

EDITORIAL AUDIT NO. 1

ABC RADIO INTERVIEWS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION DURING THE 2013 FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

**An independent impartiality review
by Andrea Wills
for Mark Scott, Managing Director, ABC**

January 2014

**Editorial Audit No. 1: ABC Radio Interviews with the Prime Minister and Leader
of the Opposition during the 2013 Federal Election Campaign**

CONTENTS

Subject	Page number
Background	3
Scope and Subject	3
The Reviewer	4
Method	4
Research Questions	4
Introduction	5 & 6
Executive Summary	7, 8 & 9
The Audit	10
Fair Treatment Indicators	10
Analysis of Fair Treatment	10 to 25
Analysis of Open Mindedness	25, 26 & 27
Analysis of Relevant Perspectives	27 to 32
Audience Expectation	31 & 32
Breadth of View	32 & 33
Conclusion	33 & 34
Appendix One	35
Appendix Two	36
Appendix Three	37
Appendix Four	38, 39 & 40
Appendix Five	41

Background

The ABC Board has a statutory duty to ensure that the gathering and presentation of news and information is accurate and impartial: section 8(1)(c), *Australian Broadcasting Act 1983 (6th)*.

The ABC Editorial Policies set out the editorial and ethical principles and standards fundamental to the ABC's gathering and presentation of content. Standard 4.1 of the Editorial Policies requires news and information to be gathered and presented with due impartiality. Standard 4.4 requires that perspectives are not misrepresented. Standard 4.5 requires that any one perspective is not unduly favoured over another.

The principles underpinning the standards in section 4 explain that, in applying the impartiality standard, the ABC is guided by a number of hallmarks including that of fair treatment and open-mindedness. The Guidance Note on Impartiality further explains the concepts in and application of Section 4 of the Editorial Policies.

Scope and Subject

This editorial audit focuses on the impartiality of a selection of radio items broadcast during the 2013 federal election campaign and featuring the then Prime Minister, the Hon. Kevin Rudd MP, and the then Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Tony Abbott MP. The items analysed for this editorial audit are listed at appendix one.

- Time span: Sunday, 4 August 2013 (Prime Minister's announcement of the federal election) until Saturday, 7 September 2013 (polling day for the federal election).
- Programs: *AM, Radio National Breakfast, Hack triplej*, and local radio metro stations in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Hobart, Melbourne, and Sydney.
- Sample: 23 items of at least five minutes duration with the then Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. The Prime Minister featured in 12 of the items, and the Opposition Leader in 11 of them. The shortest item was 5'08" and the longest 24'36" in duration. The sample included a 774 ABC Melbourne Mornings radio interview with the Leader of the Opposition which was also filmed. It was one of only three studio quality items in the sample; for the other twenty items analysed for this audit the interviewees made their contributions by phone. All items were live, or as live (i.e. recorded just prior to broadcast) apart from one pre-recorded interview with the Leader of the Opposition for AM.
- Format: The items varied in format and comprised:
 - Ten one-on-one interviews with the Prime Minister and seven one-on-one interviews with the Leader of the Opposition;
 - One election campaign debate in Brisbane with the Prime Minister and three fellow candidates for the seat of Griffith.

- Three one-on-one interviews, one with the Prime Minister and two with the Leader of the Opposition which included audience questions received by text and email and read out by the interviewer.
- Two one-on-one interviews with the Leader of the Opposition when he also took talkback, fielding questions posed directly to him by a total of ten different listeners. These interviews both ran for over twenty minutes and were both broadcast on 774 ABC Melbourne.

Reviewer: Andrea Wills

I have over 25 years' experience as a journalist, broadcaster and producer in radio, television and online content for the BBC. I have expert knowledge of broadcasting editorial standards and values in the UK and Australia. As the BBC's Chief Adviser, Editorial Policy I offered pre-transmission advice to content makers and in 2005 rewrote the BBC's Editorial Guidelines. From July 2012 to August 2013 I was the ABC's Manager, Editorial Quality. I am an independent editorial adviser for the BBC Trust and the BBC's College of Journalism.

Method

Although very well versed in the contents of the ABC Editorial Policies and specifically Section 4 (Impartiality and Diversity of Perspectives) and the Impartiality Guidance Note I nevertheless reread these documents before listening and analysing the twenty three items in the sample. All the items were publicly accessible online at abc.net.au but they don't represent the entirety of the ABC's interviews with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition during the election period.

Research Questions

In conducting this Editorial Audit I considered the following questions:

1. Were the interview subjects treated fairly, having regard to the indicators of fair treatment in the Impartiality Guidance Note which focus on the way the interviewer frames issues and the manner in which the interviewer interacts with the interviewee?
2. Were the interviews carried out in an open-minded fashion as described in the Impartiality Guidance Note in that the interviewer appeared to be open to evidence and arguments irrespective of their personal views or predispositions?
3. When significant relevant perspectives were raised by the interviewer, were these accurately presented?
4. Did the interviewer appear to unduly favour one perspective over another?
5. Were the interview subjects provided with a fair opportunity to express their views, having regard to the contentiousness of the issues discussed within the timeframe of an election campaign and to the amount of time provided and prominence assigned to each interview?

Introduction

My entire media career has been spent either as an employee of a public service broadcaster or as an independent editorial adviser. I first encountered the concept of impartiality as a rookie news journalist working for BBC local radio. Impartiality was a hard concept to grasp and I owe my initial understandings about it to my mentor - Roger Bennett – he said put simply it was about ‘*not taking sides*’. We worked together on a three hour morning news program and he was the longest serving breakfast presenter on UK radio at the time of his death in 2005.

Since those early days I have spent more hours than I care to quantify making fine editorial judgements about matters of due impartiality in broadcasting. Over the years these have related to hundreds of hours of radio and television content for which I was editorially responsible. I’d like to be able to say that all of my decisions about matters of impartiality were good ones - but I made some less than perfect ones along the way. However I learnt from my mistakes and they helped to inform the way I updated the BBC Editorial Guidelines in 2005 and in particular the section on Impartiality and Diversity of Opinion.

In the last six years I have investigated numerous impartiality complaints appealed to the BBC Trust. Many of these have been incredibly complex, involving claims of bias in the BBC’s reporting of controversial stories like the Middle East and climate change.

I have also developed training materials about impartiality for journalists and other radio, television and online content makers. Last year I produced and delivered the ABC’s Editorial Leaders Program – a two day course which included a half-day session discussing all aspects of impartiality. Previously I had done the same for the BBC College of Journalism’s Foundation program and Editorial Leadership course. The course development process involved dissecting the many faces of impartiality, including the absence of conflicts of interest, weighing of material facts, examination of the evidence, accuracy, rigour, objectivity, lateral and distinctive thinking and so much more. When I’d done that and put it all back together again as training materials I felt confident that I’d truly ‘got it’ and could explain and discuss all aspects of impartiality with anyone.

Impartiality is a small word with a big meaning which creates much controversy and heated debate. The ABC’s Impartiality Guidance Note issued 22 July 2013 says:

‘Audiences come to the ABC for fair and unbiased information which will help them to gain a reasonable understanding of an issue and to make up their own minds.

The requirement for impartiality is testing, precisely because of the fundamental challenge at the heart of the concept – everyone regards the world through the prism of their own values, and no one is truly able to either make or consume media free of those values. The more important the story, the stronger the tension becomes.’

I am aware that there is some cynicism about my ability to carry out this audit impartially. I'm also aware that whatever I write here will not satisfy those who will still question the impartiality of my impartiality report and who are convinced that the ABC is biased, either to the left or the right. But like most journalists at the ABC I have never consciously taken my personal politics or views on contentious subjects to work. So I would like to take this opportunity of assuring you that I have tackled this audit as objectively as humanly possible, whilst acknowledging that there is no such thing as absolute objectivity. I certainly did not prejudge the outcome and kept an open mind throughout the process. Finally I must add that the ABC has given me the freedom to tackle this work in the way I felt was most appropriate to fulfil the brief.

Andrea Wills, 27 January 2014

Executive summary

- This report represents my independent views on whether a selection of 23 radio interviews with Australia's then Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition during the 2013 federal election campaign met the ABC's impartiality standard.
- Items in the sample dealt with contentious subjects, including but not restricted to, nationwide internet access, carbon tax and other policy responses to climate change, education reforms, same sex marriage, and economic forecasts.
- In conducting this editorial audit I considered each piece of content as a standalone item and assessed whether it achieved due impartiality within itself. This sometimes involved assessing the introduction or wrap up to the item, and/or the context in which the item appeared on the ABC's website.
- In undertaking the editorial audit I was guided by the following indicators of fair treatment:
 - Were the ABC interviews with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition introduced or wrapped up in a way that provided appropriate context or background, and summarised fairly the points expressed? Was careful attention given to accuracy bearing in mind that omitting either information or context may have the effect of favouring one side over another and therefore signal a lack of impartiality?
 - Was the language used by the interviewer clear rather than emotive, hyperbolic, inflammatory or derogatory?
 - Were the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition treated with civility and respect by the interviewers, unless there were compelling reasons not to do so?
 - Did the interviewers ask well-informed, relevant questions?
 - Did the interviewers provide sufficient opportunity for the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to answer questions or state their views, notwithstanding situations where interruptions were appropriate – for example to elicit or clarify a response to a question which the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition were not answering, or not answering clearly, relevantly and within a reasonable time.
- I considered whether there was anything in the way the ABC interviewers framed their questions, or interacted with the interviewee which suggested they were not conducting the interview in an open-minded fashion.
- I found that 'actuality sound bites' were used to good effect on a number of occasions in the sample items and provided context for the interviews with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition.

- I did not identify any examples where I felt the language of the ABC interviewers could be described as emotive, hyperbolic, inflammatory or derogatory in the 23 items analysed.
- I considered that both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition were treated with appropriate civility and respect by the ABC's interviewers and 'listener interviewers' in the sample analysed for this editorial audit.
- I found that the ABC interviewers normally asked well informed and relevant questions. I did though note the odd occasion when the interviewees were asked to predict or speculate about future events or respond to unattributed allegations.
- I noted that two ABC interviewers, both with 774 ABC Melbourne, offered their audiences the opportunity to put questions directly to the Leader of the Opposition. This ensured the questions were relevant to those listeners but also to the wider audience of that program.
- I was satisfied that all 23 radio items in the sample allowed the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition to put their point across and that their views were normally rigorously tested by the ABC interviewers.
- I noted examples where interruptions from ABC interviewers were valid and appropriate in the context of the items analysed.
- I noted occasions when ABC interviewers pressed the Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition in order to try and ensure they answered questions clearly, relevantly and within a reasonable time. They were scrutinised about many different matters including election costings; policy announcements; nationwide internet access and bringing the country back into surplus. The interviews were normally conducted in a polite, fair yet robust way.
- I found no evidence to suggest that the Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition were treated unfairly in the interviews in this sample, having regard to the indicators of fair treatment in the Impartiality Guidance Note which focus on the way the interviewer frames issues and the manner in which the interviewer interacts with the interviewee.
- I noted that because the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition contributed to a broadcast program in a live or as-live situation that their contribution was unedited, and that they therefore had a fair chance to answer questions or state their views. I also noted that they had the opportunity to correct inaccuracies or misquotes during the course of the interview itself. I provide examples of this in the audit.

