

ABC REACHES MORE PEOPLE, IN MORE WAYS, THAN EVER BEFORE

The ABC's critics in Parliament House and in the News Corp media tend to focus on a narrow range of programs: *Four Corners*, *7.30*, ABC News, and a few documentary series. Crucial though those programs are, Australians value the ABC for far more, for example:

- *Bluey*, *Backroads*, *Playschool*, triple j's *Hottest 100*, Emergency Broadcasts, Coronacasts, *Rosehaven*, *The Newsreader*, *Total Control*, *Fires*, *Wakefield*, *Gardening Australia*, *Australian Story*, *Landline*, *The Science Show*, *Health Report*, *The Music Show*, *Shaun Micallef's Mad As Hell*, *Gruen*, *BTN (Behind The News)*, *Download This Show*, ABC Classic, *Heywire*, Cricket on the radio... Add your own favourites.
- The ABC's independent, impartial and accurate News services are now engaged with by **more than half of all Australians** in more ways than ever before; ABC News is the **number one digital news site**, the number one news site on Apple News and on Instagram.
- Through bushfire, cyclone and flood, **ABC emergency broadcasts save lives.**
- Fewer Australians watch or listen to live broadcasts on TV and radio. But use of the ABC's digital and online services is booming. In a typical month in 2021:
 - *some **27 million** ABC podcasts were downloaded
 - *triple j's YouTube channel attracted over **4 million** unique viewers
 - ***12.8 million** Australians – or **51% of people aged over 2** – used either the ABC News website or the ABC News app
- Overall – on TV, radio, online, iview, ABC Listen app, and through third party platforms – the ABC estimates that it reaches **68% of Australians, or 16.5 million Australians every week** – far more than it ever achieved in the pre-digital age.
- The ABC is the **most trusted** of all Australian media: according to the ABC's Tracking Program, **78%** of Australians trust the information provided by the ABC. That compares with 58% trust in newspapers and 36% trust in Facebook. Many other surveys agree that the ABC is the most trusted news brand in Australia – for example, the University of Canberra's *Digital News Report*, part of an annual global survey conducted by Oxford University's Reuters Institute. [70% of its sample found ABC News trustworthy, compared with 53% for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and 47% for *The Daily Telegraph*, 52% for *The Age* and 49% for the *Herald Sun*.]

- The ABC **wins more awards for excellence** than any other Australian media organisation. In this year's AACTA Awards, ABC-commissioned productions won 22 awards in all, including best drama (*The Newsreader*), best miniseries (*Fires*), best factual (*Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds*), best factual entertainment (*Love on the Spectrum*), best children's (*Bluey*), best narrative comedy (*Fisk*), best comedy entertainment (*Hard Quiz*), best documentary (*My Name is Gulpilil*) and best short-form comedy (*All My Friends are Racist*).
- The ABC's **quality journalism has led directly to recent federal or state royal commissions** on banking, institutional responses to child abuse, juvenile detention in the NT, aged care, and veteran suicides, among others.

ABC GIVES EXCELLENT VALUE FOR THE TAXPAYER'S MONEY

- The ABC is excellent value for money, reaching more Australians than ever before with quality Australian content on multiple platforms...all for less than 12 cents a day per head of the Australian population.
- In 1987, the ABC offered ABC TV (one channel), Local Radio, Radio National, ABC FM, and triple j: 5 platforms costing about 8 cents per day per Australian.
- In 2022, for the equivalent (in 1988 dollars) of 4 cents per day per head, the ABC provides:
 - 6 TV services** – News 24, ABC TV, ABC Kids, ABC TV Plus, ABC Me, and ABC Australia (for international viewers);
 - 12 radio networks** – ABC News Radio, Radio National, ABC Local Radio, ABC Classic, and triple j on **analogue and digital**, plus Double J, Kids Listen, Radio Australia, ABC Country, ABC Jazz, and ABC Grandstand on **digital only**; and
 - ABC Online** multi-media stories and blogs – news, science, religion, kids, arts, sport, and lifestyle – which account for thousands of pages and millions of page views every week.

Through **ABC iview** and the **ABC Listen** app – and through third party platforms like Facebook, Apple News and YouTube – Australians can access all this output anytime, anywhere they have a phone signal.
- The ABC's critics often claim the ABC costs \$1 billion a year. It does – but almost **\$190 million goes on transmission and distribution costs** outside the ABC's control. In 2020-2021, the ABC's taxpayer-funded operations budget was just under **\$880 million**. The ABC employs **a little over 4,000 full time equivalent staff** (FTE), but many are on lower grades than were experienced staff affected by redundancies.
- The ABC commissions hundreds of hours of screen content (drama, factual, children's, documentary) from **independent production companies** every year. Each dollar the ABC spends with independents generates an extra \$1.11 from other investors (e.g. Screen Australia, state film agencies, overseas investors). A recent report by Deloitte Access Economics estimates that in 3 years (2017 to 2020) ABC screen productions, internal and external (not including news and current affairs), contributed **\$744 million** to the Australian economy, and 8,319 full-time equivalent jobs.

