



An Introduction to the  
**Editorial Policies 2007**

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From 1 March 2007, the ABC will implement a new set of Editorial Policies. This document introduces the Policies.

## What is different?

### ...to the existing policies

- Four categories of content
  - Content is not division specific
  - One program may contain more than one content category
  - A new category of Opinion
  - Two expressions of impartiality
- Online training resource for all staff

## 1. Four Categories of Content

The Editorial Policies 2007 has four content categories:

- News and current affairs—instead of 'News and current affairs and information programs comprising both news and information relating to current events'.
- Topical and factual—instead of 'Factual'.
- Opinion—for the first time, opinion content has been formally recognised as a separate offering within ABC content. Previously, it was included in the 'Factual' category.
- Performance—recognition of what type of content the ABC is already providing in music, drama, satire and related fields.

Content is not division specific:

- For example, news and current affairs content is produced by other output divisions as well as by the News and Current Affairs Division.

The four categories refer to content, not programs. It is recognised that a single program could include more than one category of content.

- For example, a mornings program on local radio may range from news and current affairs, to topical and factual and perhaps through to performance.
- Under the Editorial Policies 2007, a news and current affairs program will be able to include opinion, such as an editorial, providing that the content is commissioned as opinion content and clearly signposted to audiences in advance.

### Opinion Content: a New Content Category

- Opinion content is commissioned or acquired to provide a particular perspective or point of view.
- Such content relates to matters of contention and public debate.
- It is prepared and presented by the person who is the author of the content.
- Examples of opinion content includes lecture series, point of view documentaries, editorial commentary, speeches, and programs where the ABC has commissioned the presenter to take an editorial perspective.
- This category **does not** include opinions expressed by audiences through talkback or online interactive features; opinions expressed by guests participating in news and current affairs or topical and factual content; content categorised as performance; or analysis and context provided by ABC presenters and journalists.

## 2. Two Expressions of Impartiality

The preamble to the *Editorial Policies 2007* distinguishes two ways in which the ABC must demonstrate impartiality: impartiality at the content level and impartiality at the platform level.

- As a creator, broadcaster and publisher of news and current affairs content, the Policies require impartiality at the **content or program** level. This means that each program or item of news and current affairs content must be impartial in accord with the requirements set out in the news and current affairs content section and;
- As a creator, broadcaster and publisher of opinion and topical and factual content, the Policies require impartiality at the **platform** level (ie the individual television or radio network, or on ABC Online). This means that while individual items of content can take a particular perspective on an issue, the ABC must be able to demonstrate at the platform level that it has provided its audiences with a range of different perspectives on the subject under consideration.

## 3. Minimum Requirements for Each Content Category

- Each content category has a minimum set of mandatory editorial principles which must be met by content makers.
- Editorial principles have been developed to reflect the duties of the Board under Section 8 of the ABC Act. (1)
- The principles for each content category, as listed in the *Editorial Policies 2007*, are detailed below.

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<sup>1</sup>Section 8(1)(c) of the ABC Act, states that it is the duty of the Board "to ensure that the gathering and presentation by the Corporation of news and information is accurate and impartial according to the recognised standards of objective journalism".

### 3.1 Principles for news and current affairs content

All news and current affairs content will be accurate, impartial and objective, and thereby avoid bias. Staff working on news and current affairs content are required to keep in mind the ABC's key values: honesty, fairness, independence and respect.

Staff must also observe the following principles:

- ❑ The ABC takes no editorial stand in its programming.
- ❑ Avoid conflicts of interest.
- ❑ Be accurate.
  - Every reasonable effort, in the circumstances, must be made to ensure that the factual content of news and current affairs is accurate and in context.
  - The ABC will not hesitate to admit and correct a significant error when it is established that one has been made. When a correction is necessary, it will be made in an appropriate manner as soon as reasonably practicable.
- ❑ Be impartial. Editorial judgements are based on news values, not for example on political, commercial or sectional interests or personal views. Do not unduly favour one perspective over others.
- Be balanced. Balance will be sought but may not always be achieved within a single program or publication; it will be achieved as soon as reasonably practicable and in an appropriate manner. It is not essential to give all sides equal time. As far as possible, present principal relevant views on matters of importance.
- ❑ Be questioning. Serve the public interest by investigating issues affecting society and individuals.
- ❑ Exercise civility unless there is compelling reason not to do so.
- ❑ Exercise reasonable respect for privacy.
- ❑ The ABC supports employees' ethical obligations in protecting confidential sources, subject to requirements under the law.
- ❑ Take responsibility for editorial decisions and refer upwards as required.

