

Quality Assurance Project 4:

Impartiality (Topical and Factual Content)

Final Report June 2008

POLICIES

Advise. Verify. Review



Editorial Policies

The Editorial Policies of the ABC are its leading standards and a day-to-day reference for makers of ABC content. The Editorial Policies -

- give practical shape to statutory obligations in the ABC Act;
- set out the ABC's self-regulatory standards and how to enforce them; and
- describe and explain to staff and the community the editorial and ethical principles fundamental to the ABC.

The role of Director Editorial Policies was established in 2007 and comprises three main functions: to advise, verify and review.

The verification function principally involves the design and implementation of quality assurance projects to allow the ABC to assess whether it is meeting the standards required of it and to contribute to continuous improvement of the national public broadcaster and its content.

Acknowledgements

The Director Editorial Policies acknowledges the work of Denis Muller in the design and implementation of the project, including management of the team that independently undertook the detailed content analysis. In ABC Editorial Policies, Michelle Fisher, Manager Research, and Jessica List, Executive Assistant, once again made valuable contributions. Thanks also to Sue Howard, Director Radio and Regional Content, Margaret Cassidy, Head National Networks, Jane Connors, Manager Radio National, and all colleagues in Radio National for the way they gave the co-operation necessary to the proper functioning of these new and unfamiliar projects.

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Goading storms out of a darkening field

Goading storms out of a darkening field, Cockeyed bobs seeding the salt, the farmer Cursing the dry, cursing the bitter yield.

And while lightning would savage him with skilled Thrusts, and floods strip the topsoil, it's better Goading storms out of a darkening field

Than sit distraught on the verandah, killed By the "quitter's syndrome" – it's much safer Cursing the dry, cursing the bitter yield.

Field bins empty, coffers bare, should have sold Two years back when prices were halfway there. Goading storms out of a darkening field.

Red harvest, charred hills, dry wells filled and sealed. Sheep on their last legs. Dams crusted over. Cursing the dry, cursing the bitter yield.

It's tempting when prayers and patience have failed, Diviners have lost track of ground water. Goading storms out of a darkening field. Cursing the dry, cursing the bitter yield.

John Kinsella

From *The Silo - A Pastoral Symphony* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995) and read, along with other Australian poetry on the theme of drought, on "Life Without Rain" *Poetica*ABC Radio National
22 March 2008

Foreword

In the ABC's 2007 Editorial Policies, "topical and factual content" is all the content that isn't news and current affairs, opinion or performance content.

Topical and factual content might be arts, education, history, pets, religion, science, sport, philosophy, gardening, and much else. The formats in which the ABC presents this category of content also vary widely and include magazine-style, quiz, talk-back, documentary, discussion, interview and review.

In 2006, for the first time, the ABC Board created an impartiality test for all this content, and this is the report of the first attempt to see how that test might work in practice.

The range of subject matter and of presentation styles for topical and factual content makes it very difficult to devise a method for assessing impartiality that is both rigorous and fair (see Appendix I for details). Can this "orange" and that "apple", this reminiscence and that lab result, this documentary and that call-in conversation, all be judged for impartiality in a way that is credible and manageable but also cognisant of the diversity of the programs' very different briefs, subject-matter, makers' expertise, resources and audiences?

This project gave it a go. The sample of content passed the relevant test for impartiality. The response of the Radio and Regional Content Division (Appendix III) is important to consider. All responses will inform future approaches.

A by-product of this project is the way it showcases the sheer variety of material to be found on Radio National.

As a recent edition of the Radio National program *Poetica* implicitly demonstrated^a, the modes in which a free society can think aloud about its shared concerns are many and diverse. Had this program been broadcast within the time-frame of the project, would it have been right to categorise its treatment of reflections by poets about drought in Australia as containing perspectives relevant to the issue of how Australia manages water? If so, which among them might properly have been designated "principal" relevant perspectives? This is the sort of question thrown up by the current section 7 of the Editorial Policies.

For centuries artists, scientists and other types of thinkers have assisted their communities to recognise, to diagnose, to reflect, and even sometimes to resolve to act on what, in the jargon of today's Editorial Policies, are "matters of contention". In Australia, in its way, the ABC – and in particular Radio National – is in that long, great tradition.

It is quite some challenge to say how such work is to be credibly assessed for impartiality, while at the same time preserving the conditions necessary to the creation of the best work.

PAUL CHADWICK
Director Editorial Policies

June 2008

^a Excerpt reproduced on the previous page.

Quality Assurance Project 4

Impartiality (Topical and Factual Content) – Final Report

June 2008

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I. Introduction

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation commissioned this firm in 2007 to assist it to devise and implement a new system of editorial quality assurance. The system consists of a number of separate projects, of which this is the fourth. It examines impartiality as it relates to Topical and Factual Content (section 7, Editorial Policies 2007).

The methodology was devised by the Principal of this firm, Dr Denis Muller, in collaboration with the ABC's Director Editorial Policies, Mr Paul Chadwick. The implementation of it was carried out independently of the ABC by Dr Muller, reporting to Mr Chadwick.

This draft report:

- presents the rationale, objectives and guiding principles for the project;
- describes the definitions and methodology;
- presents the findings;
- presents conclusions, and
- provides as appendices the methodology, the database of items used in the review, and the response from Radio and Regional Content Division.

This is in the nature of a pilot project. No comparable editorial quality assurance system has been found to exist in media organisations in countries with a similar cultural and political setting to Australia. The methodology will be reviewed after the pilot is complete.

In accordance with procedural fairness, a draft of this report was circulated to the relevant ABC Division for comment. Those comments have been taken into account in the preparation of this final report.

We would like to thank the ABC for inviting us to participate in this very interesting and important work. We regard it as a privilege to be asked to assist the national broadcaster in strengthening its capacities in such a vital area. We are accountable to the ABC through Mr Chadwick for the proper conduct of this project. We would be happy to discuss this report through him and by arrangement with him at any mutually convenient time.

DR DENIS MULLER Principal

June 2008

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II. Rationale, Objectives and Guiding Principles

A. Rationale

The ABC aspires to the highest standards. The standard of its work is of particular importance because the national broadcaster, under statute, is required to:

- inform
- educate
- entertain and
- innovate,

and through those activities to reflect Australia to itself, the world to Australia, and Australia to the world.

In any healthy democracy, those who wield public power need to maintain legitimacy and build trust. Major media outlets wield public power. Legitimacy and trust depend in part on personal and institutional accountability. Although the ABC already has well-developed mechanisms of accountability, it is increasing its commitment.

The role of the ABC Director Editorial Policies includes the development of fair and rigorous methodologies to –

- verify that content is meeting the standards required by the ABC Act and Editorial Policies; and
- contribute to continuous improvement of standards.²

This is the first time this methodology has been used. When tested and refined, it is intended to re-use it periodically.

B. Objective

The objective of the project is to test a method of assessing the coverage of a contentious issue of national significance against the requirement for impartiality set out in section 7.4.1 of the ABC's Editorial Policies 2007.

C. Guiding principles

The approach taken in designing and carrying out this work is guided by six principles:

- 1 Respect for program-makers' independence
- 2 Professional accountability
- 3 Natural justice
- 4 An educative focus
- 5 Reasonableness
- 6 Transparency

The Principles are explained in full in the Methodology at Appendix I.

² The role of the Director Editorial Policies is more fully described in the 2007 ABC Annual Report, pages 107-108.

III. Definitions

These definitions are drawn from the methodology prepared for this project. They are summarized here for the convenience of readers of this report. The full methodology is at Appendix I.