- I noted that, within the brief of this audit, it was not always possible to check whether every significant relevant perspective raised by ABC interviewers were accurately presented. Instead I assumed that in the absence of any challenges about inaccuracies from the interviewees themselves that the perspectives raised by the interviewers were accurately presented or were considered to be accurate and credible at the time of the interview.
- I did not observe any occasions when an interviewer unduly favoured one perspective over another within the sample of radio items analysed for this editorial audit.
- In my professional judgement the ABC did achieve due impartiality across this sample of items. It did so by ensuring due weight was given to hearing the views and examining and challenging the policies of both the then Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition; by generally asking well informed and relevant questions that its audiences would reasonably expect to hear and by normally being robust and consistent in its dealings with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition.
- This audit offers the ABC a chance to stand back and reflect on the editorial quality of its 2013 federal election coverage and identify where improvements could be made for next time. In conducting the audit I observed the potential for improvement and examples are included in this report. I hope these will be accepted as useful constructive criticism to ensure the ABC becomes even better at fulfilling its important public service broadcaster role during election campaigns: to fairly and accurately inform its audiences about the campaign; to scrutinise the records and promises of those seeking office; to enable those seeking office to explain, debate and try to persuade and engage the voters - the ABC's audiences.
- I concluded that the 23 items analysed for this editorial audit were duly impartial and complied with the ABC's Editorial Policies. Although I must emphasise that this editorial audit provides only a 'snapshot' analysis of the ABC's coverage of the federal election campaign. Its findings cannot be extrapolated across the whole of the ABC's election campaign coverage to indicate that all such content was duly impartial.

The Audit

A. Were the interview subjects treated fairly, having regard to the indicators of fair treatment in the Impartiality Guidance Note which focuses on the way the interviewer frames issues and the manner in which the interviewer interacts with the interviewee?

The fair treatment indicators included in the Impartiality Guidance Note are included in full at appendix two.

In assessing whether the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition were treated fairly in this sample of ABC radio interviews broadcast during the 2013 Federal Election Campaign I was guided by the indicators of fair treatment which were directly appropriate to this editorial audit:

- a. Were the ABC interviews with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition introduced or wrapped up in a way that provided appropriate context or background, and summarised fairly the points expressed? Was careful attention given to accuracy bearing in mind that omitting either information or context may have the effect of favouring one side over another and therefore signal a lack of impartiality?
- b. Was the language used by the interviewer clear rather than emotive, hyperbolic, inflammatory or derogatory?
- c. Were the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition treated with civility and respect by the interviewers, unless there were compelling reasons not to do so?
- d. Did the interviewers ask well-informed, relevant questions?
- e. Did the interviewers provide sufficient opportunity for the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to answer questions or state their views, notwithstanding situations where interruptions were appropriate – for example to elicit or clarify a response to a question which the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition were not answering, or not answering clearly, relevantly and within a reasonable time.

Analysis

- a. **Were the ABC interviews with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition introduced or wrapped up in a way that provided appropriate context or background, and summarised fairly the points expressed? Was careful attention given to accuracy bearing in mind that omitting either information or context may have the effect of favouring one side over another and therefore signal a lack of impartiality?**

I considered the context or background provided in the interviewer's introduction to the interviews with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition as well as any additional context given within the interviews themselves. I found that 'actuality

sound bites' were used to good effect on a number of occasions in the sample items, including but not limited to the following interviews:

- On day one of the election campaign 5 August 2013 both the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott were interviewed on AM. (Items 1 and 2) The live phone interviews were introduced by AM's presenter and actuality 'sound bites' from both Mr Rudd and Mr Abbott were used to summarise some of their arguments and points of difference and provide context and background for the interviews which followed. The 'sound bites' are in bold:

AM presenter: Today on the first full day of the election campaign we talk to Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott about their pitch for office. Already they've set out their arguments and what they see are points of difference.

Kevin Rudd: This election will be about who the Australian people trust to best lead them through the difficult new economic challenges which now lie ahead.

Tony Abbott: We will scrap the carbon tax, we will get the budget back under control, we will build the infrastructure of the future and we will stop the boats.

Kevin Rudd: In the month or so ahead the people of Australia are going to be subjected to an absolute barrage of negative political advertising.

Tony Abbott: Who do you think is more fair dinkum?

AM presenter: 'Off and running' is a racing parlance and it's apt for the September 7th election campaign. This morning Kevin Rudd is in Canberra and Mr Abbott is already in Queensland. Over the next five weeks, the two leaders will criss-cross the nation and it's a matter of staying the course. Kevin Rudd will begin his first day of election campaigning by unveiling a \$200 million sweetener for the car industry. The Prime Minister will also unveil a plan to boost Australian car sales by forcing Government agencies to buy local.'

- On day five of the election campaign 9 August 2013 the Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott was interviewed for 936 ABC Hobart Mornings. In this program the following clip from Tasmania's Premier Lara Giddings was played. She had been talking about employment issues earlier in the week:

'Lara Giddings: There are some people who are making the choice not to take a job and in this climate, we need people to take employment on. We need people to have the confidence then that with the employment they can make their savings, they can spend on things. They can help the wider economy move.'

Interviewer: Mr Abbott, in your time in Tasmania, do you think we have a problem with jobs being available and people just refusing to take them?'

- On 26 August 2013 the Prime Minister appeared on triple j's Hack program. The following clip was used to contextualise the interview for the Hack audience:

Interviewer: Do you remember when Kevin Rudd said this?

Kevin Rudd: "Let me just say a word or two to young Australians. I understand why you've switched off. It's hardly a surprise. But I want to ask you to please come back and with your energy we can start cooking with gas."

Interviewer: Kevin Rudd said those words right after he was installed as Prime Minister again and today the man himself will be on Hack and we'll ask him what he's done to bring you back to politics.

Also ‘voiceover’ from a Labor advertisement was used to contextualise the issue of negative politics for the Hack audience:

Interviewer: Kevin Rudd when you took over the Prime Ministership again you said you were sick of negative politics and that it was holding us back. Since then you’ve focussed your attack on Tony Abbott and so has your political advertising. Let’s just hear a little bit of that right now:

‘If Tony Abbott is elected Prime Minister families will lose the School Kids bonus; and he’ll cut billions from education including those schools that need it most. If he wins, you lose’.

Interviewer: Kevin Rudd at some point did you decide that negative campaigning was actually a good idea?

Kevin Rudd: What I said at the beginning of the campaign to be perfectly frank with you Tom is that our advertising our campaign would be policy based. What you’ve just played is a policy fact and that is if Mr Abbott is elected what happens is that he will withdraw and abolish the School Kids bonus to 1.3 million Australian families that’ll cost them on average \$15,000 over the life of their kids’ education at school. That’s a factual thing to put out. Now Mr Abbott and others in the media are not going to place him under any scrutiny then we have an obligation to do so. That’s different from a personal attack, I think we’ve seen lots of personal attacks in recent times but largely directed at other folks.

Interviewer: But even in that ad that’s about policy you’re still targeting the man, you’re talking about Tony Abbott not the Coalition.

Kevin Rudd: Well Mr Abbott puts himself forward as the alternative Prime Minister.

- On 26 August 2013 702 ABC Sydney Mornings (item 14) used library sound bites to contextualise an interview with the Leader of the Opposition:

Interviewer: So we’re heading to the tail end of the Federal Election campaign. Tony Abbott of course and the Liberals had their campaign launch during the weekend and there were some new promises:

Tony Abbott: ‘An incoming Coalition Government will commit an additional \$200 million to dementia research to help the 300,000 Australians who have it today and to help the 900,000 at risk of having it in thirty years’ time as our population ages...I announce today that an incoming Coalition Government will finally index eligibility thresholds for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card so that more self-funded retirees will have access to cheaper medicines...An incoming Coalition Government will help more young Australians to start a trade; to stay in a trade and to finish a trade by giving apprentices access to a \$20,000 loan like university students have.’

The use of such library sound bites, whilst normally useful for giving context, can sometimes be criticised. This is when the clips are used with the intention of providing additional context but are themselves judged to have been taken out of context. If this happens there is always the potential for misleading the audience about an issue or being seen to be unfair to the interviewee or other talent. I would like to highlight the following example from the sample interviews analysed.

On day two of the election campaign in the Griffith candidates’ debate on 612 ABC Brisbane Mornings (item 10) Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and his fellow candidates for the seat took part in a panel discussion in front of a live audience. During the live broadcast the interviewer quoted from the Prime Minister’s maiden speech to parliament on 11 November 1998. This is what was said:

Interviewer: 'Now let me move on and ask some other questions. First of all a general question; who said this: 'Politics is about power. It's about power of the state. It's about the power of the state as applied to individuals'.

Panellist: I think it was Kevin Rudd wasn't it?

Kevin Rudd?: Correct

Interviewer: Do you agree with that Geoff Ebbs?

Kevin Rudd: Heh, ..., ..., Auntie wouldn't be taking anything out of context would they?

Interviewer: It's the opening line from your maiden speech to parliament.

Kevin Rudd: Yeh and what it goes on to say: 'and whether power is exercised for the many or the few'. Why did the ABC chop that bit out?

Interviewer: I haven't got to that bit yet.

Kevin Rudd: yeh, good, thank you

Interviewer: Keep going, so Geoff...

Geoff Ebbs: [not transcribed]

Kevin Rudd [interrupts]: so you don't think a debate about politics is whether power should be used for the many or the few?

Interviewer: Just, please Kevin, I'm the moderator, you're the Prime Minister. Continue.

Please Mr Ebbs

Kevin Rudd: And you misrendered the quote [applause] and you misrendered the quote.

Interviewer: Geoff Ebbs would you like to continue on?

Geoff Ebbs [not transcribed]

Interviewer: Karin Hunter, how does..

Karin Hunter [not transcribed]

Interviewer: All right. Now Kevin Rudd finish the statement if you would. It was a statement from your opening line of your maiden speech to parliament. Do you want to finish the line for me?

