



## SENATOR CLAIRE CHANDLER

Liberal Senator for Tasmania  
Shadow Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ms Ita Buttrose AC OBE  
Chair  
Australian Broadcasting Corporation  
GPO Box 9994  
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Ms Buttrose

I write in relation to the ABC article of 27 April 2022 *‘Trans women’s participation in sport has been framed as an election issue. This is what some trans athletes think’* which has been found by your Audience and Consumer Affairs division to be materially misleading and to have breached the ABC’s standards for accuracy and impartiality.

I am sure you will agree that it is quite a failure of editorial process to publish an article stating that *“little airtime has been given to examining the science behind the claims being made”* which then proceeds to mislead audiences by omitting the science in question.

Despite the damning findings by the Audience and Consumer Affairs division, the article remains online and continues to contain basic errors of fact and omission. It appears that despite the unequivocal findings that the article is misleading, the ABC’s news division remains content to mislead its audience on this issue.

I hope you agree that it is important to get to the bottom of how this disappointing situation occurred. To that end, I encourage the ABC board and management to investigate:

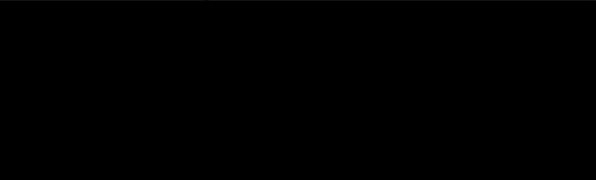
- Why the author chose not to reference peer-reviewed research on the specific subject of retained male advantage, or interview the authors of such research;
- Why the author did not interview experts involved in the creation of the World Rugby policy or the FINA policy;
- Why the article links to Tweets, rather than to publicly available scientific research;
- Why the author neither sought the views of female athletes, or reported the many statements from high-profile female athletes in support of single-sex sport;
- How none of the shortcomings above were picked up by editorial processes before the article was published on April 27;
- Why the ABC has not adequately corrected the above issues following the finding that the article was materially misleading and omits references to the relevant research;

- Why the author did not make corrections after being alerted to these errors after the April 27 publication;
- Why the updated article falsely claims that “in some cases, transgender women have been banned from competition entirely”, citing World Rugby and UCI policies. Policies which require participants to compete in the appropriate sex category do not mean anyone is “banned from competition entirely”.
- Whether the ABC’s affiliations with lobby groups and participation in award programs influenced the framing of this article.

I would suggest that this series of errors and breaches of standards could only have occurred in circumstances where the author set out to make a pre-determined case, selected interviewees to support their own position, and purposefully omitted relevant facts which demonstrate that there is substantial evidence that trans women retain performance advantages as a result of male puberty.

I would particularly encourage the ABC to reflect on the finding that relevant research indicates that trans women retain physical advantages over females. Now that the ABC concedes that this is the case, I trust that future coverage of this issue will no longer reflect such a hostile stance towards women who are aware of this fact.

Yours sincerely



Senator Claire Chandler  
Liberal Senator for Tasmania



28 September 2022

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Dear Senator Chandler

Thank you for your letter concerning the ABC article of 27 April 2022 'Trans women's participation in sport has been framed as an election issue. This is what some trans athletes think'.

As you note the editorial complaints unit - Audience and Consumer Affairs - which sits outside content divisions at the ABC, conducted a thorough investigation of the story and found two breaches of editorial standards. A&CA determined that the story breached accuracy requirements by failing to provide an adequate overview of the available science, including recent research indicating that trans women may retain some physical advantages. The unit also breached the article for unduly favouring the views of Associate Professor Ada Cheung. These are indeed serious editorial lapses and have been treated as such by the ABC Sport team and those journalists responsible for producing the story. There has been a thorough debrief with all involved. The article has been amended to include reference to relevant research from the US Air Force and transgender inclusion guidelines by sport governing bodies. An editor's note has been published, along with a summary of the complaint outcome, and the matter will be reported to the ABC Board in the normal way at its next meeting. Audience and Consumer Affairs was satisfied that these necessary changes addressed the shortcomings of the original article. No further complaints have been received about the story.

On your other questions - it is important to note that editorial standards do not require equal treatment or equal time in every story, or that all perspectives are presented in every story. Impartiality standards require the ABC to 'Present a diversity of perspectives so that, over time, no significant strand of thought or belief within the community is knowingly excluded or disproportionately represented.'

The ABC has covered this complex issue on television, radio and online, including the story of NZ weightlifter Laurel Hubbard and other trans athletes at the Tokyo Games, with additional viewpoints from Olympians Tamsyn Manou and Jane Fleming.

When Cricket Australia released guidelines for the inclusion of transgender players the ABC interviewed Australia cricket captain Alex Blackwell and trans cricketer Erica James. Journalist Tracey Holmes reported the debate over FINA's transgender policy, sparked by the performance of trans athlete Lia Thomas, including the comments of Australian swimming champion Cate Campbell who called for fairness in elite sport.

The Q&A program also recently featured a segment on the debate over transgender athletes. After several elite female athletes declined invitations to participate, dual Olympian Deborah Lovely-Acason approached the program and was included in the discussion.

You ask about ABC affiliations and the framing of the article. The ABC participates in the Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) which forms part of the ACON Health Limited (ACON) – Pride Inclusion Program. The AWEI is a national employee benchmarking index with 186 employers across all sectors participating in the index in 2021. The AWEI is designed to measure the impact of LGBTQ inclusion initiatives in organisations and is used by the ABC to monitor its progress and help improve inclusive workplace practices.

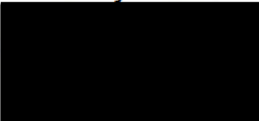
The ABC also participates in other benchmarking indexes to monitor its progress and improve workplace practices, such as the Diversity Council of Australia, Reconciliation Australia and the Australian Network on Disability. The ABC is committed to improving its inclusive workplace practices but decisions relating to employment and participation in benchmarking indexes are taken by corporate management not content making teams. They have no bearing on editorial processes.

In conclusion, the editorial lapses in the original story are certainly regrettable. The ABC is committed to ensuring its reporting is based on credible research, talking to people with lived experience, peak bodies, qualified experts and taking an evidence based approach.

Transgender and gender identity issues are complex and require careful editorial judgement to ensure informed reporting without causing offence or undue distress and harm to vulnerable individuals and communities.

I share your disappointment that the original article didn't meet our editorial standards and I have shared your letter with the ABC Editorial Director.

Sincerely

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Ita Buttrose.

Ita Buttrose AC, OBE  
Chair