"**Topical and Factual Content**" is dealt with in section 7 of the 2007 Editorial Policies. In this project, it has the meaning given in section 7.1. As section 7.2 states, this category of content does not include News and Current Affairs Content (section 5), Opinion Content (section 6) or Performance Content (section 8).

"Impartiality" – The concept of impartiality is discussed in the Preamble to the Editorial Policies, which states in part –

The Board is clear that the requirement for impartiality – whether at content level or platform level – does not oblige the ABC to be resolutely neutral on every issue. As an Australian public broadcaster, the ABC is committed to fundamental democratic principles including the rule of law, freedom of speech and religion, parliamentary democracy and equality of opportunity.

It follows that any quality assurance process to assess impartiality must take account of such fundamental principles.

The Preamble makes it clear that the four content categories each have their own set of editorial requirements.

For the purposes of a project assessing impartiality in relation to Topical and Factual Content, "impartiality" is defined in the relevant passage of the Editorial Policies, para 7.4.1:

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 time-frame.

To assess impartiality in the context of the test in section 7.4.1, it is necessary to -

- break the test down into its component parts;
- define key terms;
- make clear each step in applying the test, and
- ensure that the requirements of the test are capable of consistent application and explanation.

Under section 7.4.1, impartiality is what results from -

a diversity

of principal relevant perspectives

on a matter of contention or public debate

demonstrated across a network or platform

in an appropriate time-frame

A sample of Topical and Factual Content that fits that description will satisfy the impartiality test for Topical and Factual Content.

"Diversity" is used in section 7.4.1 as a noun. It is the presence of a diversity of principal relevant perspectives, not the degree to which the sampled content mirrors the extent of support or opposition in relation to particular perspectives, that matters to this test of impartiality.

"Principal relevant perspectives" both reinforces and qualifies the diversity required. The words "principal" and "relevant" are limiting factors. Not *all* perspectives have to appear in order for a diversity to be demonstrated, only the relevant ones – and not all relevant perspectives, only the principal relevant ones.

Perspective has two elements – what we have termed "aspect" and "voice". "Aspect" is a dimension of the topic, in this project the topic is "Managing Australia's water". "Voice" refers to who is heard in the debate.

Four factors will be used when considering which "voice" perspectives on any given matter of contention are the principal relevant perspectives –

Authority. The perspective of persons or entities with legitimate power to decide the outcome or substantial elements of the outcome of the given matter of contention can reasonably be regarded as a principal relevant perspective.

Expertise. The perspective of persons or entities with recognised expertise in the given matter of contention, whether formally part of the decision-making processes or not, can reasonably be regarded as a principal relevant perspective.

This is even more the case where the expert is in a position formally to advise the decision-making authorities in relation to the outcome, a common state of affairs in the development of public policy in Australia.³

Influencers. The perspective of persons or entities who by virtue of public standing, public following, social, political or economic positioning establish a voice in a matter of contention can be regarded as a principal relevant perspective.

Affected interests. The perspective of persons or entities whose interests will be affected by the resolution of a matter of contention, whether those interests are directly material or more general, can be considered a principal relevant perspective.

Diversity is not limited to what those in authority, experts, influencers or affected interests have to say. Sometimes a contribution from another source that is found by the program-maker will be "lateral" or otherwise odd and unexpected yet seem a relevant element to inject into public debate. Program-makers are entitled to make professional judgements based on the key values and relevant considerations for editorial decision-making set out in the Editorial Policies.

"Matter of contention or public debate" means a matter of public interest on which views differ.

Two points need to be made about the definition.

First, the terms "matter of contention" and "public debate" are for the purposes of the quality assurance projects being conflated. The "or" is read as "and'.

Second, the definition limits the matters of contention to matters of public interest. This is a very wide field and, to paraphrase a judge, the categories of the public interest are never closed.

"Network or platform" - The terms are defined in the Glossary to the Editorial Policies -

Network: Discrete services within a platform (see platform below). For example the ABC has an analog and a digital television network and 65 analog and digital radio networks (eg Radio National, triple j, dig and each of the Local Radio stations).

Platform: A medium or technology for content distribution. The ABC's primary platforms are radio, television and the internet (ABC Online).

3

³ See, for example, Muller, D. and B. Headey, "Agenda-Setters and Policy Influentials: Results from the Victorian Agendas Project" (July 1996) 3(2) *Australian Journal of Political Science* 135-152.

"Appropriate time-frame" will be determined by -

- the nature of the "matter of contention" chosen for analysis;
- factors specific to the network or platform chosen for a project;
- the deliberative process through which the matter of contention is to be resolved (for the time being), insofar as that is reasonably practicable, and
- the extent of resources available for a fair and rigorous project.

Since the objective of the quality assurance projects is to assess whether an impartiality test has been met, the time-frame should start and end at points of significance in public debate and/or resolution of the matter of contention. Where possible it should be linked to the deliberative process upon which the matter turns.

IV. Design

A. Scope

The scope of this quality assurance project comprises:

Matter of contention or public debate: Managing Australia's Water

Network or platform: Radio National

Time-frame: 1 June 2007 - 31 August 2007

Sample content: Items broadcast on the network about the matter of contention during the time-frame.

The reasons for choosing water management in Australia are that it is:

- a national issue of importance;
- highly topical;
- clearly contentious, with impacts that are social, environmental, economic and political, and
- still developing, but already exhibiting a substantial range of perspectives from which a selection of
 principal relevant perspectives can be delineated for the purposes of this project.

The reason for choosing Radio National is that it is national and carries a large number and range of programs with topical and factual content, the relevant category of content for a section 7 project.

The time-frame of three months' content, is large but manageable. The period is recent enough for the content to be relatively convenient to locate and collect for analysis. The winter of 2007 was a dry winter, the continuation of a serious drought in many parts of Australia. The time-frame coincided with a significant debate about management of the Murray-Darling Basin, which brought the issue into sharper national focus, even though it was already a significant local issue in many places.

The range of perspectives was first gathered by simple observation of media coverage of the issue over much of calendar 2007. The range of perspectives was refined by asking the Australian Water Association to independently nominate principal relevant perspectives on the issue of managing Australia's water. The Australian Water Association is a not-for-profit organisation which draws together a national range of experts and organisations concerned with water. It is not owned by any government or corporate interest and has a widely respected reputation for authoritativeness and excellence in research.

The refined list sets out the perspectives against which the sample of content was assessed. They are all relevant perspectives. Reasonable people may disagree over which of them ought to be called *principal* relevant perspectives. It was decided to treat them all as principal relevant perspectives for this first project. In future, on other topics, it may be necessary to nominate which among the relevant perspectives are the principal ones.

B. Collection and analysis

All material on Managing Australia's Water broadcast on Radio National between 1 June and 31 August 2007 was collected and analysed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Radio National staff initially identified all items on this topic within the time-frame and provided the project manager with a list of programs, with relevant items listed. The project manager then made an independent check of all RN programs within the time-frame. He added two programs to the original list, but closer inspection revealed that one was not relevant to the study. Two further programs, *Ockham's Razor* and *Perspective*, which in total broadcast three items on this topic, were excluded after advice from Radio and Regional Content Division that they fell outside the Topical and Factual Content category and were categorised by Radio as Opinion content (section 6, Editorial Policies).

The analysis was based on transcripts. Where these were not available from the archives, they were created from the audio file.

For the quantitative measurement, the data were subject to computer analysis to establish the incidence of key words, phrases, names, positions and interests with the object of revealing the presence of, first, the matter of contention (managing Australia's water) and, second, the perspectives presented on that matter. The quantitative work was done using an established software program.

