



Twelve-month Report

January-December 2024

Published 27 February 2025

1. Background

The Ombudsman, Fiona Cameron, was appointed in September 2022 following an independent review of ABC Complaint Handling. A key recommendation of this review was a commitment to a process of regular public reporting.

ABC online complaints are received by the Audience Support team who triage the approximate 23,500 yearly complaints. 70-80% of all complaints are defined as **'general'** (broad concerns such as tastes, preference, scheduling and operational matters like the use of personal social media by ABC staff or other staff conduct issues). General complaints are either sent to ABC divisions or addressed by the Audience Support team – this may include noting for information. General complaints are not subject to internal (ABC Ombudsman) or external (ACMA) review.

Complaints about specific ABC content (post publication) about the ABC's editorial standards (due impartiality, accuracy, offence and fair dealing – the top four) are categorised as **'content'** complaints and are assessed by the Ombudsman's Office (OO). These number approximately 6,000 with nearly half sent on to the relevant ABC division for their direct response. The remaining complaints are retained by the OO for investigation.

A dissatisfied complainant can come to the OO (or ACMA) to request a review. OO reviews often provide an opportunity to improve the ABC response to a complainant. This has assisted reduce the number of external reviews conducted. Whenever a matter is considered significant, the OO will publish an investigation report. All complaints that are resolved or found to be in breach of editorial standards are published here and here.

Content complaints are the business of the Ombudsman's Office and are the subject of this report. Further information relating to the Complaint Handling Process can be found here.

2. Summary of 2024 data

In 2024, complaints declined 12.5% to 21,473 (down from the 24,533 received in 2023). The decline can largely be attributed to a 2023 spike in general complaints (broad concerns such as taste preference and program scheduling) following the broadcast of the Coronation of King Charles III. Content complaints (relating to concerns that ABC programs do not meet editorial standards including accuracy and impartiality) were slightly up, representing 25% (5,284) of all complaints received.

The conflict in the Middle East was the most complained about subject matter in 2024. Relative to 2023, however, these complaint numbers are down from 51% (3,347) to 27% (1,541).

Most complaints relating to the conflict are claims of bias or lack of balance (71%) with 40% suggesting content was pro-Israel and 58% claiming a pro-Palestine bias (2% claiming an alternative bias).

Other international stories that contributed to content complaints received include coverage of India and Indian politics in an election year (8% of complaints) and the war in Ukraine (5% of

complaints). On the domestic front, power generation in Australia, particularly nuclear, represented almost 9% of complaints.

Complainants predominantly raised issues concerning bias, followed by accuracy, offensive content and unfair treatment. The most complained about ABC program was News Online followed by *Four Corners*, *7.30* and the 7.00pm news. While the vast majority of complaints (85%) were not found to be in breach of editorial standards, some 475 complaint issues were resolved (involving the ABC taking some form of remedial action) and 39 resulted in a breach finding.

The Ombudsman assessed 97 requests for a complaint review and accepted 26.

3. Complaint numbers over 5 years

Single content complaints may concern more than one issue and the Ombudsman’s Office assesses every issue before determining if an investigation is appropriate. Other courses of action available to the Ombudsman’s Office include referring the matter to the relevant ABC division for direct response or noting the response for no further action if the complaint has not been made in good faith or if the matter is considered insignificant.

Over a five-year period, average total complaint numbers have remained fairly consistent while content complaints have increased representing the higher profile and a potential greater understanding of the complaint process.

Table 1 - Complaint Numbers 2020-24

Complaints	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	5 year average
Total¹	24,662	24,037	21,796	24,533	21,473	23,300
General	20,961	20,665	18,703	19,313	16,189	19,166
Content	3,701	3,372	3,093	5,220	5,284	4,134
Content complaint issues²	4,039	3,599	3,262	6,539	5,708	4,629
Investigated	1,858	1,689	1,393	3,670	3,391	2,400
No breach	1,556	1,336	1,059	3,338	2,877	2,033
Resolved	215	278	244	240	475	290
Breach	87	75	90	92	39	77

¹ The number of single complaints (may contain more than one issue).