Kevin Rudd: Well I'm more interested in why the ABC chopped it off when they rendered it about 5 minutes ago. Because the full quote is politics is about power, and the other things you've just referenced, and whether power is exercised for the many or the few. That's the core moral question in political life. When you come to the collection of three to three hundred billion dollars plus worth of federal taxation revenue in a given year, the decision of power is to where that is allocated. Who gets support from that and who does not. Whether you make a decision to fund the extra new computers at Balmoral State High School or take the Liberal Party's view that that's a waste of money, whether you take that power of the state to provide school kids' bonuses to help people on the south side here with their cost of living which the Liberal Party says they'll abolish, whether you use the power of the state to provide Australia's first paid parental leave scheme which thousands of local families benefit from, whether you use the power of the state to build Australia's first national disability insurance scheme, whether you use the power of the state to lay out a better schools plan which puts an extra fifteen billion dollars into our schools, and whether you use the power of the state, and I think this is very important before Bill goes to his next point, to do this, to have a lower tax to GDP ratio than existed under the Howard Government. And that's what I believe using the power of the state is all about, for the many or the few. We're for the many.

Interviewer: Bill Glasson do you want to address this point that politics is about power in the context in which Kevin Rudd has made the statement?'

This was what Kevin Rudd said in his maiden speech:

'Politics is about power. It is about the power of the state. It is about the power of the state as applied to individuals, the society in which they live and the economy in which they work. Most critically, our responsibility in this parliament is how that power is used: whether it is used for the benefit of the few or the many. In this my first speech I want to speak on the fundamental principles that I believe should govern the exercise of political power and the reasons, therefore, that I am a member of the Australian Labor Party and why I have sought election to this parliament. I want to speak on how these beliefs shape my approach to some of the great policy challenges now facing the nation.'

Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjLcAPrO3ak>

In this example Kevin Rudd complained that the quote from his maiden speech had initially been taken out of context. He made this quite clear during the course of the debate by immediately pulling up the interviewer on this point; ensuring the audience heard the missing part of the quote about how political power is used '*whether it is used for the benefit of the few or the many*'; and explaining what this meant using budgetary examples.

I considered whether the 'omission' of part of the original quote as criticised by the Prime Minister at the time could be judged to have been unfair to him and if unfair whether it also potentially signalled a lack of due impartiality. I noted that in the circumstances of this particular live election debate in front of a live audience the Prime Minister had immediately complained about the misuse of his quote and had the opportunity to right what he felt was a wrong; he provided the context he claimed was missing and explained further what he meant by it in terms of day to day political decisions on the way the Government spends its money. Taking all this into account I considered that the Prime Minister was fairly treated and that the live audience at the debate and the radio audience would have both been able to reach an informed and independent view on the matter. I also judged that given the type, subject and nature of the content; the circumstances in which it was presented and the likely audience expectations of the content, due impartiality was achieved.

As this example shows, a clear advantage of one-on-one interviews is that they normally allow an interviewee the opportunity to correct inaccuracies or misquotes or quotes that were felt to be out of context at the time. Another example of this occurred when Tony Abbott immediately corrected a quote about climate change in an interview on triple j's Hack on 6 September 2013 (item 9).

Interviewer: Now Tony Abbott you are well known for saying that climate change is crap and your Direct Action Plan will be capped at \$3.2 billion even if you don't meet the 5% carbon reduction target by 2020. Does that show that you're not really committed to serious action on climate change?

Tony Abbott: Tom I've been misquoted along the lines that you just mentioned. What I was referring to was not climate change as such but the so called 'settled science' Now I've always said that climate change is real, humanity makes a difference, it's important to have a strong and effective policy to deal with it.

b. Was the language used by the interviewer clear rather than emotive, hyperbolic, inflammatory or derogatory?

In my professional judgement I did not observe any significant examples where the language of the ABC interviewers considered in this audit could be described as emotive, hyperbolic, inflammatory or derogatory. I did though note an example where clearer language could have been used in the framing of a question to the Leader of the Opposition on RN Breakfast on 26 August 2013 (item 13). This was because the language used was perceived by the interviewee as accusatory in nature. This perception could perhaps have been mitigated if the allegation contained in the question had been attributed. However, I judged that the use of the words 'trickery' and 'something to hide' were not unfair to the Leader of the Opposition in the context of this interview.

*Interviewer: You say you'll have more to say on savings this week. Will we then get the details of how you're going to pay for your signature policy the Paid Parental Leave scheme because it's a lot of money? You've told us again today the Parliamentary Budget Office has costed it. **But you won't show us how it's funded which just looks like like trickery on your part or like you've got something to hide.***

Tony Abbott: Well I think you're making an accusation there rather than asking a question... But ...

Interviewer: I'm just saying that's the perception of that.

Tony Abbott: Frankly the fact is ... that it's about \$5.5 billion a year and we meet that \$5.5 billion through a modest levy on big business; through not continuing with Labor's existing scheme which is more of a welfare than a workplace entitlement and with some consequential adjustments including an ending to double dipping. Now that gives us the money that we need to pay for our scheme.

Interviewer: And I understand you've settled that and I'm sure everyone will believe it but I think people would wonder why you don't give us the details to see that's all.

Tony Abbott: Well I'm telling you exactly how it's happening and the Parliamentary Budget Office has gone through this policy with a fine tooth comb and it is fully costed and it is fully funded.

Interviewer: And will we see this later this week when you release those, some numbers?

Tony Abbott: As I said ... we will have more to say on savings this week and we'll give people the full fiscal position in the final week of the campaign because while we're still making policy announcements, obviously they have to be paid for and they've got to be factored in to the final fiscal position.

c. Were the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition treated with civility and respect by the interviewers, unless there were compelling reasons not to do so?

I considered that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition were both treated with appropriate civility and respect by the ABC's interviewers and 'listener interviewers' in the sample analysed for this editorial audit.

d. Did the interviewers ask well-informed, relevant questions?

I found that the ABC interviewers normally asked well informed and relevant questions. The following couple of examples, both from ABC Local Metro stations illustrate good research and preparation for a leader's interview. The first is a question to the Leader of the Opposition in an interview on 612 Brisbane Mornings on 5 August 2013 (item 11).

Interviewer: Let me pick up on the red tape thing. Small business is by far collectively the biggest employer of Australians and you've consistently said you'll lower the red tape burden on them. The Australian Institute of Chartered Accountants have calculated the cost for each small business to comply with their tax obligations is just over \$32,000 each year. How practically, in reality, are you going to lower that?

The second is a question to the Prime Minister in an interview on 774 Melbourne Mornings on 4 September 2013 (item 12).

Interviewer: Bureau of Statistics data reveals that the four fastest growing postcodes in the entire nation, no not in Western Australia, no not in Queensland, not in Western Sydney, all four of the fastest growing postcodes here in Melbourne. Tony Abbott says he'll be the infrastructure Prime Minister. What do you offer to those people?

In several of the items I noted that ABC interviewers offered listeners the opportunity to ask questions of the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. This ensured that the questions were relevant to those listeners but also to the wider audience of that program. An example was the interview with the Prime Minister on triple j's Hack program (item 8):

Interviewer: 'Kevin Rudd. One thing that really concerns triple j listeners is being able to afford a house. And a listener of ours Pru Elmer tweeted us today and said can you please ask about housing affordability, not supply, and end negative gearing. Now this is an issue that our audience bring up all the time because negative gearing supports property investors who make housing unaffordable to young home owners because they basically bid up the prices. If Labor's serious about housing affordability particularly for young people why not commit to winding back negative gearing?'

Six listeners put questions directly to the Leader of the Opposition when he was interviewed on 774 Melbourne Mornings on 13 August 2013 (item 13). They included questions about jobs for older Australians; the Coalition's Paid Parental leave scheme; the financial implication on fuel prices of abolishing the carbon tax and 457-visas. The Leader of the Opposition was also interviewed on 774 Melbourne Drive on 27 August 2013 (item 21) and on this occasion four listeners put questions directly to him. They included one on why he labelled asylum seekers 'illegal' and another on the paid parental leave scheme.

I note that of the 23 radio items I have analysed for this audit only two one-on-one interviews with the Leader of the Opposition included the opportunity for ABC listeners to engage personally with their political leaders via talkback. I also note that both these opportunities were offered by 774 ABC Melbourne. In my view the ABC could have used this technique a lot more widely across its output during the election campaign. I believe it could have broadened its view and provided a greater diversity of topics for discussion, and possibly made for better listening.

I also noted occasions when the interviewers were asked to predict, speculate, and to respond to claims or allegations. I understand the challenges involved when conducting a live (or as live) interview with the Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition and that this means not all questions asked by the interviewers are as well-informed or relevant as they might be. In the interests of completeness I have noted a few examples of questions which could have been better prepared and potentially elicited a more interesting response from the two key politicians battling it out for the post of Australia's next Prime Minister.

On the first day of the election campaign the Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott was interviewed on AM about his pitch for office (item 1). I considered one of the questions posed about the opinion polls could have been better framed to encourage an answer from the interviewee that would have more fairly and accurately informed the audience about the facts of the campaign:

Interviewer: The polls are pretty tight, but Newspoll has the Coalition four points ahead of Labor on a two-party preferred basis. But Mr Rudd though is still way ahead, even though he acknowledges too that people have seen him warts and all. Why do people prefer him as

Prime Minister and not you?

Tony Abbott: Well I prefer to look at the known facts and the known facts ... are that when Mr Rudd was prime minister before, his party sacked him for arrogance and incompetence and just five weeks ago when he came back into the prime ministership, a third of the cabinet resigned rather than serve with him. And my point is that if the people who know him best don't trust him, why should the Australian voters?

Interviewer: But they're not hidden facts and people are still saying they prefer him to you.

Tony Abbott: And on September 7th we'll discover, won't we, how substantial those judgements have been.

On 4 September 2013 891 ABC Adelaide Drive interviewed the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. This interview was just over five minutes long so in my view it was a shame that a couple of the questions posed to Mr Rudd were speculative in nature:

'How many seats do you feel you could lose in South Australia?'

'Prime Minister how many people do you think are undecided at this stage 48 hours out?'

On 5 September 2013 on the day Kevin Rudd was in Canberra with just two days to go before polling day, 666 ABC Canberra Drive interviewed the Prime Minister. Again some of the interview questions were speculative in nature:

'Prime Minister it's been a pretty up and down campaign I think it's fair to say. Are you concerned that you'll lose your seat?'

'...what is your future in politics?'

Indications are Prime Minister that a suite of Labor seats could be lost at the election and you could be headed for a massive loss. On reflection of that is there anything you regret over the last few years particularly this year and through the election campaign?'

'If through your eyes Kevin Rudd the message is so good why is that not resonating with voters as appears to be the case?'

The questions provoked answers from the Prime Minister which amounted to general electioneering and gave him an opportunity to again highlight what he described as a 'proud record of achievement' but in my view there was a missed opportunity here to hold him to account on behalf of the ABC audience on more specific issues that mattered to voters at this point in the election campaign.

