



**media, entertainment & arts alliance**  
the people who inform and entertain

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Mr Maurice Newman AC  
Chairman, ABC  
ABC Secretariat,  
14th floor, 700 Harris St,  
Ultimo, NSW 2007

12.3.2010

Dear Mr Newman,

I was surprised to read, yesterday, the text of remarks you delivered to a group of journalists, program makers and management in which you appeared to be giving direction and setting guidelines under which the public broadcaster's news team should be working.

During the course of the day I was contacted by a number of Media Alliance members who work at the ABC and are concerned that this was a clear breach of the doctrine of editorial independence under which editorial direction is set by the managing director acting independently of the board of directors.

For the chairman of the ABC to attempt to direct, encourage or cajole ABC staff to cover any issue in a certain manner is a clear breach of the editorial independence of the ABC.

For it to be done in this public way over such a politically charged issue makes it all the more improper.

The result has been to place the ABC's integrity in question and, indeed, to put the corporation at the centre of the debate – as a subject, not a participant. It has offered comfort to critics of the ABC on both sides and disillusioned those who support the ABC precisely because of its independence. It has done more damage to the ABC than any of the reporting errors that are claimed to have occurred.

The internal processes of the ABC are established precisely to protect the ABC from these sorts of sweeping, unsubstantiated claims of bias – and to ensure that allegations are properly investigated and processes adapted, if necessary.

The fact that the criticisms from you are unfair and wrong-headed only compounds the unnecessary attack on the integrity of the ABC and its staff.

For an ABC chairman to attempt to influence editorial direction risks causing terrible damage to the principle of editorial independence, on which hangs so much of the ABC's hard-won and well-deserved credibility.

In fact, that spirit of editorial independence was perhaps best displayed by those who challenged your remarks at the gathering.

For the ABC to remain a beacon of quality and integrity in an increasingly challenging news landscape, this spirit must be nurtured and encouraged. I fear your apparent intervention in the editorial processes of the ABC's news and current affairs team is counter-productive and to the great detriment of Australian public discourse.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher Warren". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'C' at the beginning.

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