

ABC Board Appointments to Senate Standing Committee

2001.5. A.B.C. Board Appointments

Submitted (?) 2001 to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and Information Technology, Parliament of Australia, and the Arts References Committee

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ABC Board Appointments

The Humanist Society of Victoria strongly supports the role of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation as a national, independent and comprehensive broadcaster.

We pointed out that we had previously written to the Minister of Communications, Senator Richard Alston, expressing our concern with the government's lack of commitment to adequate three-year funding and decisions made by the ABC Board and management which contradict the ABC's charter.

We pointed out that while reducing funding has hampered the ability of the ABC to consistently deliver high quality programs, we also considered that the Board's appointment of Jonathan Shier as Managing Director, a person with little experience and commitment to public broadcasting, has further reduced the capacity of the ABC to deliver quality broadcasting. Shier's appointment is widely perceived as a product of a Board composed of members, many of whom have publicly identified links to the government. This marked politicisation of the Board's composition has greatly reduced public confidence in the objectivity of its decision making.

We said we appreciated the opportunity to put our views on the ABC Board Appointments, and believed that it is essential that new methods be put in place that increase public confidence in ABC Board and management decision making.

We pointed out the three groups with a special interest in the ABC:

- the people of Australia as listeners and viewers,
- those who work for the ABC,
- the government who fund the ABC.

We said that the ABC as a statutory body [was] set up to fulfil its charter independently of the government of the day. Thus the composition of the Board, including its Chairman, should be seen as truly independent.

Recommendations for ABC Board Appointments

1. That a parliamentary committee, whose membership accurately mirrors the proportional strength of the various political parties and non-party independents in both houses of the Federal parliament, be charged with appointing three-quarters [of] the ABC Board members for three-year terms.
2. That this parliamentary committee be newly appointed after each election.
3. That this committee should make its choice from persons nominated through a public advertising process. This process should take the form of notices in newspapers, on radio and television and in other public platforms, inviting suggestions for Board membership.
4. That the people selected for appointment should demonstrate public commitment to the charter of the ABC.

5. That this parliamentary committee should annually review the performance of all ABC Board members, and have the power to terminate the appointment of any member who has been deemed, through their actions or words, to have compromised the charter of the ABC.
 6. That this committee should annually report to Parliament on its deliberations.
 7. That those employed by the ABC should appoint by secret ballot a further quarter of the board members for three-year terms.
 8. That the Chairman of the ABC Board should be selected by the board members, from among themselves for a three-year term, subject to review annually.
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