



Northern Suburbs of Sydney

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<p>TO: The Director National Broadcasters Section Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, and the Arts GPO Box 594, Canberra ACT 2601 Website: www.infrastructure.gov.au/natbroadcastersreview Email: nationalbroadcasters@communications.gov.au</p>	<p>FROM: <i>Contact name:</i> Janine Kitson <i>Organisation name:</i> Northern Suburbs of Sydney Branch of ABC Friends NSW & ACT <i>Contact details:</i> Address: [REDACTED] Mobile: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED] <i>Date of Submission:</i> 19 August, 2023 <i>Confirmation that submission is a formal submission:</i> YES <i>Confirmation whether or not your submission can be made public—published:</i> YES</p>
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Dear National Broadcasters Section Director

The ABC Friends NSW & ACT Northern Suburbs of Sydney Branch (NSoS) appreciates the opportunity to make this submission as we fully support the need to strengthen the independence of Australia's national broadcasters.

NSoS Branch is a non-political, not-for-profit volunteer-based organisation that represents over 700 northern Sydney residents, living in the Bennelong, Berowra, Bradfield, Mackellar, Mitchell, North Sydney, and Warringah federal electorates and who are passionate about ensuring Australia has a strong, well-funded and independent ABC.

As ABC Friends NSoS Branch focuses on defending and promoting the ABC the focus of our submission will be on the ABC. However it is hoped that these comments can also be applied to supporting SBS as well.

ABC Friends NSoS Branch recommends:

Stable Funding mechanisms

- ◆ that legislative and/or non-legislative mechanisms ensure that the current arrangements for five-year base funding for the ABC be maintained.
- ◆ that the five year funding cycle be indexed to ensure funding is maintained at its real value over the five years.
- ◆ that tied funding, or one-off or short term allocations for specific projects or initiatives **cease** as there is a history of these allocations being used to interfere with ABC operations and to pressure the ABC to spend the funds as the government sees fit - thereby undermining the independence of the ABC. The ABC should not be held hostage to tied funding.
- ◆ that the ABC be given sufficient funding to attend to fulfilling its obligations under the ABC Charter.
- ◆ that the ABC should not be subjected to efficiency dividends that requires it to make 'savings' or reductions to yearly funding.
- ◆ that an independent statutory body makes recommendations to Treasury for adequate funding for the ABC to enable it to fulfil its Charter; and that the ABC and the public have the opportunity to make submissions to this statutory body.
- ◆ that the transmission towers be brought back into public ownership that ensures proper maintenance and repair so that all Australians can receive radio and television broadcasts; as well investigations to build new short wave transmission towers to ensure all Australians have access to radio - as radio is an emergency broadcaster that saves lives during natural disasters.

Effective Governance arrangements

- ◆ that the process of formal, arms-length, merit-based appointments to the ABC Board be strengthened and if it is abused, with political appointments, then the matter should be referred to the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC).

Board's composition

- ◆ that ABC Board Directors must demonstrate substantial experience and commitment to public interest journalism and/or public service and/or community sector experience and the ABC Charter.
- ◆ that the ABC Board has a majority of Directors who have backgrounds in public interest journalism, the Arts, education, science and academia; and a minority of ABC Board Directors who have backgrounds in conventional commercial corporations.

Nomination Panel appointments and functions

- ◆ that the ABC Board Nomination Panel consist of members who have a commitment to public interest journalism; public and independent broadcasters; and experience in making independent appointments.
- ◆ that the ABC Board Nomination Panel include a community representative.
- ◆ that before the nomination process begins the ABC Board Nomination Panel will consult with the ABC Board about skills and experience needed on the Board to promote diversity.

Role of the Minister

- ◆ that the Minister for Communication and/or other parties involved in the appointment processes not breach the independence of the ABC.
- ◆ that the Minister for Communication or Prime Minister be prohibited from making 'Captains Picks' or selecting appointments who have not been recommended by the Nomination Panel.
- ◆ that the Minister for Communication have a choice of **three to five** before selecting a Board Director for recommendation to the Governor-General.
- ◆ that the Prime Minister property consult on the final appointment of the ABC Chair with the Leader of the Opposition and a genuinely cross-party committee before recommendation to the Governor-General

Other Governance approaches

- ◆ that the review cooperates and takes advice from with the work of Ms Lynelle Briggs AO's Review of Public Sector Board Appointments Processes (Briggs Review) in relation to ABC board appointments processes.
- ◆ that government **cease** to fund to commercial media that undermines the ABC's broadcasting capacity as happened when the former government gave \$40 million to Fox Sports grants to Foxtel for women's sport without a tender (<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/40-million-fox-sports-grant-on-auditor-general-s-radar-20210517-p57sog.html>) and that anomalies be referred to the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC).
- ◆ that legislation be made to ensure a Minister of the Crown or MP cannot sue the ABC or SBS.
- ◆ That the Minister for Communications must admit publicly and honestly about the true nature of the budget for the ABC and whether any constitute 'cuts'.
- ◆ That the Minister for Communications should not leak the details of correspondence to the ABC Board before the ABC Board has time to respond to it.
- ◆ That the Minister for Communications be censored by Parliament if s/he makes inflammatory abusive claims against the statutory independence of the ABC and its valued role as Australia's national public broadcaster.
- ◆ That the Minister of Communication in her/his statements about the ABC acknowledge and respect the ABC as one of Australia's most important cultural and democratic institutions.

ABC Friends Northern Suburbs of Sydney strongly support reforms to ensure the independence of a strong, independent and well-funded national broadcasters.

Yours sincerely

Janine Kitson

Convenor

ABC Friends Northern Suburbs of Sydney Branch