

23rd June 2011

Michael Mason
Acting Manager, Radio National
ABC
GPO Box 9994
Sydney NSW 2001



Dear Mr Mason

Re: ABC Radio National Review 2011

It is a reflection of the esteem in which Radio National is held that many members of the community contact Friends of the ABC on occasions they are alerted to a possible threat to RN's quality and integrity. Presently, RN listeners and podcasters are phoning and emailing FABC as the result of recent reports in the daily media that changes are planned to Radio National to attract younger listeners.

RN listeners have observed a decline in the quality and specialist content in some RN programming in the past 15 years, and so would welcome change if it is for improvement. Included in feedback they provide to FABC is the hope that changes which are presently being considered will address the gap in important information, analysis and debate on matters dealt with by RN's specialist media and religion programs until they were axed in 2008.

Some listeners are grateful that particular programs are repeated at a different time during the week which is more accessible for them personally. Though many are also critical of the overall number of repeats throughout the year, believing that this may be a cost-saving measure and preferring to see the development of new culturally and intellectually challenging programs.

It is clear that RN listeners are not averse to change, and appreciate innovation. However, in the context of the ABC's record in recent years, they are concerned. Although the choice of ABC delivery platforms has expanded and the amount of local drama screened on ABC television has increased, much programming that is broadcast on the ABC reflects a cut in the number of specialist staff and the time needed to research and produce quality content. It appears to many listeners and viewers that the public broadcaster's interest has moved overwhelmingly in favour of lightweight programming and infotainment.

Many phone calls to FABC in Victoria have come from listeners who are refugees from local ABC Melbourne radio. FABC is no longer surprised that this group now includes many older rural and regional Victorians who FABC previously assumed were wedded to local radio and discovered RN only after they were no longer able to tolerate the extent to which ABC 774 has been 'dumbed down', presumably in an effort to draw audiences from commercial stations.

Because of the interest in this matter among our members, Friends of the ABC would appreciate being informed of the changes that are being considered or planned for Radio National, and provided with any research on which they are based. We seek your assurance that:

- . all changes to RN will be to increase the quality, depth and diversity of programming;
- . RN will not seek to decrease the average age of its audience by broadcasting programs of a lesser standard, but instead, will work to introduce more young people to high quality programming; and
- . RN's efforts to increase its younger audience will not be at expense of its existing audiences. Older members of the community are entitled to have their interests catered for by the ABC, and increasingly have less access to content of interest to them than do other audiences the ABC now seeks to attract.

With work the ABC did to facilitate its interests in the community's conversion to digital television in mind, one suggestion which has come from FABC members for RN to expand its audiences is that the ABC seek to influence the design of content delivery devices, such as MP3 players now in widespread use, and especially popular among young people.

Podcasting is useful, but fulfils a different need, and people frequently don't get around to recording or downloading radio podcasts from their computer to their MP3 player. And without radio being available in real-time on commonly used brands of MP3 players, young people, for whom they are overwhelmingly the device of preference, may simply never be exposed to radio.

We look forward to hearing from you on the matters raised in this letter so that Friends of the ABC can help to keep Radio National's loyal listeners informed.

Yours sincerely

David Risstrom
President

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