However, simply counting the incidence of certain phrases, key words and so on is not enough, particularly when the test is the presence or absence of a diversity of principal relevant perspectives. To do justice to context, a qualitative analysis is also necessary. This requires the material to be read, grouped by theme, and analysed for meaning.

For the qualitative measurement, a code frame was developed using established content-analysis techniques, and items were analysed and coded by two coders working independently. Inter-coder reliability was monitored by the project manager, Dr Denis Muller, using standard procedures.

The code frame allowed each item to be assessed specifically for principal relevant perspectives. The analysts also assessed the content in order to gather data on the aspects of the matter of contention presented in each item. They made judgements on whether the item contained material in support of, opposed to, or neutral on, the particular aspects or topics addressed by the item.

The key questions on which the assessments of individual items were based were:

- Does the item contain one or more of the principal relevant perspectives?
- What aspects of the topic were covered in the item, and with which principal relevant perspective perspective was that aspect associated?
- Was it associated in a supportive, opposed or neutral way?

From this data, judgements were made about whether the time-frame's total sample exhibited overall a diversity of the principal relevant perspectives on the matter of contention under analysis, and the breadth of the topic or aspect base of the coverage.

A draft report, prepared by Dr Muller for the Director Editorial Policies, was provided to the Radio and Regional Content Division for comment. The Division's full response is included as Appendix III.

The data from this pilot will be used for benchmarking as well as for assessment of contemporary performance.

V. Findings

A. Volume and shape of coverage

During the study time-frame of 1 June to 31 August 2007, 25 items on the issue of Managing Australia's Water, and falling into the category of Topical and Factual content, were broadcast on seven Radio National programs. The programs and items are listed in Appendix II.

The items broadcast broke down into the following program formats:

- Interviews 72% (n = 18)
- Documentaries 28% (n = 7)

Table 1 shows the number of items by program.

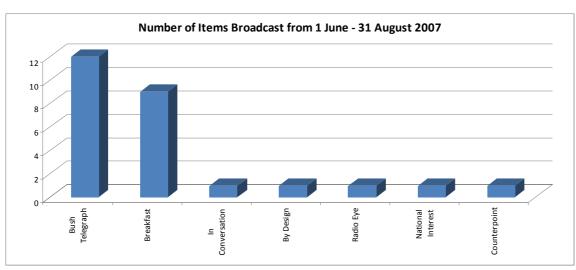


Table 1

In total, approximately 8.75 hours were dedicated to discussing Australia's water management on Radio National over the three months. Nowadays it is common also for programs to be available as podcasts, but this study did not assess this aspect of the programs' availability.

B. Presence and treatment of Principal Relevant Perspectives (PRPs)

Perspective has two elements - what we have termed "aspect" and "voice".

In considering how to assess the ABC's performance in respect of the requirements of Section 7 of the Editorial Policies, we decided that both elements needed to be taken into account, since the Editorial Policies themselves did not distinguish between the two but were assumed to comprehend both.

The central question to be answered was whether this network (Radio National) presented a range of principal relevant perspectives on this matter of contention or public debate (Managing Australia's Water) in an appropriate time-frame (1 June to 31 August 2007).

First, we considered the "aspect" element.

1. What aspects?

The "aspect" element of the principal relevant perspectives was taken to consist of nine perspectives generated in advance. As explained in the Methodology, these were first developed by the ABC Director Editorial Policies in collaboration with the researchers, on the basis of general contemporary media coverage of the issue. At the invitation of the project manager, these were refined by the Australian Water Association to arrive at the nine used for this review:

- 1. Use less water
- 2. Reclaim more water
- Collect more water
- 4. Centralize control of water resources
- 5. Preserve more water
- 6. Abandon some uses
- 7. Conversion
- 8. Charge more for water
- Re-order usage priorities.

This review found that at least one of the principal relevant perspectives was present in 21 out of the 25 items (84%). Only 4 out of the 25 items (16%) did not refer to any of the principal relevant perspectives.⁴

Twelve of the 25 items (48%) portrayed one PRP; four (16%) portrayed two; and five (20%) portrayed three or more.

This indicated a propensity by the programs to discuss aspects of this issue in detail, allowing time for a limited number of PRPs per item. The overall breadth of PRPs covered by the programs as a whole, however, closely matched the anticipated set of PRPs.

Issues surrounding the centralised control of water were most prominent in the coverage, while using less water, re-ordering priority uses and collecting more water via dams, pipelines and domestic rain-tanks were also discussed frequently. Table 2 shows how often each PRP was dealt with.

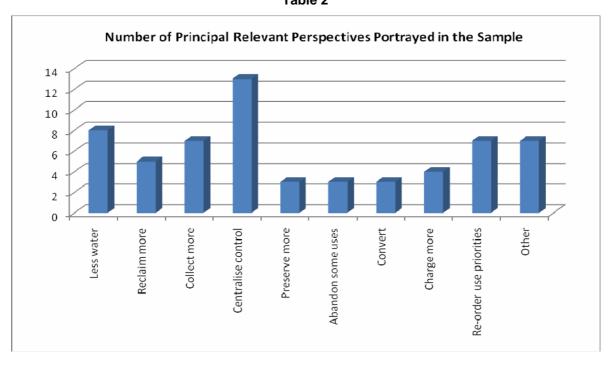


Table 2

⁴ Of those items, the dominant perspectives related to global issues such as population sustainability and sustainable development (see *An Interview with Herbert Giaradet*, 12 July 2007), urban waterways (see *Science with Chris Smith*, 31 August 2007 and *Pulp Effluent*, 29 August 2007) and a current university survey about river use and river management (*Survey of River Use*, 27 July 2007).

An analysis of the two programs that broadcast the most items on this topic, *Breakfast* and *Bush Telegraph*, found that *Bush Telegraph* discussed a broader range of principal relevant perspectives than *Breakfast*, and portrayed the perspectives in their discussion of water management twice as much. The *Breakfast* program presented 13 mentions of PRPs and in doing so covered five of the PRPs. It did not discuss "use less water", "preservation", "conversion" and "abandoning some uses". *Bush Telegraph* presented 26 mentions of PRPs, covering all but one of them, "abandoning some uses". Tables 3 and 4 compare the PRPs covered by these two programs, which provided so large a part of the coverage.

Table 3

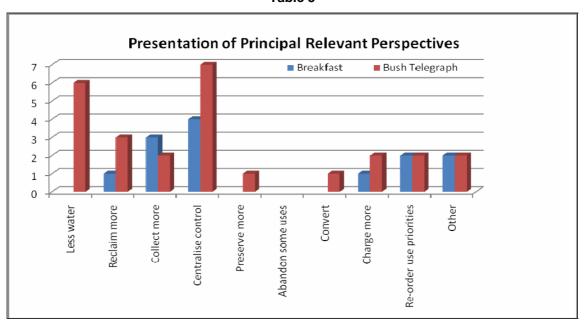
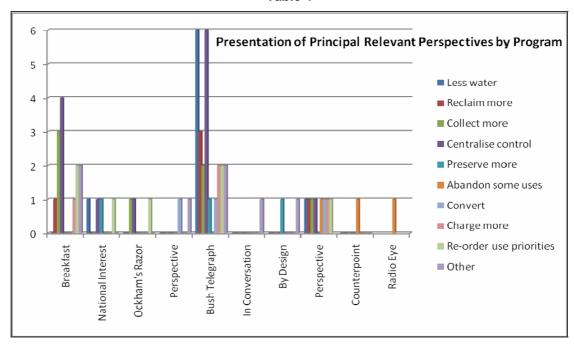


Table 4



2. Whose voice?

This section deals with the "voice" element of perspectives.