- In the eight years since the 2014 Abbott government budget, the ABC's operational funding has been **reduced by 10% – over half a billion dollars**. This includes an indexation pause introduced by the Turnbull government that has **reduced funding by \$84 million since July 2019**. The Morrison government has now promised to restore indexation in the next budget – but not to compensate the ABC for inflation between 2019 and now.
- As a result, the ABC has reduced permanent staff by **1,000 full-time equivalent positions** since 2013.
- In the last 15 years the ABC has had 12 internal and external efficiency reviews; 68% of Australians believe the ABC provides an efficient service. However, in the last 8 years the ABC has been forced to return tens of millions to the federal budget in 'efficiency dividends' – savings that in the past had been used to fund new ABC services such as News24 and iview.
- ABC funding as a proportion of total government expenditure has declined **from 0.4% in 1992-93 to 0.14% of current Commonwealth spending**. Despite its severely reduced budget and recent loss of around 1,000 staff, the ABC has excelled in its transition to digital media.
- ABC International's radio and TV broadcasts to our region have been slashed. Funding for the Australia Network was cancelled in 2014 and Radio Australia is a shadow of what it once was – at a time when China's 'soft power' in the Asia-Pacific is increasing exponentially. For comparison, annual spending (in AUD) on foreign broadcasting by China is \$3 billion; UK \$700 million; Germany \$500 million; France \$500 million; Australia \$11.5 million.

AN ABC FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS

- No other media organisation recruits and broadcasts from so many **locations** across the nation. As well as its 8 capital city offices, and 11 overseas bureaux, the ABC maintains **48 regional offices** staffed by more than **550 content makers**.
- 70 of these are journalists hired under the **Enhanced News Gathering (ENG)** program, worth over \$14 million per year. They produce over 10,000 digital news stories a year across the country, and have won more than 300 awards since 2013. In February 2022, the Morrison government announced that it will continue to fund the ENG program, at the rate of about \$14 million a year for the next three years.
- The ABC has announced (December 2021) that the proceeds of the **Bargaining Code** negotiations with **Facebook and Google** will be spent entirely on adding **50 additional regional reporters** in 20 regional locations, including 5 new 'mini-bureaux' in Warragul (Vic), Bateman's Bay (NSW), Carnarvon (WA), Hervey Bay and Charleville (Qld), and individual reporters in Swan Hill (Vic), Whyalla and Victor Harbour (SA), Katherine (NT), Esperance and Karratha (WA), Longreach and Toowoomba (Qld).
- The ABC is determined to cover Australia's suburbs as well as the regions. 300 staff will soon be moved from its Sydney HQ in Ultimo to new offices in Parramatta. Similar decentralisation is taking place in other capital cities.

- The ABC has made huge strides in increasing **cultural, ethnic and gender diversity**. The faces on ABC TV and online are much more representative of multi-ethnic Australia than they used to be.
- Dramas like *Mystery Road* and *Total Control* have given leading roles with real agency to **Indigenous** characters, played by leading Indigenous actors – and produced by Indigenous-led production companies (Bunya Productions, Blackfella Films).
- Factual programs like *You Can't Ask That* and *Love on the Spectrum* have encouraged Australians to embrace and **celebrate diversity**.
- The ABC is Australia's leading supplier of **children's programming**. *Bluey* is the most popular series the ABC has ever produced. 4.5 million kids have watched *Bluey* on ABC Kids and iview.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & CRITICISMS

“ABC is biased.” Many of those who make this claim (e.g. the IPA) represent points of view well to the right or left of centre. What looks biased to them doesn't seem so to most Australians. According to the ABC's own tracking polls, 73% of Australians believe the ABC does a 'good job' of being 'accurate and impartial' in news and current affairs. 78% 'trust' the ABC's information (compared with 62% who trust commercial TV and 36% who trust Facebook). Polling by reputable pollsters (Essential, Roy Morgan, Reuters Institute) deliver similar figures. All rate the ABC as the most trusted news source in Australia.

“ABC competes unfairly with commercial media organisations, especially online where commercial news sources' paywalls are hard to maintain in face of free competition from the ABC.” These arguments were made by News Corp and Nine to the Competitive Neutrality Review set up at the behest of One Nation in 2019. The review found that ABC and SBS were *“not causing significant competitive distortions beyond the public interest”*. News.com.au is a free service which is outcompeted by ABC News online.

The ABC's complaints system is “like Dracula guarding the blood bank...the ABC marks its own homework” – (Senator Andrew Bragg). Every news organisation in Australia deals with complaints, in the first instance, internally. Complaints to commercial TV and radio (including Sky News) are dealt with by editors, without transparency. They have 60 days to respond. The SBS's 'ombudsman' is appointed by and reports to SBS's director of news. He or she is no more 'independent' than the ABC's Audience and Consumer Affairs unit, which is outside the editorial chain of command. Not even the Director of Editorial Policy can over-rule its findings. The Audience and Consumer Affairs unit tries to, and usually does, respond within 30 days.