On 6 September 2013 as the election campaign entered its last 24 hours, Kevin Rudd joined RN Breakfast to make his final pitch before the polls opened (item 6). Again I considered that several of the questions could have been better framed to elicit a more meaningful response from the then Prime Minister and so allow the audience to make up its own mind on issues that directly affected them, particularly in an interview so close to polling day.

Interviewer: Now, that has been your message for some weeks now to convince the voters on those very facts. If the polls are close to right it looks like you have failed, do you accept that?

Kevin Rudd: The bottom line ... is that we're in an election campaign, including today, and your listeners are interested in what our policies are and what it means for them. And what I have spent the entire election campaign doing is explaining why we go into this period with a strong economy after six years of growth, why we go into this election campaign with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the world, why we go into this election campaign with interest rates at 60 year lows, and with among the lowest debt and deficit levels in the industrial world, and with a triple A credit rating. They're our fundamentals.....

Interviewer: Again though, that's your argument, and it's a strong argument you'd think – six years of growth under Labor, 22 years consecutive growth, interest rates at 60 years low I think you just told us. Strong fundamentals, but the voters aren't buying it. Why?

Kevin Rudd: Well that's a matter for you good folks in the media to analyse to your heart's content. My job is simply to explain what we've done and what we plan to do.

Interviewer: The answer can only be division, can't it?

Kevin Rudd: Well, you know something...? On the question of the analysis of opinion polls, I just don't get into that. Never have done, never since I entered political life.

Interviewer: So here you are with that proud record you've just been detailing. Here you are with your strong Christian values, a strong family man, we all know that. A big policy brain. How has Kevin Rudd got lost in translation?

Kevin Rudd: Well ... that's your continued assertion, my job is simply to say that my job is to talk to people about policy, how it affects their lives. Your listener's lives....

Interviewer: And you'll be continuing to do that right up until six o'clock tomorrow but if you wake up on Sunday and it's all over, was it worth it? All the insults? All the divisions? And all the hard work if it comes to naught?

Kevin Rudd: Can I say ... the business of politics is about hard choices and what you can do to support the families of Australia and the country's future.

- e. Did the interviewers provide sufficient opportunity for the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to answer questions or state their views, notwithstanding situations where interruptions were appropriate – for example to elicit or clarify a response to a question which the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition were not answering, or not answering clearly, relevantly and within a reasonable time.**

I noted a number of examples where interruptions from ABC interviewers during the course of an interview with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition were valid and appropriate. Interruptions are a key interviewing skill but they can annoy the audience, often because they think the interviewer is being aggressive towards the interviewee and in some cases that this indicates bias on the part of the interviewer. I judged the following to be valid interruptions by ABC interviewers in the context of the item analysed. The first was in a 612 ABC Brisbane Mornings interview with the Leader of the Opposition on 5 August 2013 (item 11.)

Tony Abbott: But, but I'm not saying that we can solve the fiscal mess overnight. What I'm saying is that our budgetary position will be better than Labor's and because we are..

Interviewer: That's like saying my dad's bigger than your dad, it doesn't really explain much, you've got to give some explanation.

Tony Abbott: Well we're going to reduce taxes, we're going to reduce red tape, we're going to be pro-business rather than anti-business and all of that over time will produce a stronger economy and a stronger economy will produce more revenue...

The second example was from 891 ABC Adelaide Breakfast in an interview with the Leader of the Opposition on 7 August 2013 (item 16). In this example two interviewers tried to hold Mr Abbott to account by forensically examining the Coalition's policy announcement of the day – the proposed 1.5 percent cut in company tax. This topic dominated the interview and was an example of when the discussion of a wider range of subjects was sacrificed in order to allow greater scrutiny of a new policy announcement on behalf of the audience.

Interviewer: Your big announcement today is a cut to the company tax. Can you explain to our listeners exactly what you're proposing?

Tony Abbott: Yes if a Coalition Government is elected there will be a 1.5% reduction in the company tax rate. It will go from 30 to 28.5% on the 1 July 2015 and this is good for business obviously, but it is good for jobs. And I want to quote the former Prime Minister Julia Gillard who said "If you are against a company tax cut, you are against jobs." And I want to quote Ken Henry the former Secretary of the Treasury who said if the company tax were to be cut the principle beneficiaries would be the workers. So our campaign is all about easing people's cost of living pressures, and it is about increasing people's job security and that is what this company tax cuts is about.

Interviewer: Does this effectively cancel out the paid parental levy?

Tony Abbott: Well the paid parental leave levy will only be on quite large businesses. This is a company tax cut to make our country more competitive, to make our jobs more secure.

Interviewer: But, but, for the big companies who are going to pay that levy, the Paid Parental Leave Levy when they get this tax cut will they effectively cancel each other out?

Tony Abbott: Well yes they will but the important thing today is that we are reducing company tax that is good for jobs; it's good for job security; it's good for investments; it's good for prosperity.

Interviewer: How much was your Paid Parental Leave levy going to raise and what will be the total cost of this company tax cut?

Tony Abbott: I'll have more to say about Paid Parental Leave in a week or so. The total of this is about \$5 billion over the forward estimates. The total cost of various tax benefits that we are offering the Australian people at this election, and which we are in the process of announcing, is about \$17 billion. And we have already announced \$17 billion worth of savings over the forward estimates.

Interviewer: I'm just trying to work out if this is revenue neutral in other words if this counteracts or counterbalances the pain for companies of having to pay the Paid Parental Leave levy to you how does that stimulate the economy? Aren't you just marching time?

Tony Abbott: Well this is more money in the hands of people and less money in the hand of Government because what we want to do is to have leaner more effective Government and stronger more capable citizens. This is all about reducing Government and increasing citizens that's what it's all about.

Interviewer: When do businesses start paying the Paid Parental Leave levy?

Tony Abbott: ... I know what you're trying to do here..

Interviewer: What get some information from you?

Tony Abbott: OK and that information will be available to you next week..

Interviewer: But isn't it important in the context of this?

Tony Abbott: OK fair enough but what I'm saying to you today is that every every corporation in Australia and there's almost a million of them is going to be paying less tax under the Coalition.

Interviewer: OK. But the 37,500 businesses who are the ones who have revenue over the five million, who you've targeted to pay the Paid Parental leave scheme pay that for you. This will balance that out, correct?

Tony Abbott: Many of them will be better off.

Interviewer: Right, so how are you going to therefore pay for your Paid Parental Leave scheme?

Tony Abbott: Well, the point I'm making today, and I'm sorry to labor it because I know you're trying to get me off on to a different point. But the point I'm making today is that we have so far committed to \$17 billion worth of tax cuts and we have so far announced a \$17 billion worth of expenditure reductions over the forward estimates. so everything's fully funded.

Interviewer: But I'm trying to work out how you're going to pay. If you're going to use a levy on the top businesses to pay for a Paid Parental Leave scheme that's been criticised by the Government as being too generous and you

Tony Abbott: But why is it too generous..?

Interviewer: No, no but just before we get onto that one just quickly, and if this is going to negate the impact of that this company tax cut. Where are you going to get the money from to pay for your Paid Parental Leave scheme?

Tony Abbott: But what I'm telling you today is that the company tax cut and the carbon tax compensation which becomes a real cut under us because we abolish the carbon tax. All of that is fully funded by sensible savings over the forward estimates.

Interviewer: And do we know what they are yet?

Tony Abbott: Yes. If you go back and look at my budget reply I enumerated these. There'll be some modest reductions in the total Commonwealth public sector payroll. We're deferring as the Government keeps telling you the Superannuation Guarantee Levy increase; we're not going ahead with some measures funded by the mining tax or that the Government says were funded by the mining tax that isn't raising any money. So I went through all of them in my budget reply speech and they're all fully on the record.

I noted many occasions when ABC interviewers pressed the Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition in order to try and ensure they answered questions clearly, relevantly and within a reasonable time. They were scrutinised over election costings; balancing the economic books and bringing the country back into surplus. The interviews were normally conducted in a polite, fair yet robust way. The first example here was from 612 ABC Brisbane Mornings when the Leader of the Opposition was interviewed on 5 August 2013 (item 11) and asked some tough questions about proposed public service job cuts.

Interviewer: Tony Abbott in 2011 Joe Hockey, your treasury spokesperson, promised if elected, to make redundant 12,000 Federal public servants over two years now which Senator Gary Humphreys reworded to say it would be through natural attrition not redundancies. But given the Federal Public Service has fallen by 1,400 employees, which is a fairly small number, will natural attrition still be the Coalition's policy or can the public service expect significant redundancy packages?

Tony Abbott: Well natural attrition is still our policy and every year something like 7% of the total turnover. So there are many many thousands of public services who leave the Commonwealth's employ every year and what we are proposing is analogous to a hiring freeze really. But it is important to get the numbers down. I don't think anyone thinks that we've got 20,000 public servants of better performance as it were, since 20,000 public servants worth of better performance as it were since 2007. I think if anything the quality of Government services has stood still or deteriorated since the Howard Government's days.

Interviewer: So your policy is still for natural attrition rather than actual redundancies to lower the size of the public service federally?

On 26 August 2013 (item 8) Kevin Rudd was interviewed on triple j's Hack program and probed about his commitment to a conscience vote on same sex marriage:

Interviewer: The other thing you've leaned heavily on to appeal to young people is making a change to same sex marriage and you said that you are committed to a conscience vote on same sex marriage within the first 100 days of parliament. But based on the way your Labor MP's voted on the last bill this actually means that it wouldn't get up. If you were really serious about gay marriage why not promise a binding vote so that it would actually get up?

Kevin Rudd: Let me tell you what would happen if we had an open vote on both sides of politics.

Interviewer: Let's talk about your side of politics Mr Rudd.

Kevin Rudd: Hang on but hang on. Well number one my position on marriage equality is as you've described. And I believe that same sex couples should be treated equally under the law and the civil institutions of the state that they should be respected for the decisions that they make whatever the gender of their partner might be. Secondly, in our parliamentary system on matters of this nature the long standing tradition has been to offer people a conscience vote. We've done that. What I'm disappointed about though is that the prospect of this passing the parliament is undermined by Mr Abbott refusing a conscience vote to the other side. If you allowed people like Malcolm Turnbull and others to vote according to their

conscience let me tell you there would be a very very strong prospect of this passing the House of Representatives and through the Senate as well.

Interviewer: But why not have a binding vote on your side of parliament and make sure that this gets through?