Of the items broadcast, 60% (n=15) involved only one guest, 12% (n=3) involved two guests, 8% (n=2) involved three guests and 20% (n=5) items involved more than three guests. Each guest was assessed by the researchers in terms of which "voice" perspective he or she represented: authority, expertise, influencers and affected interests. These terms are defined in the Definitions section above. A total of 53 guests were involved in the sample of items: 32.0% (n=17) were persons or entities with recognized expertise in the given matter of contention; 37.7% (n=20) represented influencers; 22.6% (n=12) represented affected interests, and 7.5% (n=4) represented authoritative interests. Table 5 shows the distribution.

Few authoritative figures (major policy decision-makers) featured in the sample items. The pattern and nature of the coverage suggests that this is because these Radio National programs for the most part played the role of debate facilitator, rather than being a vehicle for reporting decision-making. Politicians were not excluded *per se*, but opposition ministers or minor party MPs were more likely to be invited to present their point of view than authoritative decision-makers in government.

On the whole, guests were treated similarly. However, experts were more likely to have their credentials or qualifications presented repeatedly compared to influencers. This may be explained by the evident preference in the programs for guests with recognised expertise. It should also be noted that a basic technique of radio interviewing is for the interviewer from time to time to remind the audience who it is they are listening to. It may be that, since the experts appear less commonly in the media than influencers, it was felt that more frequent reminders about experts were necessary for the audience's benefit.

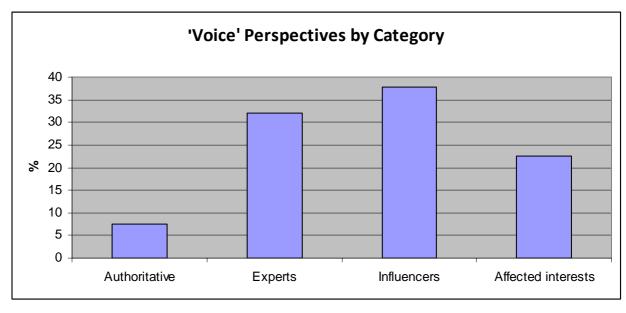


Table 5

C. Tone and nature of presentation (Framing)

In this section the researchers report on tone and nature of the items sampled, and on how the issues were framed by the programs. The purpose in doing so is to illustrate a different kind of diversity – the diversity of presentation (that is, style) as distinct from diversity of perspectives (that is, content). Diversity of presentation is not a requirement of section 7.4.1. The data that follows is a useful byproduct of the project.

There was no case where the program itself or a presenter sought to impose a positive or negative tone on the issue under discussion. Some guests argued in favour of a proposition and others argued against, but the programs themselves did not take a line.

Two terms used in this section should be defined so there is no misunderstanding about what is meant:

Contentious means that the item presented the issue as a matter of contention. It is merely descriptive and does not connote that there was anything controversial about the way the matter was presented. Specifically this term is distinguished from "tendentious". Tendentious frames were never used by presenters in the sample. Even in the presence of strong debate around an issue, the presenter never used the platform to advocate a particular policy or solution to the matter in question.

Framing refers to the presentational context of the item. For example, some items were presented as political, some as environmental, and so on. Once again, this is purely descriptive and does not connote distortion or any other shortcoming in the presentational forms used.

The tone and nature of the titles, introductions and bodies of the items were examined as individual components and then the items as a whole were analysed.

1. Titles

Only 12% (n=3) of the titles were deemed to have been contentious in nature. The vast majority of titles selected for the segments were purely factual or descriptive. This was true even in cases where contentiousness was present in the introduction (though all of the items with contentious titles also had contentious introductions).

2. Introductions

In the sample, the host used a contentious introduction in 64% (n=16) of cases.

While in some instances the contentiousness took the form of journalistic dramatization of the issue, in most cases it was simply reflective of the nature of the issue or of policy disagreements between the guests.

There was a strong correlation between the use of contentious introductions and political framing within the piece. 81.3% (n=13) of the contentious introductions occurred in items which were framed as political. Of these:

- 69.2 % (n=9) focused on the Victorian government, either having to do with water allocations or arguments between the state government and the Prime Minister over the Murray-Darling Basin.
- 46.7 % (n=6) of these stories had to do with centralization of control over water to the Federal Government.

(The above two categories are not mutually exclusive.)

All of the items (n=16) in the sample that had a contentious introduction also had problem/solution framing in the introduction. Of these:

- 62.5 % (n=10) framed the problem alone
- 6.3 % (n=1) framed the solution alone
- 31.3 % (n=5) framed it as a combination of problems and solutions

3. Body of items

The vast majority (96%, n=24) of the items featured a problem/solution frame in the body of the report. Of these:

- 41.7 % (n=10) framed the problem alone
- 16.7 % (n=4) framed the solution alone
- 41.7 % (n=10) framed it as a combination of problems and solutions

Comparing this to the Introduction-Problem/Solution Framing above, we see that presenters were more likely (62.5% versus 41.7%) to use a problem-only frame for the piece in the introduction than in the body of the piece. In combination with the tendency to combine contentious introduction framing with problem-only framing in the introduction, we may see this as stronger evidence of a tendency for presenters to frame the issues to promote interest or newsworthiness. We see from the body of the pieces that they were more likely to deal with both problems and solutions.

All of the items in the sample that had a contentious introduction (n=16) also had problem/solution framing in the body of the item. Of these:

- 43.8 % (n=7) framed the problem alone
- 18.8 % (n=3) framed the solution alone
- 37.5 % (n=6) framed it as a combination of problems and solutions

These data reinforce the hypothesis about the use of framing in titles and introductions to promote interest or newsworthiness. Even in the presence of problem-focused framing in the introduction, the body of the piece commonly paid attention to solutions, too.

The problem/solution framing in the introductions and the bodies were compared. In 52% (n=13) of these items the framing of the introduction exactly match the framing of the body. Of those:

- 53.8% (n=7) were problem/problem
- 7.7% (n=1) was solution/solution
- 30.8% (n=4) were mixed/mixed
- 7.7% (n=1) addressed neither in either the body or the introduction

If the item began by discussing both a problem and a solution frame in the introduction, it never went on to focus only on the problem. In the sample, two items presented only problems in the introduction, but went on to discuss only solutions in the body.

Although the methodology states as a key question an assessment of whether individual items were associated with a perspective in a supportive, opposed or neutral way, in practice this was not a relevant question in this project. These items presented various points of view about the perspectives but allowed these to be expressed freely by guests. This indicates the need for a modified approach in the methodology for subsequent studies of this kind.

4. Locality variable

This study analysed the locality around which coverage was based: local, state, national or international. The main locality divides were as follows:

- 24.0% (n=6) had a local focus
- 40.0% (n=10) had a state focus
- 24.0% (n=6) had a national focus
- 12.0% (n=3) had an international focus

The results heavily featured the state of Victoria: 52% (n=13) of the stories featured Victoria in some fashion. This can be explained by the fact that Victoria was engaged in a political stand-off with the Federal Government over control of the Murray-Darling Basin. Overall, significant mentions of individual states and territories were as follows:

- Victoria: 13
- New South Wales: 6
- Tasmania: 2
- Queensland: 2
- South Australia: 3
- Australian Capital Territory: 1

5. Inter-coder reliability

Inter-code reliability refers to the extent of congruence between the findings made by the two independent coders who analysed this material separately. The degree of inter-coder reliability was 97.68%. This means there was very little difference between the coders on the questions asked about the coverage, and indicates a high degree of reliability in the methodology.