Dissatisfied complainants can appeal to the ACMA, the independent regulator – as can complainants to any TV or radio broadcaster in Australia. The ACMA adjudicates complaints against the broadcasters' codes of conduct. The ABC's is far more demanding than those of commercial broadcasters, who are not, for example, required to be fair or impartial in current affairs programs.

The ABC is conducting an [independent review](#) of its complaints system by two outside experts (former Commonwealth Ombudsman Professor John McMillan, and former Ten and SBS news chief Jim Carroll). Submissions will be made public, as will the reviewers' report, around April 2022.

The ABC series *Exposed: The Ghost Train Fire*. This program was heavily criticised by prominent supporters of former NSW Premier Neville Wran and by some media outlets. ABC's Audience and Consumer Affairs unit received only one formal complaint about this issue and rejected it on the grounds that the series did not breach ABC Editorial Policies. The complainant had the option of taking the concerns to the independent adjudicator, the ACMA, and did not do so. The ABC Board nonetheless then commissioned a review by Professor Rodney Tiffin and veteran investigative journalist Chris Masters. **They found that the series was "in most ways an outstanding achievement"** which "mounted a scathing demolition of the police investigation" of the 1979 Ghost Train Fire at Sydney's Luna Park. However, the reviewers found that the evidence implicating the then NSW Premier, Neville Wran, in a conspiracy to award the Luna Park contract, after the fire, to crime boss Abe Saffron was insufficient. ABC News stood by the story, claiming that it had said many times that Wran's involvement was an "allegation" not a fact.

Complex investigations of past events seldom result in firm, unchallengeable conclusions. In the end, this dispute is about whether the documentary was sufficiently cautious, given the damage it did to Neville Wran's posthumous reputation. The reviewers conclude that, nevertheless, the series mounted "a compelling case for a new investigation", which is in fact now under way.

Recent mistakes in ABC factual programs. The ABC has apologised to former senator Cory Bernardi for airing allegations about him in the series *Ms Represented* without offering him a right of reply. A crucial witness in a series about the alleged murder of *Juanita Neilsen* was discredited by the ABC's *Media Watch* program, and the Neilsen program has since been withdrawn from the iview platform. The ABC has recognised that its oversight of independently-produced factual programs needs to be enhanced, and has appointed a senior producer experienced in investigative journalism to ensure that the ABC's editorial policies are rigorously applied to independent productions in future.

"Is the ABC necessary in age of media plenty and diversity?" The digital age has brought media diversity but also fake news, misinformation, conspiracy theories and anonymous scuttlebutt through social media platforms like Facebook. Commercial 'legacy' media's business model has been disrupted as ads go to Facebook and Google. Local news, in the regions and the suburbs, has suffered – News Corp recently closed down more than 100 local papers. And they have found that one-sided opinion sells better than even-handed news and current affairs: witness Sky News After Dark in Australia. In the USA, cable news channels Fox News (right wing) and MSNBC (left wing) have been outrating CNN ('impartial') since the mid 2000s. The result: a deeply divided polity.

The ABC, required by law to be accurate and objective – and trusted by at least 70% of Australians (according to independent research) – is more essential to the health of Australian democracy than it has ever has been.

It is of considerable concern that **the Liberal Party policy is to privatise the ABC** – though not yet the Coalition government's policy.

“The ABC costs too much.” ABC’s \$1 billion budget is modest compared with many other public broadcasters. A 2018 **survey of 20 ‘Western’ countries found that 14 spent more public funds per capita on public broadcasting than Australia does.** Eight including the UK (BBC) spent more than double (including four that spent triple the amount).

“ABC is Sydney-centric and/or caters to inner city elites.” See page 4 about moves to Parramatta, regional bureaux etc. It should also be noted that a major reason for centralisation in Sydney and Melbourne is the effect of funding cuts. TV production in Adelaide, Hobart, Brisbane and Perth costs more than concentrating it in Sydney and Melbourne.

Centralisation is cheap, decentralisation is expensive. For example, the ABC’s decision to drop its weekly state-based edition of 7.30 following the Abbott 2014 budget saved millions of dollars. **During the pandemic, this state-based coverage has been sorely missed.**

A report by Per Capita (funded by GetUp!) in 2020 held a focus group in the federal electorate of Page on the NSW-Qld border. Participants there said the ABC was the most relevant to regional consumers of all the mainstream media.

“It’s always Sydney, Sydney, Sydney. No one cares about the rest of Australia. The local ABC station is the only thing that tells us we matter.”

Per Capita’s polling showed that the ABC is four times more trusted than commercial TV (the next most trusted news source), and ten times more than social media.

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