



Senator Tim Storer
Independent Senator for South Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

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Time for Reform of ABC Appointments

Now is the time to strengthen legislative provisions to guarantee the independence of the ABC.

After the events of the last week, I am troubled that, speaking on *Insiders*, the Prime Minister is now promising that the ABC Board “can expect a bit more attention from me” if they don’t “do better” in his judgment.

This points to the urgency of Parliament acting to enhance the transparency and independence of the process for appointing ABC Directors.

The position of Chairman and Managing Director should not be filled permanently unless and until new legislative arrangements are in place to strengthen that independence and transparency.

Several directors have been appointed by the current government without following the Panel’s recommendations, undermining the value and credibility of the Panel.

1. When Parliament resumes in two weeks I plan to move amendments to the ABC Act to require the Independent Nomination Panel established in 2012 to oversee the appointment process for ABC Board Directors to publish its recommendations to the government and the reasons for them in advance and in a timely fashion.
2. The proposed amendment would also require the government to explain publicly in advance and in good time if it intends to ignore the recommendations of the Panel.
3. If that is the case, the Minister (or in the case of the Chairman, the Prime Minister) would be required to consult the Leader of the Opposition before finalising any appointment
4. If they disagree the appointment would then be subject to a public Senate committee inquiry.

I am also exploring the possibility of increased parliamentary guarantees for future funding of both the ABC and SBS by requiring that funding be subject to an independent public review every three years aligned with and ahead of the regular triennial funding negotiations.

The ABC is the nation's premier cultural institution; the prism through which we view ourselves, our nation and the world.

It is the most trusted media organisation in the country.

With resignation of Justin Milne as Chairman, the ABC board has taken the first step towards re-establishing public trust in the corporation's independence.

The steps I am proposing to strengthen the transparency and independence of the board appointment process would help enhance the autonomy and integrity of this profoundly important institution.

For further information contact **Jim Middleton (0418 627066)**