

Impartiality and commercial influence in broadcast news - consultation 02/2020

Submission

I am deeply concerned about the quality of journalism and editorial in broadcast news. Issues such as climate change are handled very badly, with substantial airtime given to spurious claims by climate change denialists in the name of “balance”. A pretence is made of being impartial and giving two sides to the story when the science is completely settled.

This false impartiality is really just a cloak for perpetuating confusion and division and pretending there is still a climate “debate”. There are no two sides to the climate debate any more than there are two sides to whether or not smoking causes cancer or the earth is flat. Broadcast media (as well as social media) is being used by commercial interests to stymie or at least hamper an effective transition to a zero-carbon economy.

One example is recent reporting in the Murdoch press that arsonists were responsible for the recent bushfires – or that greenies were responsible for hampering fuel reduction burns. These things are patently untrue and out fire chiefs have said so repeatedly.

Ingrained sexism still infects reporting on family violence. Even as I write, a man murdered his young family by setting them alight in a car is being portrayed as “a good bloke who snapped” rather than a violent and dangerous man whose family were entitled to protection.

Racism is another example – the negative portrayal of African-Australians is a case in point.

So too is the obvious bias against the Labor and Greens parties. I was regularly shocked by the tone of the Murdoch press in the last federal election. Not even the merest wisp of impartiality was on display in that campaign.

Social media is even worse. Misinformation and fake news is so rife that many people are unable to discern fact from fiction. Clever use of data analytics by players such as Clive Palmer are distorting our democracy to a dangerous degree.

Yours sincerely,

Penelope Swales