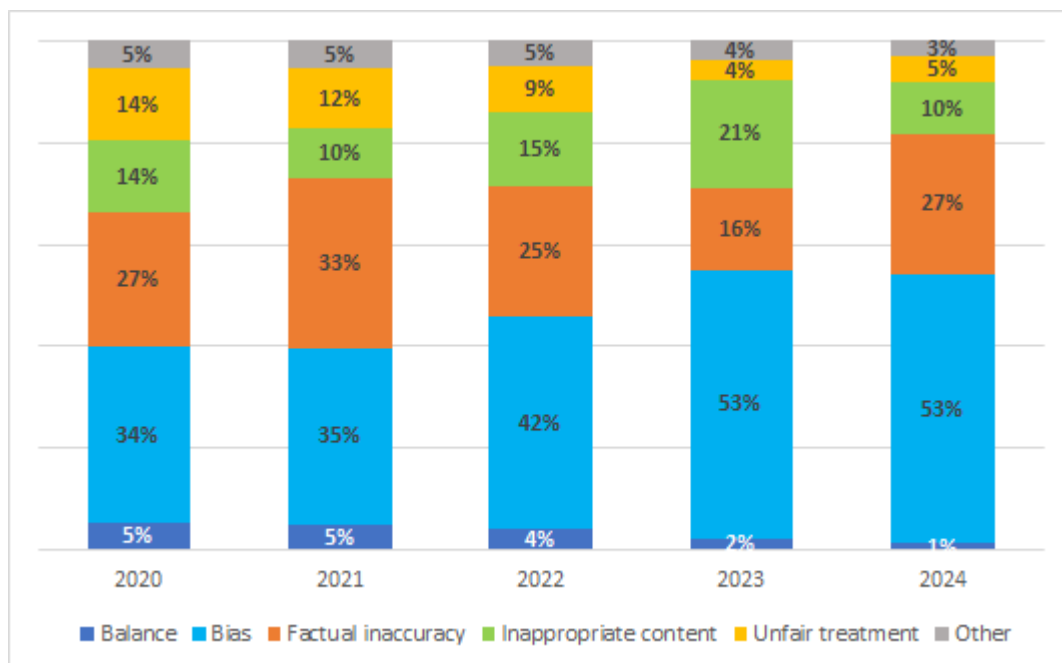
² The number of issues identified in content complaints.

In 2024, the OO resolved 475 complaints which is the highest number of resolved complaints recorded in a five-year period. In part, this reflects the priority the OO places on resolving matters in a timely fashion. Breach findings in turn are at a 5-year low, potentially reflecting the focus on resolving matters upfront rather than investigating after the fact. Breach and resolved findings are very contingent on the number of complaints received for a single piece of content. For example, in 2023, 22 of the 92 breach findings related to one piece of content (*AM’s* report on an Alice Springs town meeting).

4. Categories of complaints

Bias and balance complaints are the predominant concerns expressed by ABC audiences. The OO investigates such complaints against the ABC requirement to satisfy due impartiality and diversity of perspective undertakings. While the table below depicts the most complained about categories, it reflects the personal and subjective views of individual complainants and not necessarily any particular problem with ABC content.

Graph 1 - Categories of content Issues 2020-24

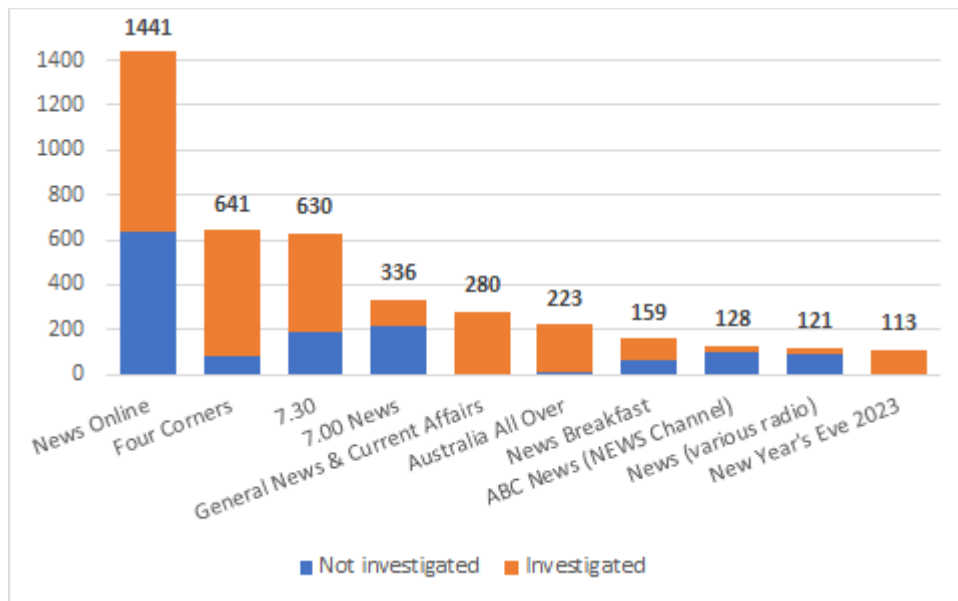


5. Programs most complained about

Programs complained about are often confronting, brave or controversial. These are important attributes for a national broadcaster and complaints in this context are welcomed. ABC content will at times be unpopular and uncomfortable. The ABC of course is not beyond reproach. The ABC needs to correct errors swiftly, be willing to clarify and explain decisions, acknowledge misjudgements and, where appropriate, apologise. The ABC cannot afford to be too thin skinned. Audience complaints form part of a public exchange with the ABC from which all parties can benefit.