VI. Conclusions

A. Content

The Radio National coverage of Managing Australia's Water in the period 1 June to 31 August 2007 met the requirements for impartiality of topical and factual content set out in section 7.4.1 of the ABC's Editorial Policies.

This is shown by the findings in respect of both the "aspect" and "voice" elements of diversity as described in the findings, and satisfies the requirements of section 7.4.1.

These conclusions are reinforced by the findings in respect of framing. The diversity of the frames used added to the breadth of the coverage and to the fulfillment of the impartiality requirement.

The programs did not take a line themselves beyond that provided by the guests.

In its response, Radio and Regional Content Division correctly pointed out that this report did not acknowledge the wide variety of program formats, which arise from differing program briefs and durations. Each program has a brief which sets out its specific nature, intended audience, duration, content type and other important aspects. This makes no difference to the conclusions on impartiality under the methodology used for this project, which has to apply section 7.4.1 as it currently stands and looks only at Topical and Factual Content, not other content types.

However, the Radio and Regional Content Division's response (reproduced in full at Appendix III) draws attention to a layer of complexity which does affect content analysis. It will be taken into account in future.

B. Method

The method of establishing an anticipated set of principal relevant perspectives ("aspect") and of identifying four categories of "voice" has provided a valid basis for measuring performance on this test.

The relevance and application of the conventional positive/neutral/negative assessment of presentation to studies of this kind are questions that will need to be addressed in any future iterations of this study.

The high degree of inter-coder reliability indicates that the findings are also reliable in the sense that they are likely to be replicated by other trained analysts using the same database and coding schedule.

ABC Editorial Policies

Appendix I: Methodology

Quality Assurance Project 4

Impartiality (Topical and Factual Content) – Description and Method

February 2008

I. Introduction

The ABC aspires to the highest standards. The standard of its work is of particular importance because the national broadcaster, under statute, is required to:

- inform
- educate
- entertain and
- innovate,

and through those activities to reflect Australia to itself, the world to Australia, and Australia to the world.

In any healthy democracy, those who wield public power need to maintain legitimacy and build trust. Major media outlets wield public power. Legitimacy and trust depend in part on personal and institutional accountability. Although the ABC already has well-developed mechanisms of accountability, it is increasing its commitment.

The role of the ABC Director Editorial Policies includes the development of fair and rigorous methodologies to:

- verify that content is meeting the standards required by the ABC Act and Editorial Policies; and
- contribute to continuous improvement of standards.

This is the fourth quality assurance project. It will examine impartiality as it relates to Topical and Factual Content (Section 7 Editorial Policies 2007).

The project has been designed in conjunction with a qualified independent consultant, Dr Denis Muller, who is also an experienced journalist. Dr Muller will manage the project and provide a report to the Director Editorial Policies on the implementation of the methodology and its findings. This is the first time this methodology has been used. When tested and refined, it is intended to re-use it periodically.

II. Objective

The objective of the project is to test a method of assessing the coverage of a contentious issue of national significance against the requirement for impartiality set out in section 7.4.1 of the ABC's Editorial Policies 2007.

III. Guiding Principles

The approach taken in designing and carrying out this work is guided by six principles.

⁵ The role of the Director Editorial Policies is more fully described in the 2007 ABC Annual Report, pages 107-08.

A. Principle 1 – Respect for program-makers' independence

Consistent with section 8 of the ABC Act, section 2 of the ABC's Editorial Policies gives independence the status of a key value in the ABC, along with honesty, fairness and respect. These values are applicable generally across the organisation.

Section 7.3 of the Editorial Policies enjoins staff to observe the four key values. Accordingly, makers of Topical and Factual Content (Ed Pols section 7) are expected to exhibit independence.

Of particular relevance to the ABC is its independence from the government of the day. Independence contributes to the ability of the ABC to widen the diversity of media content in a country in which the ownership and control of the commercial media is highly concentrated. This concentration results in part from geographic and demographic factors that limit the role that market forces might otherwise play in media diversity.

The first guiding principle of this quality assurance project is that those conducting it recognise and respect the independence of ABC program-makers.

Everything done in this quality assurance project is directed at maintaining that independence, not weakening it.

B. Principle 2 – Professional accountability

Those privileged to have access to the broadcasting and publishing opportunities created by ABC networks and platforms should be accountable for the way they exercise their power and meet the responsibilities that come with that privilege.

C. Principle 3 – Natural justice

The quality-assurance process must adhere to the requirements of natural justice. No adverse findings will be conclusively made until the relevant Director has had a fair opportunity to respond to any draft finding on behalf of the program team or teams concerned. That response will then be taken into account in arriving at and reporting conclusive findings.

D. Principle 4 – An educative focus

This is an educative and developmental accountability process, not a censorious or punitive one. Individual staff members' identities will not be used in association with the results. The purpose is not to single out individuals for criticism or praise.

The purpose is to provide the basis for training, professional development and continuous improvement in quality across a program team, a Division and, where relevant, across the whole ABC.

E. Principle 5 – Reasonableness

Data will be assessed in light of what was reasonable to achieve in the circumstances, particularly by reference to the time or other practical pressures under which the material was gathered, produced and broadcast or published online.

F. Principle 6 – Transparency

The design and operation of the process will be transparent and made available to the relevant Director in advance of implementation, with a recommendation that relevant staff be kept informed.

IV. Definitions

A. "Topical and factual content"

"**Topical and Factual Content**" is dealt with in section 7 of the 2007 Editorial Policies. In this project, it has the meaning given in sections 7.1. As section 7.2 states, this category of content does not include News and Current Affairs Content (section 5), Opinion Content (section 6) or Performance Content (section 8).

B. 'Impartiality"

"Impartiality" - The concept of impartiality is discussed in the Preamble to the Editorial Policies, which states in part:

The Board is clear that the requirement for impartiality – whether at content level or platform level – does not oblige the ABC to be resolutely neutral on every issue. As an Australian public broadcaster, the ABC is committed to fundamental democratic principles including the rule of law, freedom of speech and religion, parliamentary democracy and equality of opportunity.

It follows that any quality assurance process to assess impartiality must take account of such fundamental principles.

The Preamble makes it clear that the four content categories each have their own set of editorial requirements.

For the purposes of a project assessing impartiality in relation to Topical and Factual Content, "impartiality" is defined in the relevant passage of the Editorial Policies, para 7.4.1:

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 time-frame.

This contrasts with interpreting the term "impartiality" in, say, section 5 of the Editorial Policies (News and Current Affairs Content), where the term requires elaboration in order to apply it in a fair and rigorous way to any given sample of content.⁶

To assess impartiality in the context of the test in section 7.4.1 it is necessary to:

break the test down into its component parts, define key terms, make clear each step in applying the test, and ensure that the requirements of the test are capable of consistent application and explanation.

Under section 7.4.1, impartiality is what results from:

a diversity
of principal relevant perspectives
on a matter of contention or public debate
demonstrated across a network or platform
in an appropriate time-frame

A sample of Topical and Factual Content that fits that description will satisfy the impartiality test for Topical and Factual Content.

⁶ For details, see *The Elements of Impartiality*, a consultation paper (September 2007) at http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/documents/impartiality_sep07.pdf.

C. "Diversity"

"Diversity" is used in section 7.4.1 as a noun. It is the presence of a diversity of principal relevant perspectives, not the degree to which the sampled content mirrors the extensiveness of support or opposition in relation to particular perspectives, that matters to this test of impartiality. It is to be expected that on any given matter of contention the extent of support for, or opposition to, particular points of view will vary.

