product from larger English-speaking countries.

The ABC's healthy operation and independence - from government and commercial influence - is critical to Australian democracy and culture. Yet the failure of federal governments to adequately fund the national broadcaster, political interference and the ABC's own commercial activities have all undermined the ABC.

The ABC must have:

1. a transparent **ABC board** appointment process resulting in board members appointed on the basis of merit and a strong commitment to independent public broadcasting; and the restoration of a staff-elected director to the ABC Board
2. a mechanism that guarantees federal **government funding** which is adequate for the ABC to maintain its **independence**, and to fulfil its **Charter responsibilities** to a high standard. Operational funding must not be targeted. It is for the ABC, not government or external bodies, to determine how the broadcaster will best meet its charter responsibilities.
3. proper resources for **Radio Australia** to produce a wide range of programs in relevant languages, and to have access to facilities which enable it to independently broadcast its programs to the Asia Pacific region
4. the ABC Act's **prohibition on advertising** on radio and television extended to all mediums through which a public broadcaster should provide content (i.e., at this time, online)

The ABC should:

1. cease **commercial activities** which influence ABC content, detract from audience satisfaction or risk damaging the ABC's integrity
2. **produce in-house** all news and current affairs, and a high level of quality programming across all other genres. Along with a healthy independent production sector, the ABC must be a producer. To outsource all ABC content beyond news and current affairs is privatisation through the back door.
There must be strong production units in **every Australian state** so that the breadth of Australian interest and experience is reflected.
A review is required of the ABC's inadequate funding levels and the present system of public assistance to the private production sector which is a disincentive to the ABC to produce programming. (i.e., As the result of government assistance, the private sector is able to sell programming more cheaply to the ABC than it would cost the ABC to produce.)
3. reinstate **specialist program units** (such as the former Natural History Unit); and return to providing the sort of **employment** in which people are nurtured and trained to produce quality content. The loss of these will, in the longer-term, result in television programming that is bland and less specialised.
4. focus on **innovation and quality, not ratings**; thereby also causing other broadcasters to lift their standards
5. reflect a **greater diversity of interests**, including **local diversity** - state and regional differences
6. use **technological change to increase public access** to the ABC, not as an opportunity to earn revenue from services that a modern public broadcaster should provide
7. expand its **role in the arts**, providing more opportunities for original creation and work for Australian artists; and do more to stimulate community interest in the arts
8. re-establish **radio programming for children**
9. do more, as a **recorder and keeper of the nation's history**, to facilitate community access to its archival material
10. expand its role as an **educator**. The ABC is well placed to use its delivery mechanisms to make education accessible to more Australians without cost. Digital technology provides huge opportunities for the ABC to move beyond its existing role as Australia's open university and a lifetime educator.
The ABC could, for example, carry content for adult education, formal educational material of public educational institutions at all levels, and content to assist newly arrived migrants to learn English.
11. play a greater role in **promoting public debate** on important political and social issues. The ABC could, for example, sponsor live debates on important topics in public venues.