It is not normally appropriate for regular ABC presenters or reporters associated with news or current affairs content to provide opinion content. However, presenters or reporters may be specifically commissioned to provide opinion content, such as in the form of an identified program 'editorial'. This should not be confused with a reporter or presenter providing analysis and context, based on their professional expertise and judgement, as part of their news or current affairs reporting, including 'Q&As'.

## 3.2. Principles for opinion content

Staff working on opinion content are required to observe the principles listed below, while keeping in mind the ABC's key values: honesty, fairness, independence and respect.

Staff must also observe the following principles:

- ❑ Content must be signposted to audiences in advance.
- ❑ The ABC does not endorse opinions expressed in such content.
- ❑ The ABC is committed to impartiality and must demonstrate this in opinion content through the presentation of a diversity of perspectives. This requires a diversity of perspectives to be demonstrated across a network or platform by providing content of a similar type and weight in an appropriate time-frame. (For example, this might be achieved by presenting a discussion program after a point-of-view documentary.)
- ❑ In the presentation of this content, staff should:
  - take reasonable steps to ensure factual content is accurate
  - not misrepresent other viewpoints.
- ❑ Exercise reasonable respect for privacy.
- ❑ Take responsibility for editorial decisions and refer upwards.

## 3.3 Principles for topical and factual content

Staff working on topical and factual content are required to observe the principles listed below, while keeping in mind the ABC's key values: honesty, fairness, independence and respect.

Staff must also observe the following principles:

- The ABC is committed to impartiality: where topical and factual content deals with a matter of contention or public debate, a diversity of principal relevant perspectives should be demonstrated across a network or platform in an appropriate timeframe.
- ❑ Factual content requires accuracy.
  - Every reasonable effort must be made to ensure that factual content is accurate and in context.
  - The ABC will not hesitate to admit and correct a significant error when it is established that one has been made. When a correction is necessary, it will be made in an appropriate manner as soon as reasonably practicable.
- Avoid conflicts of interest.
- ❑ Other viewpoints should not be misrepresented.
- ❑ Exercise reasonable respect for privacy.
- Take responsibility for editorial decisions and refer upwards.

### 3.4. Principles for performance content

The ABC encourages and promotes the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia, across its services. This category of content includes live or recorded musical or theatrical performance, drama, satire and comedy.

Staff working on performance content are required to undertake these activities with care and integrity and in accordance with the ABC's key values: honesty, fairness, independence and respect.

Satire has a legitimate place in ABC content.

- The groups or individuals most often satirised are those prominent in public life.
- Staff involved in satirical content need to consider the potential for satire to cause harm to groups or individuals and should refer upwards. Staff should also give consideration to the context and subject matter of the satirical treatment.

The section titled 'Content standards', sets the requirements for performance content, while the section dealing with editorial responsibility, is also relevant.

## 4. Staff Training

A comprehensive program of training is currently being developed, to assist staff in understanding and implementation of the new Policies. The first stage of this training will start in late November 2006 through a series of staff awareness sessions in each State and Territory capital.

From the beginning of February 2007 an online training resource will be available to all staff for completion, prior to the implementation of the new policies from 1 March 2007. This online training will be supported by face-to-face sessions where areas of need are identified. Importantly, this online training resource will be valuable for ongoing Editorial Policies training across the Corporation.

## 5. Further Information

An *Editorial Policies 2007* site will be available in the 'What's New' section on the front page of the intranet. This site will contain a copy of the *Editorial Policies 2007*. It will also provide a link to today's presentation to staff, for download as a video file in the very near future.

If you have a question about the *Editorial Policies 2007*, please send an e-mail to the user name, 'Editorial Policies' on the internal e-mail system. Questions and the associated responses will be posted on the *Editorial Policies 2007* site on the intranet.