Nothing in the section 7.4.1 test for impartiality requires that the sample of content should be assessed for whether it replicates the extent to which particular views are held. And this makes sense in practical ways. The unpredictability of public controversies, the vagaries of resources and schedules, and the uncontrollable availability of key participants – these are all factors that should make any prudent designer of quality assurance projects into the impartiality of large amounts of media content spread over significant time-frames wary of methods that offer the illusory solidity of mathematical measures.

D. "Principal relevant perspective"

"Principal relevant perspectives" – The term both reinforces and qualifies the diversity required. The words "principal" and "relevant" are limiting factors. Not *all* perspectives have to appear in order for a diversity to be demonstrated, only the relevant ones – and not all relevant perspectives, only the principal relevant ones.

Consistent with what has been said about independence, program-makers have, and ought to have, confidence that when they make judgements in good faith about the perspectives they will present on any given matter of contention, they will not find later that a quality assurance project will retrospectively query those judgements by an arbitrary or undisclosed method. To implement Editorial Policies verification work in that way would undermine the basic function of the ABC, which is to provide broadcasting services of a high standard. Accordingly, what is needed is a statement of how "principal relevant perspectives" will be worked out for the purpose of these quality assurance projects into the impartiality of topical and factual content.

In media self-regulation, it is appropriate to allow latitude for the judgements of those who actually make the programs day by day, week by week. Quality assurance projects about concepts such as impartiality in media need to acknowledge frankly the inexactitude of what is being attempted. That does not mean such projects cannot be done with fairness and rigor. It does mean they should be understood to be indicators rather than proofs. The variables affecting the results can be many, and will not always be apparent to the designers of the project or the reader of its findings.

What follows is an explanation of the method that will be used in projects of this type to determine which perspectives on any given matter of contention will be treated as principal relevant perspectives for the purpose of applying the section 7.4.1 test for impartiality.

Four factors will be used when considering which perspectives on any given matter of contention are the principal relevant perspectives:

Authority. The perspective of persons or entities with legitimate power to decide the outcome or substantial elements of the outcome of the given matter of contention can reasonably be regarded as a principal relevant perspective.

To illustrate, one (and one only) of the principal relevant perspectives on most foreign policy controversies will be the perspective of the federal government of the day.

⁷ In law, courts sometimes refer to a "margin of appreciation". In media law cases, it is an acknowledgement that in the work of the media (where freedom of speech is centrally relevant) deadlines press heavily, particular styles of communication apply, resources are limited and "truth" in most serious controversies is elusive. It is a recognition that those who follow and judge the original decision-makers usually have more time, more facts and more understanding of where any given controversy headed. The artificiality of the later judgement consciously tempers it. Quality assurance projects such as this one, within a self-regulation framework, should do the same.

Expertise. The perspective of persons or entities with recognised expertise in the given matter of contention, whether formally part of the decision-making processes or not, can reasonably be regarded as a principal relevant perspective.

This is even more the case where the expert is in a position formally to advise the decision-making authorities in relation to the outcome, a common state of affairs in the development of public policy in Australia.⁸

To illustrate: one (and one only) of the principal relevant perspectives on Australia's response to climate change can be expected for some time to be the perspective of Ross Garnaut, who has been engaged by the Rudd Government to investigate and advise on the matter.

On, say, electoral law, the "expert category" could include the perspectives of academic specialists in that field of law, or in political science, or political party funding. On, say, financial market regulation, the category may include the perspective of leading analysts.

Influencers. The perspective of persons or entities who by virtue of public standing, public following, social, political or economic positioning establish a voice in a matter of contention can be regarded as a principal relevant perspective.

To illustrate: one (and only one) of the principal relevant perspectives on Australia's response to homelessness may be a charitable organisation which over time has given aid to homeless people and is supported by significant donations to do so.

It is noted that the existence and standing of influencers frequently emerge from the program-makers' research. It becomes a matter for the proper exercise of independent judgement by program-makers whom to include and exclude. In making those judgements, they may use versions of the other three factors listed here (for they are similar to what in journalism are called "news values'). Program-makers assess in context the importance of the contribution an influencer may make, both with information and with influence on the final decision-makers, that is, the authorities.

Affected interests. The perspective of persons or entities whose interests will be affected by the resolution of a matter of contention, whether those interests are directly material or more general, can be considered a principal relevant perspective.

The assessment may depend on the extent and nature of their stake. An interest here might be public or private, financial or otherwise.

To illustrate with a hypothetical but not improbable local issue: if the matter of contention is whether a proposed road should be built along a particular route, principal relevant perspectives may come from:

- the residents whose properties are to be compulsorily acquired and the businesses on the proposed route who will gain or lose (direct material interests);
- the users of public facilities that would be reduced if the road goes by the proposed route (indirect material interest/general interest); and
- the religious community to whom the proposed road is a threat to a church and its grounds (direct but not entirely material interest).

The factor, "affected interests", is essential to consider in determining what might be the principal relevant perspectives in a given debate. It is the factor that ensures that the perspective of the weak is not missed in the proper consideration of impartiality. In some matters of contention, weak persons or entities, whose interests may be very much affected, may be drowned out by authority, which can control public processes, by well-organised and numerically strong influencers, who may be adept at media relations, or by those with expertise, who may be regularly sought out by media because they are expert and, by virtue of that regularity, be more skilled at communication.

⁸ See, for example, Muller, D. and B. Headey, B, "Agenda-Setters and Policy Influentials: Results from the Victorian Agendas Project" (July 1996) 3(2) *Australian Journal of Political Science* 135-152.

Turning now to consider all four categories in the context of the road-proposal illustration, to the list of Affected Interests can be added: the perspective of the government or council that will make the eventual decision (that is, Authority); the planning specialist from the nearby university (Expert); the transport industry organisations whose members may benefit from the road proceeding as planned and without delay, and a well-known public transport users' organisation opposed to large road projects on environmental and urban amenity grounds (Influencers).

These illustrations are intended to be straight forward, merely illustrative of the four abstract factors under discussion. But it should be apparent even from them that to discern the principal relevant perspectives in any given matter of contention, and then to rest a conclusion about impartiality on their presence or absence in a sample of content drawn from a sample time-frame is more complex and less exact than the words of section 7.4.1 of the Editorial Policies may at first suggest.

As stated above, it is not necessary to include *all* perspectives in order to meet the test for impartiality in section 7.4.1. Conversely, it promotes the ideal of impartiality if the net is cast very widely to draw in as broad a range as possible, so long as the principal relevant perspectives are included.

Similarly, diversity is not limited to what those in authority, experts, influencers or affected interests have to say. Their *perspectives* may not cover all the relevant *aspects* of a given matter of contention. It is probable in practice that by canvassing the principal relevant perspectives, the relevant aspects will also be covered. But sometimes a contribution from another source that is found by the program-maker will be "lateral" or otherwise odd and unexpected yet seem a relevant element to inject into public debate. Program-makers should always be alert to this and make professional judgements based on the key values and relevant considerations for editorial-decision-making set out in the Editorial Policies.

It would be harmful to the ABC's function to provide innovative broadcasting services of a high standard if the result of introducing the impartiality test into section 7 of the Editorial Policies were to sap flair from program-makers or drain away the audience's sense of being surprised, intrigued, challenged or amused by the unexpected and the unorthodox. These are important elements of fine broadcasting. They are part of what "high standard" means.

This is another reason the methodology for this project begins with the guiding principle of independence. In practice, independence can function as a guard against group-think. It acknowledges the legitimacy in public debate of the role of devil's advocate. On some matters, the main players may differ only within a narrow range, and it is a proper function of media in a free society to widen the range of debate.

