ACMA statement

The questions put to the ACMA by Media Watch mischaracterise both the FOI documents and the investigation process.

ACMA investigations are a collective and consultative process. Investigation outcomes involving matters of significant public interest or that have broader industry compliance implications are ultimately decided by the Authority. The documents released under FOI show that this was the case in the making of the Authority's decision in this investigation.

The ACMA stands by its decision that the Four Corners 'Sacrifice' program did not comply with the ABC's own impartiality standards. The Authority reached its decision after considering the program, the original complaint, the ABC's submissions and the analysis and advice developed during the investigation.

The FOI process is an important public transparency measure and the ACMA welcomes that transparency.

The internal discussions reflected in these documents are a normal part of a robust investigative process in which evidence and a range of views are tested and considered before a final decision is reached. It would be misleading to describe collective decision-making as being an adversarial process made up of disagreements between staff and the Authority, frustration with the process or any overriding of staff views.

The FOI documents include informal exchanges between colleagues, using the shorthand and conversational language common in the workplace. Individual comments should not be viewed in isolation or extrapolated into broader conclusions about the ACMA's position or decision-making processes.

The ACMA regularly engages with senior ABC executives, including the ABC Ombudsman and Editorial Director, to exchange perspectives and support outcomes that best serve ABC audiences. That engagement will continue, including in relation to the 'Sacrifice' investigation.

Reiterating our statement in response to the previous story you ran on this matter, when investigating broadcasting complaints, the ACMA assesses the meaning that would have been conveyed by the program to the ordinary reasonable viewer.

This independent assessment brings the audience perspective to the application of the ABC's Code, recognising that audiences are entitled to expect the national broadcaster to meet the high standards it has set for itself.