

# MEDIA RELEASE

(FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)

29 July 2015

## **PUBLIC BROADCASTING IS UNDER ATTACK - and it is time to tell it like it is.**

A recent tweet to Q&A said: "I live in fear of no ABC".

Many Australians share this very real concern - or at the very least a steady decline in its health.

The Government-enforced cuts in funding and continual pressure on the ABC from the right - promoted enthusiastically by the Murdoch conglomerate and commercial rivals - has ensured that the ABC cannot now carry out its charter responsibilities and provide a variety of quality programming for all of Australia.

Loss of the Australian Network, by capricious decision of the Abbott government, has decimated the corporation's ability to cover what is happening to our North.

A recent Guardian editorial made the point on behalf of BBC and following its second raft of cuts that "it's (Lord) Reithian ideal to be guide, philosopher and friend to its audience, **not impervious to the market but with responsibilities beyond it, unavoidably sets it at odds with commercial rivals**". (My emphasis).

The BBC suffers criticism from its commercial rivals because of its success. Some 44 million in the UK tune in to it in some way every day.

For the ABC, an element of the justification for the cuts is that, with its television audience being around 15 per cent, that it is elitist, with not enough young adherents.

News Limited adopts a constantly anti-public broadcasting editorial and journalistic barrage in response to the clear view of Murdoch senior (Rupert, in 1989) and heir apparent (James, in 2009) expressed by both in their MacTaggart media lectures.

Pliant and indebted governments have rewarded them in the USA, the UK and here in Australia by limiting funding.

'Leave the digital opportunities to private enterprise' is the theme. That is; to us.

On a personal note, this opinion piece is being scrawled on the back of a photocopied article on the remarkable Australian sportsman Peter Thomson. We are returning from St. Andrews, the scene of one of his five (British) Open triumphs.

His reaction to what is happening to the BBC is anger; his reaction to the cuts and continual attacks on the ABC is the same.

"I could not live without the ABC", he says. "It has been my companion, informant and friend during my travels over the years"

Former American President Jimmy Carter once said that to know what is happening through the media is a basic human right. Indeed, Article 19 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights states; "Everyone has the right..... to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

Regardless of the impact of the web and of social media, democracy remains under threat when news is dominated by a huge multimedia organisation - and one with a strong ideological agenda.

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Politicians and even competing journalists are often nervous at being seen as critical or 'of not being onside'. Healthy debate only exists when the facts are known and the pulpit is shared by those expressing opposing views.

So what can be done to ensure we have healthy and effective public broadcasting in Australia?

As a new member of the ABC Friends organisation, I am a strong supporter of its national campaign for new members, the creation of a new category of ABC 'supporters' and donations being sought to create a National Fighting Fund.

Its website is - [www.abcfriends.org.au](http://www.abcfriends.org.au) - and the money raised will be used to campaign for restoration of funding to give the ABC the ability to compete in the digital age using all platforms available.

Of course the ABC is not perfect and we should, and will, as 'friends' demand more of it - including pressing for it to be less Sydney centric and meets its charter obligations to all Australians.

So, let us ensure we remove the fear of NO ABC in the future.

All State and Territory Friends are determined to ensure it is politically independent, properly funded and a broadcaster we remain proud to support. Please join us.

**Ranald Macdonald**, former ABC radio morning presenter and past Chairman of the International Press Institute (the world body of editors and journalists committed to promoting press freedom)

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