

Institutionalised bias in the ABC green propaganda machine



The ABC building on Harris Street in Ultimo, Sydney. Picture: Richard Dobson
The Australian, Maurice Newman, 4 October

“All things considered, last week was a pretty good one for the ABC,” Alan Kohler, publisher of *The Constant Investor* and someone who has worked for the ABC for 23 years, wrote in *The Australian* on Monday. “Sure, it was messy and as the Prime Minister Scott Morrison said yesterday (on the ABC), the board had ‘a pretty ordinary week’. But the organisation? All fine ...” According to Kohler, while former managing director Michelle Guthrie is “a good person and a fine executive”, what is needed is someone who can “successfully lead the creation of content within the organisation or, to represent and, preferably, personify, what the ABC stands for, outside it, either to the public or the parliament”.

Add to this the appointment of a chairman who, unlike Justin Milne, who is “on way too many boards”, will simply concentrate on the broadcaster. Problem solved. Easy as ABC.

The ABC board has revealed it launched an independent investigation into serious issues Michelle Guthrie raised with it the day before she was sacked.

Reassuringly, Kohler informs us: “As someone who has worked in most parts of the Australian media, I can report that the ABC has the most infuriatingly diligent anti-bias and complaint-handling processes of any organisation. No

one comes close to it in dealing with complaints, errors and bias, and no organisation is more genuine in trying to do the right thing, from top to bottom.”

If his analysis is correct, then it reflects very poorly on all other media.

Perhaps Kohler can explain whether the fact 41 per cent of ABC employees admit to voting Green influences their professional judgment? Why so many uncorrected examples of wilful misreporting and fake news are brought to light and why, almost without exception, when they are outed by others, the bias invariably favours the Left? Why it is there are no genuinely conservative voices presenting mainline programs? Why token conservatives such as John Hewson and Amanda Vanstone, whose views are well known, are the regular go-to “experts” on fashionable topics such as climate change and renewable energy? Why the ABC permits only one-sided narratives on global warming?

If it is balanced, why does it suffer from Trump derangement syndrome? If there is no bias, why does the broadcaster constantly single out former prime minister Tony Abbott and Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton for ridicule, scorn and vilification?

Why did it see fit to champion the Yes case in the debate on same-sex marriage? If it is without bias, why are its most vocal defenders the Greens, the ALP, leftist publications such as The Sydney Morning Herald, The Age and The Guardian Australia, and a plethora of socialist academics?

It can't all be coincidence.

If, as Kohler claims, “no one comes close to it in dealing with complaints, errors and bias”, that's the “two wrongs” argument, and shame on the rest. For the April to June quarter, the ABC received 5228 complaints, of which 626 (12 per cent) were investigated and 26 (0.5 per cent) were upheld. These seem incredibly low numbers given the numerous glaring examples of errors and misreporting revealed by its audiences and critics.

And how many were in the category of Bob Fernley-Jones, who lodged five well-researched, evidence-based complaints about a Four Corners program, Weather Alert? All he achieved was a rebuke: “Our records indicate that to date you have lodged five complaints via our web form. In future should you wish to lodge a complaint about a program please set out your entire complaint in one submission ...

“Kieran Doyle wrote to you on April 12 acknowledging your emails and attachments ... The email advised you your complaint would not be investigated by Audience and Consumer Affairs. This advice relates to all of the complaints you submitted.”

With an attitude such as that, what’s the point of complaining?

And does Kohler really believe a lot of people “who take the ABC’s independence for granted were shocked by the idea of a non-executive chairman, and friend of the prime minister, trying to get journalists sacked”? Has he forgotten Bob Hawke attacked the ABC over its overuse of “Middle East experts” who persistently opposed the 1991 Gulf war? The Hawke government threatened to withdraw funding, with treasurer Paul Keating promising: “They won’t get an extra zack out of us. It’s the most pampered, self-indulgent and self-interested outfit in the country.” Was that a challenge to the ABC’s independence?

The shock this time is not that the Turnbull government applied pressure but the clumsy way the chairman handled it. In a word, it was inept. But even the notion of ABC independence is a fiction.

Forget conservative taxpayers, the broadcaster is already a green propaganda machine. Who knows what subtle, informal collaboration occurs with groups such as Friends of the ABC and GetUp? The Friends have appropriated (with or without consent) the official ABC logo.

Its website includes promotions for mainly Labor Party frontbenchers and pages dedicated to Don’t Blame Me I Didn’t Vote Liberal, Human Rights Watch and GetUp, “an independent movement of more than a million people working to build a progressive Australia”. It denigrates Abbott, retails the ABC’s editorial line regarding the evils of Nauru, raises Aboriginal deaths in custody and celebrates “marriage equality made law”.

But, despite it all, Kohler naively insists “we can now be sure that no politician will ring a future chair to call for a journalist’s head, and it will be a while before any ABC director utters a peep about journalistic bias”. That’s hardly the point. It’s too late. The bias is so institutionalised it is beyond change. The charter is a relic.

Maurice Newman served as the chair of the ABC Board between 2006–2012.