

PRESS RELEASE

ABC Friends calls for Australians to rally to defend the independence of Our ABC

The firestorm that hit the ABC this week is an opportunity for Australians to demand that all political parties commit to absolute independent governance of the ABC.

ABC Friends National President Margaret Reynolds said Australians must insist the ABC is totally free of political influence and properly funded so that board and management can fulfil the requirements of the ABC Charter in the interests of all who rely on our public broadcaster for news, information and entertainment. That is the vision of ABC Friends and our work has continuously advocated these fundamental principles for Australian public broadcasting.

The removal of CEO Michelle Guthrie, Chairman Justin Milne's resignation and two announced inquiries give the Government the opportunity to re-commit to a fully transparent process.

In recent years ABC board selection has been compromised despite having a nomination panel to recommend directorial appointments. But the selection is finally up to the Minister for Communications; two of the last four appointments were "captain's calls" as the individuals were not recommended by the panel. This has created a board with little experience in the current demands of public broadcasting.

ABC Friends National President Margaret Reynolds said it was essential that the next Managing Director has relevant Board expertise and support, plus a Chairman clearly committed to defending staff and the organisation's ability to perform with confidence and freedom and with a passion for public broadcasting.

ABC Friends National reminds all parliamentarians and candidates at the next Federal Election that the ABC is not a government entity: It is owned by the taxpayers and is a vital part of this country's democratic system.

We agree with the Australia Institute proposal that a cross party selection committee should be urgently considered as a necessary reform to the management and governance of the ABC.

We will be continuing to advocate *Our Vision* as a 'Statement of the Rights, Responsibilities and Values we expect from both the Government and from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation':-

- Clear explanations and open procedures and processes when the government appoints future ABC board members and board chairpersons.
- Transparency of ABC board and management decision-making – particularly the sharing on a regular basis of the objectives of policy decisions and of programming.
- Recognition by the government of the day that the ABC's authority and its role in the Australian media landscape depends on its independence and freedom from political influence. The Senate estimates and other hearings should ensure public scrutiny and accountability.
- Financial security being essential for sound management and for board decision-making, there is a clear need for the ABC budget to be secure and at a level which ensures the ABC can fulfil its Charter requirements that it provide the highest quality of programming with depth, range and diversity for all Australia. A five-year rolling budget is recommended.
- And, lastly, that the ABC's prime objective is to set the 'gold standard' for ethical, quality, specialist and diverse broadcasting nationally in the interests of informing, entertaining and stimulating our robust Australian democratic way of life.

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