Kevin Rudd: Because you can't force your views on other people who don't share them on questions such as this. I've been very upfront, as you'd appreciate ... in terms of my reasons for changing my position on marriage equality but I'm not about to ram it down the throats of everybody. People will eventually change their views on all sides of politics but I simply say if there was a free vote an open vote in the House of Representatives and the Senate today this thing would go very very close and it's time Australia caught up with the rest of the world.

And on 6 September 2013 (item 9) Tony Abbott was interviewed on triple j's Hack program and probed about his policies linked to housing affordability:

Interviewer: You are listening to Tony Abbott the leader of the Opposition and you're listening to triple j's Hack program on the final day of our Swinging Voters Tour. Tony Abbott a lot of our listeners are very concerned about the cost of housing they say it's extremely unaffordable. When we spoke to your Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Marise Payne on this she said the Coalition's Policy to ease the unaffordability or housing problem is to cut the carbon tax. Is that the best you've got?

Tony Abbott: Well it's not bad because the carbon tax is adding at least \$4,000 to the cost of a new home.

Interviewer: But a lot of young people are buying existing homes?

Tony Abbott: Yes and if the price of new homes falls obviously the price of existing homes will fall because they're selling in the same market and the price of a new house is a very important determinant of the price of an old house. The other thing we want to do is build a much stronger economy and if we build a stronger economy wages will go up and people will be more able to afford things they want including new homes.

Interviewer: So are there any other policies to do with housing or is that it?

Tony Abbott: Well very importantly we want to restore the Australian Building and Construction Commission which is a tough cop on the beat in the construction industry and while unlawful militancy is more a problem in commercial construction than domestic construction there is a bit of a spill over so between our policies to scrap the carbon tax, to reduce red tape, to enforce the law in the workplace, particularly in the construction industry all of those will take some pressure off the price of housing.

On 26 August 2013 (item 14) Kevin Rudd was interviewed on 702 ABC Sydney Mornings and he was asked about his views on the need for and possible location of a second Sydney airport:

Interviewer: Prime Minister, you're in Sydney today at Badgerys Creek - a second Sydney airport - big issue. Galaxy has polled the seats in the area; they all favour Badgerys Creek over Wilton for a site for a second airport. This was your response in the first leaders' debate to a question about that second airport.

Audio of PM: 'I'll defer that question to those, for example, Minister Albanese, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Transport because that is how it's appropriately deliberated on.'

Interviewer: Do you now accept that the need for a second Sydney airport is a number one national infrastructure priority deserving of the leader's attention?

Kevin Rudd: Can I just say every city in the country has an airport which is important. There's one in Brisbane; there's one in Melbourne, and the one in Sydney is the biggest in the country...

Interviewer: Is it a priority to get a second airport for Sydney, Prime Minister?

Kevin Rudd: Of course it is. The question is to make sure you get the location right and so for the people of Sydney, and the people of Melbourne, people of Brisbane and all the other capital cities this is critical. And Anthony Albanese, the Deputy Prime Minister's made it absolutely clear that Sydney needs a second airport site and sooner rather than later.

Bipartisan support is critical to resolve what has been a difficult issue for decades and we believe that this is an important priority for the future.

On 27 August 2013 (item 21) 774 ABC Melbourne Drive asked some tough questions of Tony Abbott when he joined them on the phone for an extensive live interview, including talkback, when he fielded questions from listeners on his support for the Melbourne East West Link and why he labels asylum seekers 'illegal'.

Amongst other things that Mr Abbott was pressed on in this interview was the issue of the local infrastructure. It concerned the Melbourne East West Link – an 18 kilometre cross-city road connection extending across Melbourne from the Eastern Freeway to the Western Ring Road:

Interviewer: Before you promised the money for the East West Link had you seen a completed business case that had both traffic flows and a cost benefit ratio?

Tony Abbott: It's funny that you should ask me that question ... because I've got the East West Link stage 1 short form business case sitting in front of me and...

Interviewer: Is that the thing that the state government released to the public?

Tony Abbott: I've discussed this issue with the people who are deeply deeply familiar with it and I'm not going to do them all in by saying well on such and such a date I had a discussion...

Interviewer: No no that's fair enough.

Tony Abbott: Discussion with such and such a person.

Interviewer: But we're entitled to know if you promised the money after looking at completed figures, that's all. Did you see traffic numbers and cost benefit ratios?

Tony Abbott TA: I promised the money after getting a categorical assurance from people in positions of authority, knowledgeable people in positions of authority. By far the smartest road project to invest in in Victoria was the East West Link.

Interviewer: But did you see the traffic numbers and cost benefit ratios? I mean 1.5 billion is a lot of money; I'd want to see those figures.

Tony Abbott: Yes I'd want to be assured by people of impeccable integrity and insight that this was the thing that most stacks up, that's what I'd want to be assured of.

Interviewer: And I would expect someone in your position to want to take advice, that's what politicians, especially prime ministers do.

Tony Abbott: Absolutely.

Interviewer: And I'm glad that you spoke to those people. But can you give me a yes or no? Did you see the traffic flows and the cost benefit ratios because choosing that project ahead of say the rail tunnel; you'd need those figures wouldn't you?

Tony Abbott: You need the absolute assurance from the experts, the people who have actually prepared these documents, who are poring over these documents every day,

Interviewer: Sure, you've said that, I'll move on. I'll just ask you once more did you see the traffic figures and the cost benefit ratios - yes or no.

Tony Abbott: Look if someone, if the head of the ABC comes in and says, look ah your listener numbers are down...you don't demand to see a bit of paper...

Interviewer: Oh yes I do, actually, a hundred percent I do; I want to see the breakdown of the ratings...

Tony Abbott: Because you know that Mark Scott is a man of integrity, and if you were to say to Mark Scott I will not believe that...

Interviewer: So that's no - you didn't see the cost benefit ratios.

Tony Abbott: No it's not. If you were to say I need to put my fingers in the wounds as it were, wouldn't Mark Scott think that you were in effect attacking his integrity?

Interviewer: Well I don't think so, but I'll take that as your answer for now...'

I noted that there were occasions in interviews when the interviewers found themselves in the rather uncomfortable position of answering questions posed by the

interviewee which to some listeners could have potentially signalled a perception of bias. In my view it is usually unwise for interviewers to try and answer questions posed to them during the course of an interview. Instead, in the interests of due impartiality and sometimes accuracy too, they should try and move things on. The following example comes from the interview with Tony Abbott on 774 ABC Melbourne Drive. This time it related to the Coalition's paid parental leave policy:

Interviewer: I do want to ask about paid parental leave, I know you think you're on a winner with this, I'm curious to know the justification though, I don't know what a pensioner is on but I imagine it's something like 20-25,000 dollars a year

Tony Abbott: A little less

Interviewer: A little less, so why does a pensioner not get a promised increase and why does a woman who's not working get an increase, yet a woman who's on a \$150,000 gets \$75,000? Can you explain, that seems unfair to me

Tony Abbott: Ah well, if you working for the ABC go on parental leave ..., you, let's assume

Interviewer: Yes men don't get money but women get I think 12 weeks last time I checked

Tony Abbott: Ok let's assume the presenter from the ABC goes on paid parental leave, she gets 14 weeks as her salary, now is that fair?

Interviewer: Well it's fair because the employer, the organisation that employs her pays her maternity leave and she knows that when she gets her permanent position at the ABC she'll get that, that's different to a government funded scheme isn't it. It's very different, you sign up - I don't get a key to an executive wash room either but if I go and work for Coles I might, that's just one of the benefits of working at a particular place isn't it, maternity leave?

Tony Abbott: But why should public servants and people working for big companies get access to generous parental leave and people working for small business and as shop assistants and as factory workers and so on not get access to paid parental leave?

Interviewer: Because you know that, that's one of the benefits of working for a big organisation, the equity argument though is, - I'm sure you have many people contacting the local electoral office in Warringah, I'm sure the Liberal Party get constant requests from people on NewStart and on pensions. There are a lot of people earning a lot less than \$150,000 who would love a little top up that could be funded by the sort of levy you're proposing why do they not get a top up yet someone who could save for the time when they are not able to work, someone who could save for that time gets a government help?

Tony Abbott: It'd be interesting...to do a word count on this interview and see who's done most of the talking

Interviewer: Laughs, I thought Ray Hadley, those are the interviews you do with Ray Hadley, they were the interviews

Tony Abbott: Actually Ray Hadley [laughing] asks questions he doesn't make statements, but ..., is paid parental leave a work place entitlement? I'm asking you the question now.

Interviewer: Well you say that it is, it depends on what you want to spend on as a government, you're clearly making a priority

Tony Abbott: Yeh but if you believe that it's a work place entitlement and I do it should be paid at your wage whatever your wage is. Now some people earn high wages, some people earn lower wages

Interviewer: Sure.

Tony Abbott: and that's what I'm saying, it should be paid at people's real wage and if you're on a shop assistant's wage you should get a shop assistant's pay, if you're on a radio announcer's wage you should get a radio announcer's pay, if you're on a factory worker's wage you should get a factory worker's pay because it's a work place entitlement and the great thing is every woman in the work place will be better off under our scheme because our scheme is your real wage or the minimum award wage whichever is the highest for 6 months. It's a very fair scheme because everyone's the same whether you're working for a big business or a small business everyone's going to get the same, the paperwork will be done by the family assistant's office not by the business itself. So look this is a win for every woman in the work force, it's a win for small business and even for many big businesses it's going to be a win because this scheme will substitute for their existing schemes ...

*..And the paperwork will be done by the government not by them. So this is good for productivity, it's good for participation, it's good for overall population, this is a real winner for our country. Now I know the Labor party are running a massive scare campaign on it but I tell you think the women of Australia are going make a stand for justice.
Interviewer: Well I guess we'll find out on September 7...'*

I noted an occasion when a question was framed to the Leader of the Opposition in such a way that it could potentially be viewed as unfair by some listeners. It was a supplementary question in an exchange about Mr Abbott's mortgage repayments (item 11). I noted that what began as a light hearted exchange about a significant living expense for many ABC listeners became slightly uncomfortable, when in the live interview, the interviewer asked a couple of personal questions relating to Tony Abbott's mortgage:

'Interviewer: Last time I spoke with you in the studio which was earlier this year. You mentioned to me that you were still paying off your own home, house mortgage.

Tony Abbott: That's true.

Interviewer: Is that the case?

Tony Abbott: Still the case.

*Interviewer: How can that be? You've been around for so, **how big is your mortgage and how much have you got left to pay?***

Tony Abbott; Well ... look Sydney house prices as you know are not that low – we've put three girls through education and I guess, look I don't claim to have focussed as obsessively on these things as maybe I should have because I've been attempting to contribute to public life and the thing is that I know what it's like to have a mortgage I know what it's like..

Interviewer: ...because you still haven't paid yours off.

Tony Abbott: Because I still haven't paid mine off. But the last few years we've been making some big holes in it.'

