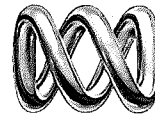


Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2014



**ABC**  
Australian Broadcasting Corporation  
**Television**

Uniting Church's Tongan National Conference  
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To the Uniting Church's Tongan National Conference,

I wish you well with your conference.

From recent correspondence, I understand that *Jonah From Tonga* will be the subject of some discussion. I acknowledge that the series has sparked vigorous debate in your community and elsewhere. I welcome the opportunity to outline the rationale behind the series.

First, some context. The ABC has a long and proud history of providing innovative content that challenges its audiences. It does so in the knowledge that this content may be confronting to some. Comedy and satire can come with a sharp edge – notions that extend back to Chaucer and Shakespeare.

Our editorial policies provide a solid framework for this sort programming: if there is harm and offence it must have a clear editorial purpose and be signposted. I contend that *Jonah From Tonga* fits properly within this framework. Yes, it challenges and subverts community perceptions. Yes, it has sparked debate. But this is common with all Chris Lilley productions. Throughout multiple series, Chris has displayed a highly-distinctive skill in crafting individual characters that test our notions of acceptability and tolerance. This unique skill has earned him international acclaim and wide audiences.

The character of Jonah Takalua is highly individual. It is not intended, nor should it be seen, to represent all Tongans. He is, in the Lilley tradition, a flawed, disenfranchised and troubled young man, possessing poor communication and decision-making skills.

The series explores the impact on those directly affected by his behaviour and the profound personal repercussions for Jonah.

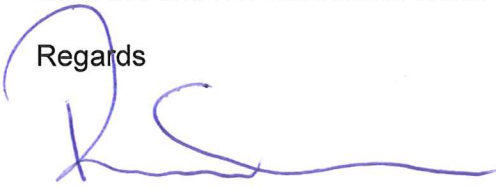
It is also evident in the series that Jonah's clear lack of respect toward his family and ignorance about his culture is in stark contrast to those around him.

While Jonah's starting stance (a direct continuation from his previous appearance in the 2007 series, *Summer Heights High*), is abrasive and dismissive; by series end, his eyes are truly opened to the significance of family, culture and community.

Central to Jonah's redemptive journey is the character of Mr Fonua (aka Kool Kris), a proud Tongan man and inspirational youth worker who befriends Jonah and gradually instils in him a sense of pride, direction, self worth, spiritual awareness and greater purpose.

I accept that Lilley's style and choice of characters will prove to be too confronting for some. The series appeals to some viewers and not others. But I urge you to accept the series for what it is and not what some critics think it should be.

Regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'R' followed by a long, horizontal, wavy line that tapers off to the right.

Richard Finlayson  
Director of Television, Australian Broadcasting Corporation