

Mr James Spigelman AC QC
Chairman
Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Mr Mark Scott AO
Managing Director
Australian Broadcasting Corporation

2 December 2014

SPECIALIST RELIGION PROGRAMMING ON THE ABC

Dear Mr Spigelman and Mr Scott,

As people of faith, our prayers are with you and all ABC staff during this painful time for our important national institution.

We write to you because we believe that the ABC has a particularly important role in presenting religion both in its own right and as an integral part of modern Australian society, thanks to the high-quality specialist religion programming provided by both television and radio.

As leaders of Australian religious and faith-based organisations and our supporters, we are concerned that the ABC's implementation of budget cuts may significantly and disproportionately diminish an area of programming that is crucial in the life of our nation.

We seek an urgent meeting with you and the ABC Board to discuss the reported proposed cuts to broadcasting about religion.

We believe the faith and values we hold will always occupy a central part in the formation of our Australian national identity. Further, an understanding of religion plays a crucial part in grasping today's ever more complex social and political developments both in Australia and internationally.

We also believe that no broadcaster committed to the common good, let alone one seeking to provide a comprehensive service to all Australians in an increasingly diverse and multicultural Australia, should diminish its commitment to the broadcasting of religion.

We are especially concerned that the proposed cuts will include:

- abolishing the position of Executive Producer of TV Religion, leaving ABC TV without a specialist editorial head of religion;
- placing the Compass program under a Commissioning Editor responsible for a broad range of programming and without experience or expertise in religion;
- the loss of high quality religious radio documentary on Radio National; and,
- removing staffing, budget and editorial authority from the Executive Producer of Radio Religion, diminishing the unit's ability to support religion documentaries, the capacity to manage staff, to develop ABC-wide projects and to share the Unit's specialist knowledge across the ABC.

There are other issues we may want to discuss when we get more information from you.

The role of the ABC in broadcasting religion is doubly important, as it is the last mainstream media organisation in print, radio or television to maintain any discrete religious coverage. It has never been more important for Australians to have access to content that builds a deeper understanding of the role of faith in the lives of individuals or society, as demonstrated in last month's G20 interfaith summit.

We look forward to meeting you and the Board to explore these issues.

Signatories

The Most Rev'd Dr Philip Freier, Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne
 Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohamed, Grand Mufti of Australia
 Rev. Professor Andrew Dutney, President, Uniting Church in Australia Assembly
 The Revd John Henderson, Bishop, Lutheran Church of Australia
 Commissioner James Condon, Territorial Commander, Salvation Army, Australia Eastern Territory
 Commissioner Floyd Tidd, Territorial Commander, Salvation Army, Australia Southern Territory
 Rabbi Meir Shlomo Kluwgant, President, Organisation of Rabbis of Australia
 Elder Jeffrey Cummings, Pacific Area Seventy, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
 Professor Nihil Agar, Chairman, Hindu Council of Australia
 Professor Raja Jayaraman, Vice Chairman, Hindu Council of Australia
 Bishop Philip Huggins, Interim General Secretary, National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA)
 Elizabeth Stone, Associate Interim General Secretary, National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA)
 Rev. Tim Costello AO, CEO, World Vision Australia
 Simon Smart, Director of the Centre for Public Christianity
 Peter Wertheim AM, Executive Council of Australian Jewry
 Jeremy Jones AM, Australia-Israel Jewish Affairs Council
 Ghaith Krayem, President, Islamic Council of Victoria
 Maha Abdo OAM, CEO, Muslim Women Australia
 Bishop Peter Ingham, Chair, Australian Catholic Media Council
 Rev Dr Richard Leonard SJ, Director, Australian Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting
 Ahmet Polat, Executive Director, Australian Intercultural Society
 Ahmet Keskin, Executive Director and Co-founder, Affinity Intercultural Foundation
 Rev. Elenie Poulos, National Director, UnitingJustice Australia
 Marcelle Mogg, CEO, Catholic Social Services Australia
 Lin Hatfield Dodds, National Director, UnitingCare Australia
 Professor Neville Rochow SC, Joint National Director for Interfaith Relations, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
 Alan Wakeley, Public Affairs Department Adviser (Australia and PNG), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
 Dr Brian Adams, Director, Centre for Interfaith and Cultural Dialogue, Griffith University and Convenor G20 Interfaith Summit
 Professor Samina Yasmeen AM, Professor of Political Science and International Relations, University of Western Australia