

# REVIEW OF OPTIONS TO SUPPORT THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE NATIONAL BROADCASTERS

## *ABC Friends - Queensland*

### **Introduction**

ABC Friends was established in 1976 to represent the community interest in defending and promoting the vital role of the ABC as a national public media organisation in Australia

[https://www.abcfriends.net.au/about\\_us](https://www.abcfriends.net.au/about_us) .

The 2023 Annual Conference of the Queensland branch of ABC Friends was held for the specific purpose of forming a response to this Review.

### **Funding mechanisms**

The Conference was of the view that all Options put forward in the Review's Public Consultation Paper could provide greater certainty for five-year funding terms. *Provided they are rigorously implemented and adhered to.*

A stop must be put to arbitrary 'efficiency audits', 'funding pauses', clearly politically motivated 'tied funding' and similar.

At the very least, if the immediately foregoing are contemplated or announced, complete justifications must be tabled and debated in Parliament and examined by an appropriate Review process.

The ABC must never again be 'ambushed' by arbitrary breaking of major contracts with other Departments or agencies, such as DFAT, with which it has contracted to provide longer-term, very significant, even 'national interest' services.

However, the priority mechanism was considered to be a public review process, for both base and additional funding. It is considered that greater transparency and accountability can be achieved through public involvement in funding decisions, and that a particular focus of engagement should be younger audiences.

In addition, population growth was thought to be a factor that should be taken into account in determining base funding.

The technological, continuing, escalating, transitions from 'broadcasting' to multi-platform, multiple delivery, of media content, transforming organizations like the ABC into 'public service media' require significant, continuous, and guaranteed, longer term funding to keep the ABC well positioned, relevant, properly funded, and resourced in this rapidly changing space.

Our final comment is more of a question: Can an agreed funding formula be developed which provides transparency of decision-making on a range of factors, including population growth, CPI, required

Australian content, and ensuring sufficient stability in staff numbers so that corporate skills and memory are retained?

### **Appointments to the ABC and SBS Boards**

*5. Section 24X of the ABC Act requires the Prime Minister to consult with the Leader of the Opposition before recommending a candidate for the appointment to the position of the ABC Board Chair. Do you think the requirement under section 24X allows for effective consultation to occur? If not, what changes could be made to improve this consultation process?*

OUR RESPONSE: it was considered that consultation with a wider range of organisations would be appropriate, so that a representative response could be gathered. A decisive stop must be put to ‘captain’s picks’, dismissive ‘consultations’, and related, arbitrary, Board and Chair appointments at the whims of Governments or even Prime Ministers.

*6. The ABC and SBS Acts, including the Ministerial Determinations, require the respective boards to be made up of members with certain skills, backgrounds, and experiences.*

- *Are the eligibility and selection criteria requirements too narrow or too broad?*
- *What knowledge and experiences should be included in the selection criteria for appointments to the ABC and SBS boards?*

OUR RESPONSE: A greater representation of the States’ perspectives was considered a useful addition to the skills base of the Board. This may lead to additional members being appointed to the Board.

### **Role of the Boards’ Chairs in the appointments process**

*8. Should the ABC and SBS Chairs have a formal role in the appointments process, such as developing the selection criteria, advising on desired skills and experience of board appointments, or be consulted on potential appointments?*

OUR RESPONSE: Yes, we believe this would be useful.

### **Appointments to the Nomination Panel**

*9. Should selection criteria be established for appointments to the Nomination Panel?*

OUR RESPONSE: Yes, and we would like to see a greater diversity of State perspectives in representatives, so that it is less South-centric.

### **Functions of the Nomination Panel**

*11. Is the Nomination Panel an effective method for identifying potential candidates for appointment to the ABC and SBS boards? If not, why not?*

*12. Should the functions of the Nomination Panel be expanded or narrowed? If so, how?*

OUR RESPONSE: We believe a Nomination Panel is an effective mechanism for recruitment and selection of Board members. Its membership, remit, and general deliberations need to be more transparent, subject to reasonable privacy and confidentiality considerations.

**Other governance matters supporting stability, independence and accountability**

*13. Are there other options for strengthening the governance arrangements of the national broadcasters that have not been contemplated in this paper? What are they? How would they support stability, independence and accountability?*

OUR RESPONSE: Overall, we strongly advocate that the public broadcasters, now Public Service Media, be permanently removed from arbitrary, ideologically driven, political interference, and that existing, and carefully added, legislative and regulatory protections or defences against such interference be rigorously adhered to, and subjected to non-partisan Parliamentary and public transparency and accountability.