

Dear ACMA,

I have always been shocked and appalled by the lack of impartiality in Australian news since I got here in 2001, from New Zealand, having lived in Hong Kong, and having read a wide variety of high-quality overseas news sources.

While there are arguments to say that true impartiality is unachievable and that presenting every side of every debate at all times is not useful, what happens in Australia is very obviously biased. There exists little in the way of independent media. Most media organisations (particularly News Ltd and Fairfax) have a blatant political agenda, will openly endorse political parties, and report the news selectively and emotively. It is propaganda by any definition, and it is a vast over-reach of the role of the Fourth Estate. I even feel uncomfortable reading media that aligns with my (progressive) views as I feel they are trying to manipulate me.

Exceptions would be the ABC and SBS, which are well-balanced, fair, insightful, high quality and are rightly beloved by the general public. Perhaps this is because they are not dependent on commercial interests and selling a product. It is awful to see their high-quality content being cut for 'bias' when they are very fair, have multiple fact-checking, transparency and critical shows and services, and will criticise or praise on merit when providing opinion pieces, rather than being partisan.

There seems to be no real distinction between opinion and reporting, and the lines are often very blurred.

The fact that the media 'self-polices' is ridiculous. I remember submitting a complaint about a racist full first-page article in The Australian. It was retracted, of course, with a tiny paragraph hidden deep in the paper. That anything was done at all was probably a miracle.

This issue is even worse on TV/radio and online media. Fox News is the most egregious example but 'shock jocks', who are often 'reporting news' are as bad or even worse. When Alan Jones incited violence against Muslims/Arabs during the Cronulla riots (which at the time should have been considered a crime under anti-terror legislation), he only got a slap on the wrist. This behaviour from those outlets has only continued or worsened.

In terms of online media, seeing the rise of things like PragerU and other extremist media on YouTube that presents false information and bigotry as real and believable has been very concerning indeed, and if it doesn't already exist, there will be Australian outlets/presenters who broadcast these things, completely unregulated.

There seems to be no policing or regulation of hate speech or offensive speech in particular. How people like Alan Jones, Miranda Devine, Andrew Bolt and Kyle Sandilands are still employed is beyond me, given their many transgressions.

Also ridiculous is how huge these media entities are. There seems to be little anti-trust legislation. Whenever there is an attempt at reform, it appears that media corporations will band together to attempt to dethrone the sitting government. Interestingly, this happened to John Howard in his last term in office.

Corporate interests, political interests (including overseas think-tanks), the wealthy, the pursuit of click-bait at the expense of truth, scrambling for advertising money in a new economic environment and many vested interests seem to be at the heart of these issues, and this is reflected in the content.

In the era of internet journalism, clickbait and social media, while we're facing things like climate change, the rise of fascism/authoritarianism, propaganda bots/trolls, geopolitical danger and a great

deal of uncertainty and risk, these issues have become amplified. One would think that now is the time when good reporting and investigative journalism could be a force for great good. Instead, we are seeing an amplification of the worst aspects of human nature in the Australian media.

On the plus side, and I think this needs emphasis - particularly as many of them are struggling financially and need support - many local papers, particularly in regional areas, will report relevant, meaningful and informative pieces that are of use to their local communities.

There needs to be an independent, non-government non-industry body to regulate the media. There also need to be an investigation of corruption in the media. Why this doesn't exist already when it does in most other wealthy countries is totally beyond me.

I hope that there will be some improvement in the situation and wholeheartedly support change.

Kind Regards,

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