## ABC RESPONSE TO THE SEVENTH EDITORIAL REVIEW

## **AUSTRALIA CHINA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT**

## **FROM THE NEWS DIVISION**

ABC News welcomes the findings of this review. News and the Radio Current Affairs unit are appreciative that the reviewer "found that the coverage provided by the ... programs was both fair and impartial ... and that the key protagonists on both sides of the labour market debate were well-represented across the four-month period."

ABC News also accepts the observation that the China Free Trade agreement is extremely complex and was a highly contested political matter. As such the entrenched positions of those involved in the debate did tend to work against public understanding. It is difficult to convey this kind of complexity during live interviews or relatively short broadcast packages but News accepts more could have been done by the way of explainers or context for the national radio audience.

ABC News would point out that radio current affairs coverage does not exist in isolation. Contextual pieces on the issue were published and broadcast by the ABC. In particular ABC Fact Check did a detailed analysis of the claims around labour market regulation – precisely the points of contention on which the reviewer wanted more 'light" <a href="http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-12/china-free-trade-agreement-cost-australian-jobs-fact-check/6653214">http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-12/china-free-trade-agreement-cost-australian-jobs-fact-check/6653214</a>

The fact check was detailed and dispassionate, closely matching the logic of the final negotiated legislation. It was carried online and in more compact forms on TV and in Question and Answer sessions using Fact Check host John Barron within regular slots he has on ABC Local Radio in major metropolitan markets. This Fact Check was also promoted using the ABC's social media accounts. Nevertheless the review is helpful in revealing that it would have been worthwhile making this journalistic ground work more available through national radio programs — or that audiences could have been made aware that the analysis was available on demand on ABC digital platforms. It's fair to say that the work the reviewer wanted had been done but that was not made obvious within the programs he reviewed.

## **FROM THE RADIO DIVISION**

RN welcomes the findings of Editorial Review No. 7 on coverage of the China-Australia FTA. The network strives for impartiality and balance through a rich composite of in-depth programming which aims to give airing to all relevant ideas and opinions surrounding contested issues.

In relation to the comments on RN Drive, the network feels that the fact that the relevant minister appeared more times than opposition spokespeople simply reflects the nature of such stories—that the government is the key player and interrogation must necessarily focus on government actions. Given the journalistic nature of the program the relevant minister necessarily will be closely quizzed to sort the facts from spin and PR. The network, however, accepts that an unintentional skew might

be interpreted by some members of a discrete RN Drive audience, and will give closer attention to the general issue of balanced political representation on policy matters.

More generally, in relation to section 4.1 (*More heat...*) it should be noted that the terms of reference for the review has severed the two selected RN programs from the rest of the network as a coordinated editorial offer, which in its totality aims to provide in depth, explanatory coverage of key issues.

In essence, the network believes it meets the three recommendations when output is seen it its full complement: the daily current affairs programs cross-examining the main players; analysis programs following through with extended exploration and background using a wide range of non- aligned specialists and experts. For an example of programs with *light* see three links below\*

Nevertheless, RN understands the logic and thrust of the review and will consider the recommendations as specifically applied to the programs reviewed to enhance their capacity to explain complex political/policy matters to the public.

\* Three recent programs with explanatory material on FTA

http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rearvision/australia-and-free-trade-agreements/5752714

http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/saturdayextra/china-watching/5903262

http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/counterpoint/unveiling-secretive-trade-deals/7007744