E. "Matter of contention or public debate"

"Matter of contention or public debate" means a matter of public interest on which views differ.

Any narrower a definition would be hazardous. The utility and the pleasure of the concept of freedom of speech in a democratic society is its breadth. The challenge and the achievement of the best of media is to host debate on matters of public interest. Media performs its role when it finds and presents in engaging ways the information that nourishes debate and the individual human stories that illustrate issues which the public has a legitimate interest in resolving.

Three points need to be made about the definition.

First, the terms "matter of contention" and "public debate" are for the purposes of the quality assurance projects being conflated. The "or" is read as "and". If "matter of contention" and "public debate" are treated as having separate and independent existences in projects assessing impartiality, both conceptual and practical problems arise. The basis for interpreting the phrase to mean "matters of contention *and* public debate" in these QA projects is as follows:

It makes more sense

If there is a debate, there is by definition some contentious matter. We're debating something.

It fits with the ABC's purpose and the policy that underpins its standards

The ABC is a broadcaster. It makes matters of contention public, and the reason it deals with them at all is to inform and host public discussion. Not all the matters it treats are contentious, but in those that are, the ABC is not permitted to take editorial positions in the way commercial media are free to do. The policy rationale underlying this impartiality requirement is that the ABC is to facilitate public debate. It follows that the matters the impartiality requirement applies to are matters of contention and public debate.

The "or" is probably unintended, and should have been "and" In Section 6.2 (Opinion Content), where the policy rationale underlying the impartiality requirement is if anything stronger, the corresponding phrase reads "matter of contention and public debate" (italics added). The preparatory papers for the 2007 Editorial Policies do not solve the question of whether the "or" in section 7.4.1 should be an "and", but neither can those who were closely involved in the preparations recall any reason for "or" in section 7.4.1 when "and" appears elsewhere in the Editorial Policies and seems to make more sense.

The second point about the definition is that it limits the matters of contention to matters of public interest. This is a very wide field and, to paraphrase a judge, the categories of the public interest are never closed.

The definition excludes trivia from being the subject of the section 7 impartiality requirement. Trivia has its place in media, especially in topical and factual content. But it would deaden the liveliness of broadcasting, probably lead to damaging ridicule, and waste ABC self-regulatory resources if the impartiality requirement in section 7.4.1 were to be interpreted as applying to matters of contention that do not also relate to a matter of public interest. Say a movie star or any other celebrity had cosmetic surgery and this caused a lot of comment by broadcasters and their talkback callers and online chat participants. So what? The celebrity's new look may be contentious and the public may debate it, but what benefit would flow from demonstrating that a diversity of principal relevant perspectives were presented in an appropriate time-frame? Nothing turns on the trivial, so the policy rationale for the impartiality requirement would not be engaged. If the celebrity's operation generated public debate about the costs and benefits of cosmetic surgery, then the policy rationale for the impartiality requirement may become engaged.

The third point about the definition is that matters of contention fall into two broad categories and it is necessary to distinguish between them when designing and implementing projects to assess impartiality. The two categories are:

- 1. Matters of contention that are amenable to evidence, debate and decision (even if the evidence is incomplete and the decision resolves the matter only temporarily or conditionally).
- 2. Matters of contention that are grounded in faith or belief and cannot be proven or resolved one way or the other.

The first category is the most common. Examples include the public debates about the extent to which a product or service is hazardous and ought to be regulated. Examples from the second category are rarer but can be highly contentious. They are often associated with religious faith.

Matters of contention from both categories may arise in topical and factual content on the ABC. Respect for others requires acknowledgement that beliefs can be and are sincerely and honestly held. But an impartiality standard for a public broadcaster does not require beliefs to be equated with proofs. To do so may undermine the independence value.

It is not necessary in this project to deal further with the distinction between the two categories. It is flagged here in this first project on impartiality and topical and factual content because it will be necessary to grapple with it if impartiality tests are to be applied appropriately and not counter-productively to the enormous range of content within the category "Topical and Factual Content".

F. "Network or platform"

"Network or platform" The terms are defined in the Glossary to the Editorial Policies:

Network: Discrete services within a platform. For example, the ABC has an analog and digital television

network and 65 analog and digital radio networks (eg Radio National, triple j, dig and each of the

Local Radio stations).

Platform: A medium or technology for content distribution. The ABC's primary platforms are radio, television

and the internet (ABC online).

The most significant difference between the two is scale. A project that assesses whether a diversity of principal relevant perspectives is demonstrated on a network will almost always – depending on the time-frame – be a more limited endeavour than a project that does the same in relation to a platform. The ABC radio platform is huge, comprising national networks, local radio stations throughout Australia, and Radio Australia.

It should be evident that the volume of content to be analysed is a key aspect of designing and implementing a quality assurance project based on section 7.4.1. Such projects are expensive and time consuming, especially because the ABC's data retention systems were not developed with projects of this sort in mind.

G. "Appropriate time-frame"

"Appropriate time-frame" will be determined by:

- the nature of the "matter of contention" chosen for analysis;
- factors specific to the network or platform chosen for a project;
- the deliberative process through which the matter of contention is to be resolved (for the time being), insofar as that is reasonably practicable; and
- the extent of resources available for a fair and rigorous project.

Since the objective of such projects is to assess whether an impartiality test has been met, the time-frame should start and end at points of significance in public debate and/or resolution of the matter of contention. Where possible it should be linked to the deliberative process upon which the matter turns.

To illustrate: if a quality assurance project such as this one had been considered a decade ago, and the matter of contention had been, say, "should Australia become a republic?', an appropriate time-frame may have begun at the time the Constitutional Convention was announced (or, given the limits on resources, when the Convention started) and ended after voting closed on the day of the Referendum in 1999. The content that would then have been tested for the presence or absence of a diversity of principal relevant perspectives would have been content provided by the ABC in a time-frame in which Australians could reasonably have been expected to be debating and deliberating on the matter of public interest. It is in that time period that the policy rationale underlying the impartiality requirement can be said to have been engaged.

It will be apparent from this discussion of definitions that some of them are and will be self referential. That is unavoidable. These projects are an exercise in self-regulation. The ABC will sometimes be the source of a disclosure which triggers public debate about a matter of public interest. The ABC will decide which perspectives are principal and relevant. The ABC will decide which of its networks or platforms to examine at any one time. The ABC, affected as it always is by resource considerations, will set time-frames.

An effort has been made to give these key terms meanings that are not arbitrary or opaque.

Part of the transparency necessary to credible self-regulation is explicit recognition of the impossibility of Olympian detachment. This does not undercut the fact that it is possible to carry out a conscientious, methodologically defensible, good-faith assessment based on the explicit considerations set out here.

V. Design and methodology

A. Scope

The scope of this quality assurance project comprises:

Matter of contention or public debate: Managing Australia's water

Network or platform: Radio National

Time-frame: 1 June 2007- 31 August 2007

Sample content: Items broadcast on the network about the matter of

contention during the time-frame.

The reasons for choosing water management in Australia are that it is:

- a national issue of importance,
- · highly topical,
- clearly contentious, with impacts that are social, environmental, economic and political, and
- still developing, but already exhibiting a substantial range of perspectives from which a selection of principal relevant perspectives can be delineated for the purposes of this project.

The reason for choosing Radio National is that it is national and carries a large number and range of programs with topical and factual content, the relevant category of content for a section 7 project.

The time-frame of three months' content, although large, is believed to be manageable. The period is recent enough for the content to be relatively convenient to locate and collect for analysis. The winter of 2007 was a dry winter, the continuation of a serious drought in many parts of Australia. The time-frame coincided with a significant debate about management of the Murray-Darling Basin, which brought the issue into sharper national focus, even though it was already a significant local issue in many places.