In this context the table below identifies the most complained about programs or platforms.

Graph 2 - Programs most complained about 2024



Programs most complained about over the last five years:

1	News Online	4837
2	Q+A	2578
3	7.30	1998
4	7.00 News	1242
5	Four Corners	1029
6	News Breakfast	819
7	ABC News (NEWS Channel)	663
8	News (various radio)	559
9	The Drum	469
10	Insiders	440

 Variance from 2024

24% of issues raised across the top ten programs in 2024 related to coverage of the Middle East conflict (988). Complaints about ABC News Online cover a wide range of stories and themes reflecting its broad remit and reach. News Online complaints mostly relate to accuracy, many of which are minor and are easily addressed.

Of note in 2024:

- 37% of news online complaints related to the Middle East conflict.
- 40% of *Four Corners* complaints were about *'Ukraine's War: The Other Side'*, alleging pro-Russia propaganda and discussed [here](#); 23% were about *'Infiltrating Australia'* on the influence of Narendra Modi's government in Australia ([Investigation report](#)); 19% were about *'Pain Factory'*, see report [here](#).

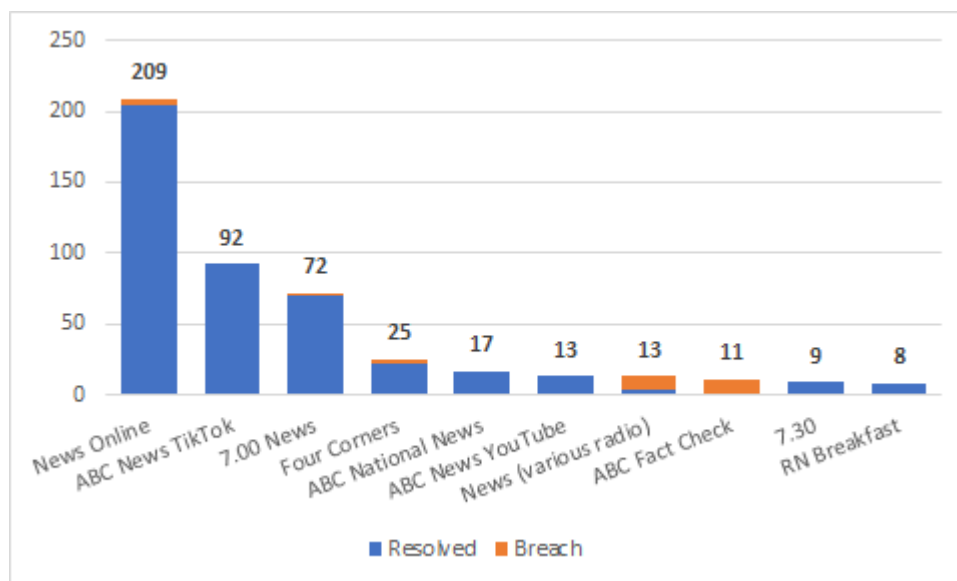
- 40% of 7.30 complaints were in relation to an interview with the Shadow Energy Minister (considered by the Ombudsman as suitably rigorous); 8% of 7.30 complaints were claims of anti-Israel bias in an interview with an IDF spokesperson (investigated [here](#)); 8% were in relation to an interview and analysis on the Federal Opposition’s budget reply.
- 44% of complaints about the 7pm TV News were about the Middle East conflict, including coverage related to the assassinated leader of Hezbollah and coverage of riots in Amsterdam (see resolved complaints section below).
- The majority of General News complaints were about the opening of a Hindu Temple by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi raising concerns about accuracy and investigated [here](#).
- Most complaints about *Australia All Over* were in relation to an interview with Dick Smith on renewable energy that complainants found biased and inaccurate. No breach of standards was found, as outlined in the Investigation report [here](#).

With reference to the five-year trends, the highlighted text in the table above depicts variances from the 2024 data. The *Q+A* reference in this data reflects concerns received by an organised campaign about a single episode of the program aired in 2023 which raised nearly 2,000 issues. *The Drum* (a daily panel program) wrapped in 2023 and *Insiders* had a quieter year recording 85 complaints in 2024.

6. Complaints Resolved or Breach

While the vast majority of investigations (85%) were not found to be in breach of editorial standards, 514 complaint issues were either resolved (475) or upheld (39) as a result of an Ombudsman investigation.

