

1999.2. The Independence and Integrity of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation
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The Independence and Integrity of the ABC

We write on this subject with a sense of urgency, in the light of current disclosures of unethical broadcasting practices, of undisclosed vested interests and commercial deals, of "opinions for sale" and of selective and censored reports. The Australian public is ill-served indeed, by those sections of the media which condone such practices. It is imperative, therefore, that the ABC is assisted to maintain its absolute political and commercial independence, its integrity, and be able to continue to set high standards in its programs. We make the following points:

Credibility

We are concerned about the level of cynicism engendered, particularly among the young who are likely to grow up unable to trust any source of facts or opinions as genuine and who will be convinced that all media can be bought by wealthy sponsors or be pressured by incumbent governments, State or Federal. The loss of trust is a grave loss.

Independence

Government of all persuasions have resented critical comments voiced on the ABC regarding their policies in the past. And so it is at present. Such visible independence from political interests is the hallmark of democracy and for that reason must be maintained at all costs. Thus appointments to the Board of the ABC must not involve an office bearer of a political party. We suggest the following persons as candidates who would command respect, be trusted to behave impartially and with integrity, and whose expertise as commentators will enrich the ABC:

Patricia Edgar, Robert Mann, Eva Cox, Ian McPhee, Pamela Bone, Peter Garrett, Janet McCalman, Steve Vizard, David Malouf, Henry Reynolds, Dr Roberta Sykes.

Funding

The ABC has to report, interpret and promote debate on all aspects of the increasingly complex world around us. This needs to be done in depth and with high quality, given the rising level of education and sophistication of audiences. And we do not live by information alone: arts programs — drama, comedy, ballet, concerts — the enriching and civilising aspects of life, should be of exemplary standard and untainted by commercials.

We do not believe high quality programs can be achieved on a depleted budget and therefore we urge that government funding be restored to its 1995 level. Were funding obtained by privatisation of any of the ABC components and/or sponsorships of programs, as suggested recently, our public broadcaster will lose its credibility worldwide and Australian audiences will be deprived of their one independent source of information, opinion and democratic forum.