In my view however, in the context of the whole of this live interview the questions, although personal in nature, were only asked once, and did not amount to a significant matter of unfairness to Mr Abbott.

Fair treatment conclusion

I was satisfied that all 23 radio items in the sample allowed the Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition to put their point across and their views were rigorously tested by the ABC interviewers. Clearly on occasion there were questions that could have been better framed and there were answers that begged more questions. However I am aware that in live situations interviewers have to make split second decisions about what to ask next; whether to keep pursuing a particular line of questioning or change tack in order to cover a wider range of perspectives in an interview which has a finite length, because of the need to be on time for regular news bulletins and so on.

I noted that it is generally accepted that when an interviewee is invited to contribute to a broadcast program in a live or as-live situation, and their contribution is unedited, they will then normally have a fair chance to answer questions or state their views, unless they are clearly treated unfairly by the interviewer. This was certainly the case in the sample of items analysed for this editorial audit.

I found no evidence to suggest that the Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition were treated unfairly in the interviews in this sample, having regard to the indicators of fair treatment in the Impartiality Guidance Note which focus on the way the interviewer frames issues and the manner in which the interviewer interacts with the interviewee.

B. Were the interviews carried out in an open-minded fashion as described in the Impartiality Guidance Note in that the interviewer appeared to be open to evidence and arguments irrespective of their personal views or predispositions?

The open-mindedness indicators included in the Impartiality Guidance Note are included in full at appendix four.

I considered whether there was anything in the way the ABC interviewers framed their questions, or interacted with the interviewees which suggested they were not conducting their interviews in an open-minded fashion. It is very hard to prove bias in an interviewer on the basis of one or two interviews examined from a small sample for an editorial audit such as this. And in reality it is normally the listeners' perception of bias that can be as much of an issue for the ABC as any actual bias.

I am aware that when contentious issues are raised concerning the ABC they must be dealt with in an impartial, accurate and fair way. During three interviews in the sample analysed for this review the issue of privatisation of the ABC and its future funding was raised. In my professional judgement the first interviewer raised a legitimate issue about the funding of the ABC with Tony Abbott; the second interviewer made a good call by not being drawn into a discussion about the possible privatisation of the ABC with the Prime Minister. And in the third example below the interviewer raised the privatisation issue and then used a more relaxed approach to move the conversation on.

774 ABC Melbourne Drive Tony Abbott 27 August 2013 (item 21)

Interviewer: Quick question if I can? If you need to cut across the board public spending would the ABC attract any greater level of cuts than other parts of the public service?

Tony Abbott: ... I respect the ABC; I think the ABC in its own way is an iconic Australian institution. Obviously I have some pretty tough interviews on the ABC some of which I haven't handled very well I hasten to add.

Interviewer: And greater level of cuts to us or the same as other public sector departments?

Tony Abbott: We'll make the cuts that we say we will make and I think when the final list of spends and saves is out there what will be crystal clear to people is that Mr Rudd's scare campaign is just a scare campaign. We can afford the things we want to do...

Interviewer: I'm not sure you've answered...

Tony Abbott: I'm coming to it ... we can afford the things we want to do without cutting education, without cutting health, without cutting social security. In fact in important areas we'll be improving here, we'll be improving here. As for the ABC – no plans to cut the ABC. I don't think there'll be any line items that will involve any damage to the ABC. I've got to say though...I would expect the ABC to do new projects under normal circumstances from its existing budget and so I guess I can put Mark on notice that if he wants to do something that he's not currently doing he would be expected to find the resources to pay for it without necessarily coming to the government seeking more.

Interviewer: I imagine that's a message he's already received.'

702 ABC Sydney Mornings Kevin Rudd 26 August 2013 (item 14)

Kevin Rudd: The IPA that you just referred to, which is the think tank of the Liberal Party, let's be very blunt about-

Interviewer: But it doesn't mean that their not capable of doing an assessment of the numbers though.

Kevin Rudd: By the way the same IPA just put out a statement the other day for Mr Roskam, saying that the ABC should be privatised so let's just bear that in mind...

Interviewer: We can have that discussion with both political parties but let's not. The OECD- Kevin Rudd: Let's just have it here. We will not privatise the ABC - their think tank says that they should-

Interviewer: OK thank you. The OECD says the unemployment figures do need more assessment. That must give you pause for thought surely?

774 ABC Melbourne Breakfast Kevin Rudd 29 August 2013 (item 17)

Interviewer: And your ABC? What about us?

Kevin Rudd: There was an interesting paper the other day by a mob who actually represent their think tank called the IPA – the Institute of Public Affairs...

Interviewer: Were they talking about privatising the ABC?

Kevin Rudd: Yeah, about privatising the ABC. James Murdoch said some time ago, by the way – that's Mr Murdoch's son – that the best future for the BBC in Britain was to privatise it. I have a slightly different view. I'm pro the public broadcaster and I think all of your listeners would worry about either slash and burn to funding for the ABC in the future.

Interviewer: We can privatise triple j.

Kevin Rudd: (Laughs). Look...

Interviewer: I'm not bothered about that.

Kevin Rudd: ...triple j regularly give me a hard time, but I think they're a vital part of communicating views to a whole bunch of Australians who would otherwise not be engaged.

There was an occasion when I had to carefully consider whether the way an ABC interviewer interacted with the Prime Minister suggested that the interviewer held a certain point of view which could have meant the interview was not being conducted in an open minded fashion. The comments that initially gave me some cause for concern were noted at the start and end of an interview with Kevin Rudd on 29 August 2013 on 774 ABC Melbourne Breakfast (item 17).

Interviewer: On the line, the Prime Minister of Australia, Mr Kevin Rudd. Good morning, sir.

Kevin Rudd: Good morning Thanks for having me on the program.

Interviewer: My misgiving is mostly if I speak to you, I have to speak to the other bloke, too. Don't I?

Kevin Rudd: Well, it's called balance and there should be lots of it on the ABC because we don't see a lot of it in the Herald Sun, do we?

Interviewer: It's not really balance - as long as you get the same amount of time, apparently that's balance.

Kevin Rudd: (Laughs). The bottom line is, it's an election and the lifeblood of a democracy is everyone getting their views out and what they've done and what they plan to do. So people will make their own mind up about those things.

Interviewer: Alright, well, you've had your turn of being on the radio. Now spare a thought for me, it means I've got to spend 10 mins with the other bloke, as well. For balance, for balance.

Kevin Rudd: I'm sure you'll be friendly, courteous and engaged and give him a whack around the ears like you give me.

Interviewer: Thank you, Mr Rudd.

Kevin Rudd: Thanks ... for having me on the program.

I understand that 774's Breakfast team made multiple requests for an interview with the Leader of the Opposition during the election campaign but none of the requests were successful. I believe this interview provides a good example of how the likely audience expectations for a program play a part in judging whether or not an interview achieved due impartiality. I considered the context in which this interview was placed on the program website (<http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2013/08/29/3836474.htm>) and noted the stated reluctance of the interviewer to do election interviews; the comedic slant he gave some of his questions and the relaxed interaction between himself and Mr Rudd. It is impossible on the basis of this one interview alone for me to make a judgement about whether the interviewer's personal political view was obvious here and whether that affected the items impartiality. However I found that the interviewer's more relaxed style and approach to framing questions produced a different style of political interview to add into the ABCs eclectic mix. Some of the questions were:

- *How does this campaign feel compared to 2007?*
- *What about the outside world, the situation in Syria is reaching some sort of breaking point, is it not?*
- *Will we send troops? Is probably a fundamental question.*
- *But it's unlikely that there will be a consensus at the UN about how to deal with Syria because Russia and China are holding out, aren't they?*

After I considered the type, subject and nature of the content and the likely audience expectations of it, I concluded that this interview did achieve due impartiality.

C. When significant relevant perspectives were raised by the interviewer, where these accurately presented?

I compiled a list of some of the significant, relevant perspectives raised by interviewers in this sample of radio items. It is not though intended to be a comprehensive content analysis of the sample. It is attached at appendix five.

Whilst I acknowledge that achieving due accuracy is inextricably linked with achieving due impartiality in content I was unable to check that every single material fact included in the radio items analysed for this audit was accurate and presented in context. As this audit had the very particular remit of analysing interviews with Mr Rudd and Mr Abbott I decided to assume that in the absence of any challenge from them about the accuracy of statements made by their ABC interviewers that the perspectives raised by the interviewers were in fact accurately presented or were considered to be accurate and credible at the time.

However, I noted one specific exchange in an interview on 702 ABC Sydney Breakfast with the Leader of the Opposition on 6 August 2013 (item 15) which I thought warranted investigation. This caught my attention because Tony Abbott challenged the accuracy of a significant relevant perspective raised by the interviewer. This is a transcript of the relevant extract of the interview:

Interviewer: Why remove a carbon tax now that's on the verge of switching to an ETS? There are 28 countries in the world with a carbon tax, there are eight states including California with the world's largest scheme of its own. It is very much the way that people are moving. It's the direction in which people are moving in this policy. Your response is direct action. There's no country in the world with a similar scheme. Why scrap the carbon tax now?

Tony Abbott: Well with the greatest respect ... I dispute the factual basis for your assertion. The Productivity Commission said there was no country on earth with an economy wide carbon tax or emissions trading scheme. Yes there are some schemes but they are much smaller than ours. They tend to be very partial. The European scheme for instance raised, from memory, as much money in five years as our scheme raises in three months. Our scheme is the world's biggest carbon tax and that's why it should go'.

Adam Spencer: What has been wrong with our carbon tax?

Tony Abbott: Well Mr Rudd admits that the carbon tax has been hurting jobs and hurting families' cost of living. That's why he's pretending to abolish it but what he's really doing is just bringing forward by 12 months the move from a fixed tax to a floating tax. Now Mr Rudd himself almost the day after he became Prime Minister five weeks ago said that I'm abolishing the carbon tax. He's just changing from a fixed to a floating tax. But the fact that he felt the need to say he was abolishing the carbon tax shows that he knows the carbon tax is hurting families and threatening job security.

Adam Spencer: But all the analysis agrees that significant price rises in electricity recently for individuals and for business is not from the carbon tax. That's about 7% of the price rise. The price rise comes from the electricity operators gold-plating the network and investing in poles and wires for those 3 or 4 days of the year when it's particularly hot. That's where electricity price rises are coming from. Do you think that electricity price rises will fall under a Coalition government?

Tony Abbott: Well on the Government's own figures the carbon-tax has added 10% to electricity prices and 9% to power prices and as soon as the carbon tax comes off we'll have the ACCC going over the power companies and the gas companies to make sure that a commensurate price cut is being passed onto consumers.'