The range of perspectives from which the principal relevant perspectives are to be chosen was first gathered by simple observation of media coverage of the issue over much of calendar 2007. The list in the Methodology Appendix shows the relevant perspectives obtained by this means. In the corresponding column in the Section VII are illustrations of how a particular perspective tends to manifest in practical topics during public debate.

Naturally, the boundaries of the perspectives are porous. They overlap. They manifest in varied practical ways.

The topics in the right-hand column are illustrations only. They are not suggested to be topics about which the holders of only one relevant perspective may have something to say. Public debate about complex issues is not so neat. The list of illustrations just provides examples of practical manifestations of the issue of managing Australia's water. They may be raised in debate by the holders of more than one perspective.

The list of perspectives is to be refined during this project through consultation with the Australian Water Association, a not-for-profit organisation which draws together a national range of experts and organisations concerned with water. It is not owned by any government or corporate interest and has a widely respected reputation for authoritativeness and excellence in research.

This will provide an independent and credible list against which to assess the sample of content for the presence or absence of principal relevant perspectives.

B. Collection and analysis

It is proposed to collect all material on the chosen matter of contention – managing Australia's water - that was broadcast on Radio National between 1 June and 31 August 2007 and analyse it using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Because Radio National produces such a broad range of programs, program format will be included as an analysis variable. These formats are likely to include:

Documentary | Talkback | Commentary | Discussions | Interviews | Reviews

For the quantitative measurement, the data will be subject to computer analysis to establish the incidence of key words, phrases, names, positions and interests with the object of revealing the presence of , first, the matter of contention (managing Australia's water) and, second, the perspectives presented on that matter. The quantitative work will be done using an established software program.

However, simply counting the incidence of certain phrases, key words and so on is not enough, particularly when the test is the presence or absence of a diversity of principal relevant perspectives. To do justice to context, a qualitative analysis is also necessary. This requires the material to be read, grouped by theme, and analysed for meaning.

For the qualitative measurement, a code frame will be developed using established content-analysis techniques and items will be analysed and coded by two coders working independently. Inter-coder reliability will be monitored by the project manager, Dr Denis Muller, using standard procedures.

The code frame will allow each item to be assessed specifically for principal relevant perspectives. The analysts will also assess the content in order to gather data on the aspects of the matter of contention presented in each item. They will make judgements on whether the item contained material in support of, opposed to, or neutral on, the particular aspects or topics addressed by the item.

The key questions on which the assessments of individual items will be based are:

- 1. Does the item contain one or more of the principal relevant perspectives?
- 2. Does the item contain one or more of the relevant perspectives?
- 3. What aspects of the topic were covered in the item, and with which principal relevant perspective or relevant perspective was that aspect associated?
- 4. Was it associated in a supportive, opposed or neutral way?

From this data, judgements will be made about whether the time-frame's total sample exhibits overall a diversity of the principal relevant perspectives on the matter of contention under analysis, and the breadth of the topic or aspect base of the coverage. Reasons for the judgements will be given.

VI. Reporting procedures

A report will be prepared by Dr Muller for the Director, Editorial Policies. In accordance with standard procedure, the Director Radio will be provided with the draft report and invited to comment. Any comments will then be taken into account in the preparation of the final report.

The data from this pilot will be used for clarifying standards and for contributing to continuous improvement of ABC services. The report is for the internal quality assurance purposes of the ABC and will not be used for any other purpose.

VII. Potential principal relevant perspectives provided by the Australian Water Association

Potential principal relevant Practical topics in which the perspective may

perspective manifest during public debate

1. USE LESS: Industry and domestic use

2. RECLAIM MORE: Recycling

3. COLLECT MORE: Dams, pipelines, domestic tanks

4. CENTRALISE CONTROL: Murray/Darling proposal

5. PRESERVE MORE: Enclose irrigation channels

6. ABANDON SOME USES: e.g., certain crops; marginal lands; exotic gardens

7. CONVERT: Desalination

8. CHARGE MORE: Pricing mechanisms

9. RE-ORDER USE PRIORITIES: Country v City

Industry v Domestic

Appendix II: Full List of Items

Breakfast:

Murray Rain – 11/6/2007 Victorian Water Strategy – 19/6/2007 Snowy Cloud Seeding – 6/7/2007 Canberra Water – 18/7/2007 Water Pricing – 21/7/2007 Murray Darling Basin – 25/7/2007 Victoria's Water Plan – 31/7/2007 Pulp Effluent – 29/8/2007 Science with Chris Smith – 31/8/2007

Bush Telegraph:

Water: Who Pays? - 7/6/2007

Recycled Water Projects in Australia - 14/6/2007

Murray Darling - 3/7/2007

Cloud Seeding Around the Country: 25/7/2007

Survey of River Use - 27/7/2007

Does the National Water Plan Make Sense? - 10/8/2007

Red Cliff Irrigators Struggling with Zero Water Allocation - 14/8/2007

Water Allocation Has an Impact on Mildura – 15/8/2007 Every Last Drop: A Water-Saving Guide – 18/8/2007

Irrigation Innovations - 22/8/2007

Positive Outlook for Mallee Farmer – 23/07/2007

By Design:

Trends and Products: Urban Waterways – 21/7/2007

Counterpoint:

Bottled Water - 27/8/2007

In Conversation:

Herbert Giaradet - 12/7/2007

National Interest:

The Unmentionable Water Option - 5/8/2007

Radio Eye:

Stories of Dirt and Water - 3/7/2007

Appendix III: Response by Radio and Regional Content Division

In general it would appear that limited consideration has been taken in the report to the varying nature of many of the programs reviewed as part of this report.

While a number of programs across Radio National have covered the water issue within the time frame, one of the over-riding considerations in terms of approach is the program brief. This identifies the specific nature of each program and the intended audience and deals with important considerations including duration and content type.

For example, the report appears to take no account of the duration or the intended purpose of individual programs in making the comment that there is a "propensity by the programs to discuss aspects of this issue in detail, allowing time for a limited number of PRPs per item" on page 16. The report then acknowledges that: "The overall breadth of PRPs covered by the programs as a whole, however, closely matched the anticipated set of PRPs."

This does not acknowledge the differing durations and program briefs, as, for example, *Ockham's Razor* and *Perspective* are single commissioned opinon pieces. *Perspective* has a duration of five minutes while *Ockham's Razor* runs for fifteen minutes.

As the program website at http://www.abc.net.au/rn/ockhamsrazor/about/ states, Ockham's Razor: "consists of a short introduction followed by a scripted talk. Just that, week after week. This program allows thoughtful people to have their say without pesky interviewers interrupting, or someone of opposite views turning the exercise into a joust. There are times when a speaker needs a clear run, some proper control, and this is what Ockham's Razor provides."

These programs differ significantly in duration from *Breakfast* which consists of a number of interviews in order to deliver its brief of providing comprehensive coverage and analysis of national and international events and *Bush Telegraph* which focuses on national rural and regional issues. However, while *Breakfast* and *Bush Telegraph* are both longer in form, they are also quite distinct from each other in terms of treatment of issues due to the differing nature of their program briefs (reflecting among other things, time of day and target audience) and also the different content categories included in each program.

Different treatment is also the result of different program categories - *Breakfast* is a mixture of News & Current Affairs and Topical & Factual content while *Bush Telegraph* is Topical & Factual. We feel the report does not recognise the different program types covered in this analysis.

In conclusion, ABC Radio is satisfied that the general methodology applied in this report is sound.