

Five ways our ABC is under threat

The ABC is Australia's most **loved, respected** and **trusted** cultural institution. For more than eight decades, our ABC has been a constant part of Australians' lives, bringing us news from every corner of this country and from around the globe; telling our ever-changing stories to Australians and the world; and supporting all forms of the arts. **But our ABC is now under threat as never before.** Here's five current threats to the ABC:

\$340 million in funding cuts

1 Cuts to ABC funding since 2014 have imperiled its ability to deliver services to Australians. The ABC's base funding has been cut by \$340 million under the Coalition government, resulting in hundreds of job losses, the closure of ABC bureaus in regional Australia and overseas, and reduced production of specialist and local content. In real terms, after adjustments for inflation, the ABC receives about 30% less from the Federal Budget today than it did in the 1980s.

Editorial freedom attacked

2 Constant political attacks on the ABC's journalism which have led to second-guessing and false balance. The chairman of the ABC, Justin Milne, a personal friend of former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, was forced to resign by revelations that he has regularly sought to interfere in staffing matters following government complaints about the ABC's journalists and political coverage. Communications Minister Mitch Fifield, who is supposed to be the custodian of the ABC, has made six complaints this year, including about issues as trivial as reporting on how the date was chosen for the "super Saturday" of by-elections in July. Coalition backbenchers and crossbenchers have also regularly made complaints about the ABC's political coverage, as has former Prime Minister Tony Abbott. On top of this, at the behest of Pauline Hanson, the Government is seeking to make changes to the ABC Charter to require the broadcaster to be "fair and balanced".

Expansion reined in

3 Private broadcasters and publishers are seeking to nobble the ABC through a "competitive neutrality" inquiry. The commercial free-to-air and subscription TV and radio networks have long seen the ABC as their competitor, but in recent years, they have been joined by the major publishers who claim that the expansion of the ABC online is a threat to their business models. With the assistance of One Nation, they have fought back by successfully lobbying the federal government to order a competitive neutrality inquiry into the ABC.

Ongoing cost 'reviews'

4 Yet another "efficiency review" could lead to further funding cuts at the ABC. The Lewis review of the ABC in 2014 resulted in more than \$200 million being cut from the ABC's budget that year. Now, another review into the ABC and SBS is under way, this time headed by former Foxtel boss Peter Tonagh. The new review is ostensibly about identifying cost-saving efficiencies at the two broadcasters, but as past history shows, this may be a precursor to further deep cuts.

Privatisation plans

5 It is Liberal Party policy to sell off the ABC. In June, the Liberal Party federal council voted 4:1 to privatise the ABC. Liberal-aligned think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs, has long campaigned for the privatisation of the ABC. Although Liberal politicians, including now Prime Minister Scott Morrison, have sought to distance themselves from the party's policy, there was only tokenistic opposition to the motion to privatise the ABC expressed by the Minister for Communications Mitch Fifield at the June meeting. In previous years, as a backbencher, Senator Fifield openly advocated for the ABC to be privatised.



Research that matters.