In the absence of any attribution by the interviewer for the statistics quoted in his question it was very difficult to verify the statement '*there are 28 countries in the world with a carbon tax, there are eight states including California with the world's largest scheme of its own.*' A trawl of the internet in January 2014 kept bringing up the same headline statistic:

'33 countries and 18 sub-national jurisdictions will price carbon in 2013. This comprises 850 million people and nearly a third of the global economy.'

<http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2013/05/08/1702861/price-carbon-tax-broad-bipartisan-support-congress/>

'Looking beyond the EU ETS, carbon-pricing around the world is actually growing. Since the EU ETS began in 2005, more than 20 additional carbon prices have been adopted worldwide. According to the Australian Climate Commission, carbon prices are currently in place in more than 33 countries and 18 sub-national jurisdictions, covering 30% of the world's economy and 20% of its emissions. In addition, new carbon prices are also being considered in a number of major countries including Brazil, China, India, Mexico and Turkey – meaning that experience with carbon pricing in practice is about to grow exponentially.'

<http://thecleanrevolution.org/assets/files/May-Insight-Briefing---Carbon-Pricing.pdf>

I have established that the original source for this statistic was a report by the Climate Commission published on 21 August 2012 and called *The Critical Decade: International Action on Climate Change*:

From 2013, carbon pricing schemes are expected to be operating in at least 33 countries and 18 sub-national jurisdictions. These schemes could be expected to cover:

- around 850 million people#
- around 30 per cent of the global economy##

- and around 20 per cent of global emissions*.

Population data based on World Development Indicators 2012. ## GDP based on purchasing power parity (PPP) basis in 2012. *Based on emissions in 2005 for these areas.

http://climatecommission.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/climatecommission_internationalreport_20120821.pdf

I noted that the Climate Commission and its reports have themselves proved contentious in the past and that the Commission was abolished by the current Prime Minister Tony Abbott in September 2013 before being relaunched as a community funded organisation.

A trawl of the internet seemed to support the view that as at 27 August 2013 California was the world's second largest carbon market, second only to the much larger European Unions' Emissions Trading System.

<http://cleantechnica.com/2013/08/27/california-cap-and-trade-comes-to-a-crossroads-as-carbon-prices-fall/> and <http://www.businessgreen.com/bq/analysis/2299358/oeed-carbon-pricing-must-be-the-cornerstone-of-climate-policy>

Therefore my preliminary online research would seem to indicate that it was not duly accurate for the ABC interviewer to talk about 28 countries of the world having a carbon tax, and California being the world's largest scheme and that Mr Abbott was therefore right to dispute it. However, I believe I have established that Mr Abbott's correction was not duly accurate either. He referred to The Productivity Commission's report entitled *Emission Reduction Policies and Carbon Prices in Key Economies* released on 9 June 2011, with a supplement to it released on 16 December 2011: http://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/109942/02-carbon-prices-overview.pdf

This report was written at the request of the Australian Government. It asked the Productivity Commission to undertake a research study into effective carbon prices that result from emissions-reduction policies in Australia and other key economies – China, Germany, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, the United Kingdom and United States. The overview to the report said:

'... these countries are taking action to address climate change in various ways. Some have introduced emissions trading schemes (ETs), and all have in place a range of more limited, less direct measures, such as mandatory renewable energy targets, feed-in tariffs, energy-efficiency measures and capital subsidies for constructing or installing sources of renewable energy.....Applying a broad interpretation of emissions-reduction policies, the Commission identified over 1000 measures in total, with more than 300 in the United States (federal and state), around 230 in Australia and 100 in the United Kingdom....

There are also sub-national ETs in place or proposed. The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative covers electricity in 10 states in the north east of the United States (but the cap is not currently binding). The Western Climate Initiative was intended to cover seven US states and four Canadian provinces. It aims to reduce emissions to 15 per cent below 2005 levels by 2020. But, it appears that only California among the US states is committed to implementing an emissions trading scheme by 2012.'

I think it's fair to say that Mr Abbott was not duly accurate when he said '*The Productivity Commission said there was no country on earth with an economy wide carbon tax or emissions trading scheme*' if only because the scope of The Productivity Commission's work was to study nine key world economies and in doing so it only provided a snapshot of the cost and performance of major emissions-reduction policies in 2010. In my professional judgement it was incorrect of Mr Abbott to extrapolate anything contained within that report to '*every country on earth*'.

This interview extract illustrates the difficulty of comparing what different countries around the world are doing in this area – indeed as The Productivity Commission itself commented ‘*comparing many different policy interventions is like comparing apples and oranges.*’

The Australian Government’s Department of Environment website gives the following information about international action on climate change. It says carbon pricing is in place in many countries: <http://www.climatechange.gov.au/international/actions/countries-acting-now>

‘Many countries—and all the major emitters—are acting now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Countries have started this transformation to take advantage of the opportunities stemming from the next stage of global development that will be powered by clean energy.

A broad range of countries have introduced, or are planning, market based emissions trading schemes and carbon taxes. Australia's top five trading partners—China, Japan, the United States (US), the Republic of Korea and Singapore—and another eight of our top twenty trading partners (New Zealand, the UK, Germany, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Canada) have implemented or are piloting carbon trading or taxation schemes at national, state or the city level.

Many countries have renewable energy targets, including fifteen of Australia's top twenty trading partners. Energy performance standards for appliances, buildings and industrial plants, as well as incentives for the use and development of low emission products and technologies are now widespread.’

The carbon tax was a highly contentious subject during the election campaign. It was also a very complex subject. Any statistics to do with it were also controversial and complex and open to interpretation. In this example the interviewer tried to ensure that appropriate scrutiny was applied to the Coalition’s plan to abolish the carbon tax but in doing so, in my view, oversimplified the issue. I have personally found no one information source which has looked at all the countries in the world and established whether they have instigated or have plans to implement a carbon tax; emissions trading scheme or some other response to the issue of climate change.

Although time restraints have meant my research on this matter has not been as forensic as I would have liked I think I have established some material facts that allow me to reach the professional judgment that in this example a significant relevant perspective raised by the interviewer was not presented with due accuracy and that the perspective raised by the interviewee was also not presented with due accuracy.

I think interviewers should try and ensure they are well informed and accurate if they use statistics to frame a question. However, when statistics are used by interviewees, I don’t believe that ABC interviewers can be expected to always be aware when an interviewee has been factually inaccurate or imprecise. In considering the ABC’s obligations in relation to impartiality I think it is appropriate to allow politicians to make reasonable claims without interviewers having to challenge every issue raised during an interview.

D. Did the interviewer appear to unduly favour one perspective over another?

I did not note any occasion when I judged that an interviewer appeared to unduly favour one perspective over another within the sample of radio items analysed for this review. However, I have made some observations and comments about the range of perspectives covered by these 23 radio items in the next section of this review. (See below Breadth of View and Impartiality).

Other impartiality considerations

1. Audience expectation

ABC interviewers face a constant challenge in meeting the expectations of their audiences in ensuring content is duly impartial. The following example illustrates how different listeners can listen to the same interview clip but have very different views on whether or not it was duly impartial: to some it's biased, to others it's not. The audience's impressions and reactions are inevitably influenced by their personal opinions and in this case specifically their political views.

This example was taken from RN Breakfast on 26 August 2013 (item 7). It came at the end of an interview with the Leader of the Opposition.

Interviewer: Tony Abbott we've only got 50 seconds to the news can I just ask you before we let you go. July 1 last year was the last time you came on this program this audience that we have here is here for a daily..

Tony Abbott: Is craving, is craving more of me obviously

Interviewer: Is craving political coverage. If you are elected Prime Minister will you come in, commit to come to talk to our listeners more than once every 400 days?

Tony Abbott: Well get me across the line, help me to become Prime Minister, and then I think that would be a fair deal.

Interviewer: We can take you on trust there?

Tony Abbott: Thank you so much.

This interview received twelve comments on the program's website which can be read here: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/interview-with-tony-abbott/4911560> Four of the comments specifically related to Mr Abbott's 'get me across the line' remark. They said:

- *(The interviewer) should have pulled him up on this immediately: the ABC cannot as a condition of future interviews agree to "help me to become PM".*
- *As for the 'Get me across the line' remark, I think (the interviewer) and listeners took it for what it was, merely jest.*
- *Abbott's answer was fair enough... it was a churlish question and got an appropriate answer.*
- *Once again, he goes unchallenged and gets away with murder....and this from the A.B.C. What hope have we got?*

This example shows there can be many different individual responses to hearing exactly the same exchange between interviewer and interviewee and therefore disagreement over whether that exchange was biased and whether it affected the

overall due impartiality of the item. In my professional judgement the above exchange between the ABC interviewer and Tony Abbott did not affect the overall due impartiality of the item.

In a similar vein I noted an interview signoff which could have potentially impacted on the perception of due impartiality of the interview it brought to a close. In my view it is inappropriate when ending an interview with one of the party leaders to say: ‘...best of luck in the rest of the campaign.’ I noted that most signoffs in this editorial audit were impartial and some are shown below. I also noted that in the fifth example from 774 ABC Melbourne the interviewer recognised that saying something as simple as ‘good luck’ could be perceived as bias by some of the audience and so when he said good luck to Kevin Rudd at the end of his interview, he very sensibly put his comment into context:

1. *‘Mr Rudd, we’re out of time, thanks for talking to AM this morning.’*
2. *‘Mr Abbott, we’re out of time thanks for talking to AM this morning.’*
3. *‘(Tony Abbott) I appreciate your time. I’ll let you get on with your day’s work. Thank you.’ (612 ABC Brisbane Mornings).*
4. *Tony Abbott thank you for joining us. Enjoy your coffee in Melbourne. (774 ABC Melbourne Drive)*
5. *‘Mr Rudd, either way, to every other candidate and Tony Abbott I’ve said good luck, I say good luck to you too....Kevin Rudd the Prime Minister.’ (774 ABC Melbourne Mornings).*

It was unfortunate that another interview did not end in such a neutral way:

6. *‘Mr Rudd, best of luck in the rest of the campaign. Thank you for your time.’ (702 ABC Sydney Breakfast).*

Whilst I don’t think the use of such language here demonstrated partiality on the part of the interviewer I do think it is important to recognise the potential sensitivity about making such comments during an election period. The interview sign off certainly made me stop and think about the issue of the ‘perception of bias’ and the way interviewers end their interviews with politicians and other talent with known political views at such a politically sensitive time.

2. Breadth of view

The ABC’s Editorial policies say that it:

‘aims to present, over time, content that addresses a broad range of subjects from a diversity of perspectives reflecting a diversity of experiences, presented in a diversity of ways from a diversity of sources, including content created by ABC staff, generated by audiences and commissioned or acquired from external content-makers.’

