

Margaret Lund  
 127 Taylor Street  
 Woy Woy Bay  
 NSW 2256

27.11.2014

Senator Xenophon  
 Parliament House  
 Canberra ACT

Dear Senator Xenophon

I am writing to you about my concerns for the ABC, since you at least seem to be an honest, thinking person and I sympathise with your annoyance at the closure of the Adelaide Studios. We need more studios not less.

I am very disturbed by the enormous cuts to the ABC especially since it has been suffering cuts for a number of years and has already been doing more with less. All politicians dislike the ABC so surely they must be doing something right. Scrutiny of governments is essential if we are to enjoy a real democracy. Things should not be done behind closed doors; everything should be transparent.

On our way to Europe in July we stopped for a night in Incheon, the airport for Seoul and it was there that we learned of the Malaysian air disaster over Ukraine. We learned that terrible story from the **Australia Network**, provided by the ABC. On our return journey that network was no longer available as the Government has cancelled the service. This is surely a great loss for Australian soft diplomacy in the Asia Pacific Region. Only recently the Chinese Government had made the surprising decision to allow the ABC to broadcast into mainland China. Rupert Murdoch has been desperate for many years to have that access but it has been denied. For our Government to simply throw all that away simply because of its ideological views seems very unwise and almost childish.

Whilst in Europe we had access to a great variety of overseas channels in English such as BBC World News; Canadian National Broadcasting Corporation; CNN; Canal Cinq Monde, the French world program; Aljazeera; Sky News and CNN. Russia Today watched on previous visits seemed to be no longer available, well not in France anyway. This is now the case with the Australia Network in the Asia Pacific Region. It is very sad. It is thought that Radio Australia will soon follow.

In Britain it appears that Rupert Murdoch is very unpopular. He will not be getting his hands on B-SKY B. Here however he seems to have the government in his pocket and so we can expect to see Murdoch be given access to that Asia Pacific Market. What will that say for Australia's standing in the world? The Murdoch press has been promoting the idea that we have too much preoccupation with asylum seekers and climate change. Others believe that the Murdoch view is anti-intellectual. Is that how you would like us to be viewed in the Asia Pacific Region?

The ABC was already functioning on a reduced budget. These further cuts are surely aimed at silencing the ABC. We already know that "Lateline", "7.30 Stateline" and "The Insiders" are threatened with a shortened lifespan. Lateline is to be "lightened", whatever that means. The Natural History Unit, which educated Australians about the wonders of our land, disappeared years ago and now Bush Telegraph has got the chop also. This surely was a means of educating city folk about the bush and our rural fraternity. Many Australians who fly the flag and maintain that they are true Aussies know nothing about this wonderful land and its many unique attributes. Let's educate them before it is all lost. Many in-depth programs from Radio National, like "Documentaries 360" "Hindsight" and "Encounter" are to go and we are told that this sort of information is to be disseminated in other general programs throughout the day. Classic FM is to have fewer recorded live concerts. Arts coverage on ABC TV has been abandoned and this will probably be the case with radio as well. One of the requirements of the ABC Charter is to provide cultural experiences to the whole nation and surely this is what Classic FM does well. We hear that such programs are for a niche market; are niche markets within our society no longer important?

Are we to just sink to the lowest common denominator? Is poetry no longer of importance in Australia? The ABC TV showed only too well during “Mental Health Week” that it does cater for niche markets as well as educating everyone. These large funding cuts will make it impossible for the ABC to fulfil its Charter. It is even questionable whether the cutting of the Overseas Network means that the ABC is already failing to fulfil its Charter which says, “to transmit to countries outside Australia, broadcasting programs of news, current affairs, entertainment and cultural enrichment that will:

- (1) Encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs; and
- (2) Enable Australian citizens living or travelling outside Australia to obtain information about Australian affairs and Australian attitudes on world affairs and
- (3) Encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia.

Of course the Government could change the Charter by legislation but the National Party is still a firm supporter of the ABC because it covers Rural areas and is popular there and because it is invaluable in times of disaster.

Many of these changes point to a general “dumbing down” of the Australian public: let’s give them fireworks and footy, anything to stop them from thinking and then we can do what we like.

Meanwhile throughout all of this the Labor Party seems to have gone into hiding and this is why Senators like you are so important.

The Government appointed Peter Lewis to conduct the **ABC and SBS Efficiency Review**. There was no independent representative or anyone with experience in public broadcasting appointed to assist in the review. Mr. Lewis is from the commercial media and returned to the commercial world as CEO of Southern Cross Media Austereo in June of this year. Surely this constitutes a conflict of interest. Mr. Lewis has taken with him much information about both ABC and SBS. He cannot help but use this information in his future decision making and it is now inadvertently available to all commercial channels, which gives them an unfair advantage. At the same time we as taxpayers and ABC users are NOT permitted to know what is in the Lewis Review even though we paid for it.

In addition to this travesty of justice the selection process for positions on the **ABC Board**, which had previously been severely criticized for its board stacking and political interference, had been changed by the Rudd Government, which established a *merit* selection process. This was turned on its head by the appointment of **Janet Albrechsten and Neil Brown**, former Liberal Party MP and known hater of the ABC, to the Selection Panel for ABC and SBS Board. This blatant, overt tactic, to thus stack the Board is beyond belief: it’s putting Mr. Fox right inside the hen house with the inevitable consequence of an empty hen house: no ABC/SBS. Ms. Albrechsten stated on Radio National Breakfast last Friday that ABC followers are members of the “tweeting class” and not “ordinary Australians.” Surely she needs to define her terms. I have always considered myself an ordinary person.

Recently in Leipzig, Germany, at the city museum, we saw of the rise of Hitler and then the coming of communism. Tactics that were used by these dictators were: muzzling of the press; engendering fear in the population, particularly of anyone who was different; encouraging nationalism and the excessive use of the National flag.

In the Flanders Field Museum in Ypres in Belgium, we read that prior to World War 1 Nationalism and its symbols were very much emphasised across the nations. Surely we Australians believe that in a democratic state it is, “important to provide an independent, public broadcasting service, free from direction or control by Government, commercial, sectional or partisan interests.” **Preamble for ABC Act 2012.**

It is not true as Senator Leyonhjelm seems to think that commercial stations are free: we pay for them every time we shop, whether we watch them or not. ABC is a means of educating citizens about the democratic process; about the wonders of the real Australia, about science which seems to not officially exist in present day Australia, but this all requires more money not less. It is listened to in many parts of the world, as is demonstrated by the incredible number of downloads of ABC Radio National Programs.

I do NOT believe that this country is broke; it is a perception which the government wishes to promote. Politicians should visit such places as Ireland, Greece, UK and Italy and live amongst ordinary people not just amongst other politicians and in first class hotels; then they might get some idea of the truth. They seem very willing to find money for wars and roads which people don't want but the hated ABC which brings joy and education to so many people including the blind and other disabilities, can be cut to the bone. Where will people turn at times of emergency?

I am fearful for the future of our land and therefore in desperation I am writing to you. Please do your best to get people to really think about what the loss of ABC programs really means and get these cuts overturned.

Regards  
Margaret Lund