Graph 3 - Programs with issues resolved and breached 2024



Programs with issues resolved and breached over the last five years:

1	News Online	696
2	7.00 News	160
3	ABC News TikTok	105
4	Nightlife	52
5	7.30	46
6	News (various radio)	39
7	ABC News (NEWS Channel)	36
8	News Breakfast	34
9	Four Corners	32
10	AM	30

 Variance from 2024

Resolved complaints

Resolved complaints are considered those where appropriate action has been taken to adequately remedy the concern raised and where any further action (such as allocating resources to an ongoing investigation) would not be warranted. The vast majority of resolved complaints occur in the News Online space where relatively minor accuracy issues can be quickly updated.

Of note in 2024:

- 65 of the News Online complaints related to an article that ‘deadnamed’ a murdered British transgender teen, investigated [here](#).
- All of the TikTok complaints related to a video that profiled a supporter of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. See report [here](#).
- 64 of the 7.00pm news complaints were about the coverage of protests in Australia following the death of Hassan Nasrallah, Leader of Hezbollah. See investigation report [here](#).
- 22 complaints relate to a minor inaccuracy resolved as part of the investigation into the *Four Corners* episode ‘Pain Factory’, where these complaints went to the online story. See investigation report [here](#).

Breach complaints

In 2024 there were 39 complaint issues found to be in breach of the ABC’s editorial standards.

Of note:

- 11 complaints about a fact check of an assertion by Dick Smith that no country has ever been able to run entirely on renewables. Investigation report available [here](#).
- Eight complaints in relation to reports about the NSW State government’s aerial cull of wild horses in the Kosciuszko Park. See investigation report [here](#).
- Three complaints about Four Corners ‘Water Grab’ and the omission of certain information. Investigation report [here](#).
- Four complaints that a News Breakfast segment unduly displayed a Sportsbet branded hat and t-shirt. See investigation report [here](#).

Summaries of all complaints upheld or resolved are published [here](#) and [here](#). Full Investigation Reports of significant matters are published [here](#).

7. Internal Review

In accordance with the new Complaint Handling Process, complainants who are dissatisfied with a response from the ABC may seek an Ombudsman Review. In 2024, the Ombudsman’s Office finalised 97 such reviews, with most declined. Twenty-six were reviewed, with none upheld and six resolved. Reviews are published [here](#).

The Review process has provided the Ombudsman with an opportunity to clarify and in some circumstances discuss with content areas how programs have or may present contentious subjects.

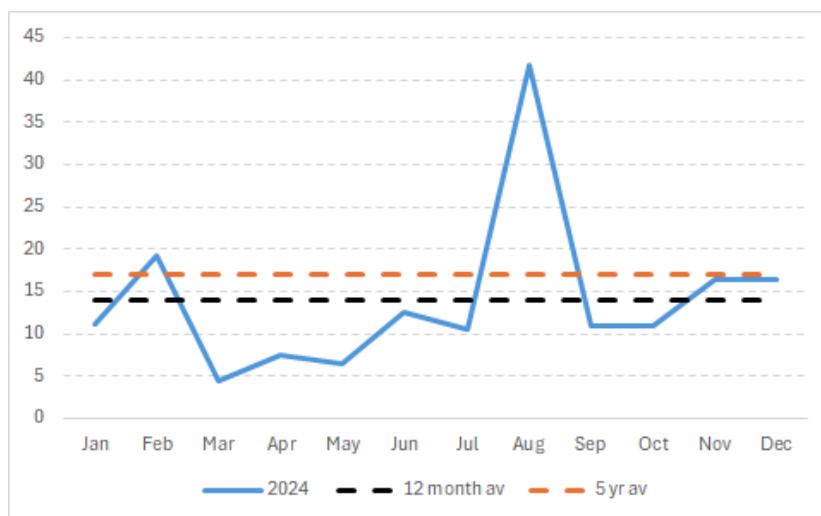
In one example, a resolved review related to a complaint that a map graphic in an embedded video in an [online story](#) “erased much of Palestine”. ABC News responded to the initial complaint acknowledging the error due to a problem with the map software and advising that the video had been removed. The video had been removed from the ABC News YouTube Channel when the response was sent to the complainant but was not removed from the ABC News website. As a result of the complainant's review request, the video was removed from the ABC News website and an [online correction](#) was posted. OO review [here](#).

8. Response times

The effective and efficient resolution of reasonable complaints is the overriding objective of the complaints handling process. Various factors, however, can affect response times including the volume of complaints, the complexity of investigations and staff resources.

In 2024, the average response time for investigated complaints was 14 days. The longer response time in August was due to a complex investigation into 31 complaints about a *Four Corners* story, which took 122 days to finalise.

Graph 4 - Investigated complaints 2024 - average response time



9. Conclusion

The ambition of the Ombudsman's Office is to help build a trusted ABC that reflects, adapts and improves. In pursuit of this goal our office aims to ensure reasonable concerns and complaints are heard across the organisation and to assist the ABC to make improvements or corrections wherever sensible. We do this with the assistance of all the programming areas through a process of assessment, consultation and where necessary investigation.