



“The most important role of the media is to question the truthfulness of governments.”
Robert Manne, La Trobe University, SMH 2 June 2003

Why *Public Broadcasting* ?

Only a public broadcaster can:

- **Probe the powerful, critically analyse government, expose the secret**
- **Concentrate on quality, rather than deliver audiences to advertisers**
- **Create a sense of national culture**
- **Cater for the diversity of interests across the nation**
- **Foster creative endeavour in the community**

“Non commercial television should address itself to the idea of excellence – not the idea of acceptability.” Ruth Cracknell quoting (2001) submission to Carnegie TV Inquiry 1967

What are the essential qualities for an effective public broadcaster?

- **Independence**, from political and commercial influences: freedom to broadcast comprehensive and accessible information so citizens can scrutinise the actions of the powerful and participate in decision-making
- **Accountability** to the public ultimately, via parliament, but also through accessible and transparent reporting and complaints procedures,
- **Distinctiveness** in creating high quality programming which caters for both minorities and the mainstream
- **Market share** sufficient users to justify public expenditure and to exert pressure on other broadcasters

Credible investigative journalism, imaginative and creative programming, take time. They require diligence, courage, integrity and independence, and adequate funding.

What are Friends of the ABC fighting for?

- **A merit-based ABC Board appointment procedure**

Maintaining the independence and integrity of the ABC is one of the duties of the ABC Board. For the Corporation to be at arms length from Government, the Board itself must be seen to be independent of Government. An open and transparent method of appointing the Board members, based on or similar to the Nolan Rules developed in the United Kingdom, should be implemented. The recently abolished position of staff elected director should be restored.

- **An ABC uncompromised by commercial influence**

The ABC should also be independent of commercial influence. There is a fundamental conflict between public broadcasting and commercial enterprise: the focus shifts from programmes to audiences. In the case of advertising, the company paying to advertise its goods or services wants to reach as large an audience as possible. It is not interested in an informed public, an inquiring public, an adventurous public, and it is certainly not interested in a diverse public.

The ABC Act should be amended to make it clear that advertising is prohibited on ABC material transmitted via the Internet, as well as on radio and television.

The ABC currently is engaged in a range of commercial activities: ABC shops, the publishing of books, music and television film, the licensing of ABC content to mobile phones, third party websites, shopping centres, magazines. The extent to which these enterprises influence the integrity of the broadcaster is unknown.

- **An ABC which is fearless, innovative and comprehensive**

The ABC is in danger of censoring itself out of innovative, comprehensive, wide-ranging programming of a high quality. Because of continuous, strident criticism, because of inadequate funding and because of provocative appointments to the Board, the ABC is likely to become increasingly bland, and much less excellent. “Diversity” must not become “acceptability to all”, “impartiality” must not become “resolutely neutral”.

The ABC should continue “to be a pace-setter in community discussion ...to ensure that Australians have an opportunity to be well-informed” - words deleted from the 2007 editorial policies.

- **An adequately and consistently funded ABC**

The ABC Charter requires the ABC to “provide within Australia innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard...”, to broadcast outside as well as inside Australia, and to encourage and promote the performing arts in Australia.” The ABC can not possibly comply with these demanding tasks unless it is adequately and consistently funded by government.

We propose four benchmarks of adequate and consistent funding:

- a. Comparison with commercial broadcasters in Australia.
- b. Comparison with public service broadcasters in other developed countries
- c. Public opinion.
- d. Freedom for the ABC to determine its own spending priorities

Only a public broadcaster can cater for the many different Australian audiences

The ABC must remain accessible to, and relevant to, all Australians. It is required to make both programs of popular appeal and programs for specialist audiences. It must serve both majorities and minorities. It must make informative and educational programs, but it must also make entertaining programs. It must take account of the multicultural nature of Australia while at the same time contributing to a sense of national identity. These Charter aims must be upheld, and retained in the ABC Act.