In my view this impartiality principle is as important during an election campaign as at any other time. Although I am aware that the radio interviews in this sample had to react to items on the daily news agenda as well as policy announcements and other current election campaign issues I nevertheless noted that the range of subjects

covered across the 23 items was not as broad as it could have been. Some topics like crime, defence, food security and mining were never discussed as substantial issues in the interviews, whereas other subjects like the Coalition's paid parental leave scheme; the government's carbon tax and economic record were discussed in depth on a regular basis. I am well aware that it is difficult amidst the daily, hourly, and minute to minute demands of news to take time out to consider ways of broadening the subjects discussed and of identifying different ways of doing so, but I believe the ABC needs to consider how to address this challenge in the future.

As I analysed the radio interviews for this editorial audit it was Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott's answers to topics I'd heard addressed the least, which also tended to be the answers that were not already well rehearsed by the politicians, that engaged me the most and in my view made for a better listening experience. I would therefore recommend that some consideration is given by the ABC to how it might broaden the range of subjects discussed with the party leaders across its output areas over the course of the federal election campaign next time around.

CONCLUSION

This editorial audit analysed a sample of 23 radio items involving the two key party leaders campaigning for election as the next Prime Minister of Australia. Eight ABC interviewers working for AM, RN Breakfast, triple j Hack, 612 ABC Brisbane Mornings, 774 ABC Melbourne Mornings, 702 ABC Sydney Breakfast interviewed both the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. One interviewer interviewed both men on two occasions. All the other interviews in the sample involved one interviewer interviewing either the Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition.

In conducting this editorial audit I considered each piece of content as a standalone item and assessed whether it achieved due impartiality within itself. This sometimes involved me assessing the introduction or wrap up to the item and/or the context in which the item appeared on the ABC's website. I never communicated with any of the ABC's production teams or interviewers about the content included in this sample and so I don't have any 'back stories' about the way items were researched; editorial decisions were taken about subjects to be discussed during the interviews or the role played by the producer as the interview went out live. Instead I came to the content and consumed it just like any other listener the first time I heard it, before I thoroughly analysed it against the ABC's Editorial Policies. I also must repeat here that time constraints meant I did not check that every single material fact included in the radio items was accurate and presented in context. As I said earlier I took a pragmatic approach and assumed that in the absence of any challenge from the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition about the accuracy of statements made by their ABC interviewers that they were accurately presented or were considered to be accurate and credible at the time.

I noted that almost all the questions posed by the ABC's interviewers across this sample dealt with contentious subjects including carbon tax and other policy responses to climate change, same sex marriage, and economic forecasts. Throughout the auditing process I was very aware that the ABC's commitment to

impartiality and fairness was under intense scrutiny as it interviewed the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition on matters of public importance and current debate and the closer to polling day the interviews took place the greater was the care needed to ensure due impartiality was achieved.

Again I must make it clear that this editorial audit is a snapshot analysis of a selection of radio items broadcast during the 2013 federal election campaign and whether or not they were duly impartial, nothing more, and nothing less. As such my findings cannot be extrapolated to conclude that all other aspects of the ABC's coverage of the election campaign were also duly impartial.

During the course of the audit I was looking for a sense of fair play – that over the election period the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition received a fair hearing on ABC radio. I was also looking for evidence that the ABC ensured due weight was given to the views of both men. I thought the interviews were polite and probing and that even in some of the shorter ones that the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition were given ample time and opportunity to explain their position. There were also some good examples of interviewers being dogged in ensuring a particular question was eventually answered and persistent in examining and challenging the policies of both the then Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. On the whole interviewers asked well informed and relevant questions that their audience would reasonably expect to hear and they were robust and consistent in their dealings with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. I have to say that it was impossible to detect any actual 'pre-judgement' or personal positions of interviewers in this sample.

I personally liked the interviews that included illustrative sound bites from the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, and other relevant talent, which succinctly gave context to various discussion topics. I also enjoyed the 774 ABC Melbourne talkback when listeners were given the opportunity to hold the Leader of the Opposition to account on two separate occasions. I think it would have been appropriate to have given listeners the opportunity to quiz the Prime Minister too if he had been available to do so in the studio rather than on the phone.

Finally, I concluded that the 23 items analysed for this editorial audit were duly impartial within themselves and complied with Section 4 of the ABC's Editorial Policies.

Appendix one

Editorial Audit No. 1: ABC Radio Interviews with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition during the 2013 Federal Election Campaign

Item	Date	Program	Interviewee	Duration	Title/link
1	5.8.2013	AM	Kevin Rudd	14'51"	http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2013/s3817899.htm
2	5.8.2013	AM	Tony Abbott	12'00"	http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2013/s3817901.htm
3	10.8.2013	AM	Tony Abbott	6'38"	http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2013/s3822542.htm
4	3.9.2013	AM	Kevin Rudd	12'01"	http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2013/s3839532.htm
5	5.9.2013	AM	Tony Abbott	16'25"	http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2013/s3841545.htm
6	6.9.2013	RN Breakfast	Kevin Rudd	8'54"	http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/election-2013-kevin-rudd/4940348
7	26.8.2013	RN Breakfast	Tony Abbott	13'06"	http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/interview-with-tony-abbott/4911560
8	26.8.2013	triple j Hack	Kevin Rudd	18'22"	http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/hack/stories/s3834120.htm
9	6.9.2013	triple j Hack	Tony Abbott	14'07"	http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/hack/stories/s3843103.htm
10	6.8.2013	612 Mornings	Kevin Rudd *debate – included other candidates for seat of Griffiths	24'36"	http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2013/08/06/3819484.htm
11	5.8.2013	612 Mornings	Tony Abbott		http://blogs.abc.net.au/queensland/2013/08/tony-abbott-in-brisbane.html
12	4.9.2013	774 Mornings	Kevin Rudd	17'42"	http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2013/09/04/3840622.htm
13	30.8.2013	774 Mornings	Tony Abbott	24'08"	http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-08-30/tony-abbott-jon-faine/4924586
14	26.8.2013	702 Mornings	Kevin Rudd	16'22"	http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2013/08/26/3833561.htm
15	6.8.2013	702 Breakfast	Tony Abbott	11'57"	http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2013/08/06/3818907.htm
16	7.8.2013	891 Breakfast	Tony Abbott	7'19"	http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2013/08/07/3819835.htm
17	29.8.2013	774 Breakfast	Kevin Rudd	8'55"	http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2013/08/29/3836474.htm
18	9.8.2013	936 Hobart Mornings	Tony Abbott	9'45"	MP3 provided
19	12.8.2013	702 Sydney Mornings	Kevin Rudd	6'01"	MP3 provided
20	22.8.2013	702 Sydney Breakfast	Kevin Rudd	10'14"	http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2013/08/22/3831193.htm
21	27.8.2013	774 Melbourne Drive	Tony Abbott	21'52"	http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2013/08/27/3834928.htm
22	4.9.2013	891 Adelaide Drive	Kevin Rudd	5'08"	MP3 provided
23	5.9.2013	666 Canberra Drive	Kevin Rudd	5'52"	https://soundcloud.com/666abccanberra/pm-kevin-rudd-with-adam

Appendix two

Source: <http://about.abc.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/GNImpartialityINS.pdf>

ABC Impartiality Guidance Note issued 22 July 2013

Fair treatment

Impartiality is not the same as simply being fair, though it is unlikely content will fail the impartiality standards if it is fair-minded in its treatment of both people and ideas.

Fair treatment relates to the way in which you frame an issue and the manner in which you interact with the people you talk to for a story - depending again, on the subject and nature of your content. For example, you should:

- Introduce or wrap up interviews or segments in a way that provides appropriate context or background, and summarises fairly the points of view expressed. Pay careful attention to accuracy as omitting either information or context may have the effect of favouring one side over another and can therefore signal a lack of impartiality.
- Choose language that is clear and not emotive, hyperbolic, inflammatory or derogatory. We all want to be interesting, but exaggerated language (such as 'polls collapsing') lacks clarity and should be avoided.
- Also be mindful about your use of music (there are some crazy lyrics out there) and images.
- Treat interviewees and other participants with civility and respect unless there is a compelling reason not to do so.
- Ask well-informed, relevant questions. It is legitimate for questioning to be provocative or for the questioner to adopt the role of 'devil's advocate' to introduce opposing viewpoints for discussion or response.
- Provide sufficient opportunity for interviewees to answer questions or state their views, notwithstanding there will be situations where interruptions will be appropriate - for example, to elicit or clarify a response to a question which the interviewee is not answering, or not answering clearly, relevantly and within a reasonable time.
- Let the audience know if an invitation to contribute has been either declined or not answered. Perhaps a written statement was provided to be read or published. Whatever the circumstances, it's important to tell the audience about the steps you took to include other views as appropriate.
- Take care to be as questioning or challenging of those with greater power as those without.
- Refrain from taking unfair advantage of a participant who is distressed or otherwise vulnerable.
- Don't allow yourself to be pressured (subtly or otherwise) by any participants in a story, or by PR and media advisers. Make sure you haven't strayed into making an implicit promise of favourable treatment in order to get an interview or story.

Ask yourself:

- Have I supplied the audience with the information they need to assess this story fairly?
- Have I supplied them with sufficient context to clearly understand that my talent is commenting from his or her particular point of view?

Appendix three

Source: <http://about.abc.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/GNImpartialityINS.pdf>

ABC Impartiality Guidance Note issued 22 July 2013

Open-mindedness

Being open-minded means being open to evidence and arguments, irrespective of your personal views or predispositions, and this is the biggest personal challenge when it comes to impartiality. We all have opinions, shaped by instinct, belief and experience, and it may be very difficult to transcend these in the face of the stories you will work on. You have to work hard to be objective, and curiosity is one of the best qualities you can bring to bear on this.

You must also make sure that your editorial decisions are not improperly influenced by political, commercial or personal interests. If you feel there is any risk of a conflict between your personal and professional concerns, you should read the ABC policy on Conflict of Interest (hyperlink) and talk to your manager.

What can you do to encourage open-mindedness?

- Broaden the range of material you consume to both expand and challenge your horizons.
- Broaden your range of contacts and/or the people you approach for advice – the essence of impartiality is to understand all the significant and relevant perspectives on any issue.
- Be respectfully critical and sceptical of experts – their expertise may be very helpful to you, but no one specialist has all the answers, and a diversity of views is still required.
- Explore the intellectual arguments you might personally tend to ignore and do your best to understand why others believe in them.
- Be challenging of conventional wisdoms.

Ask yourself:

- Have I done my best to be open-minded towards the merits of all positions?
- Have I questioned my own views and attitudes when approaching this story and weighing up the opinions of those involved?
- Have I distanced myself professionally from the story?
- Have I tried to look beyond an obvious narrative for this story?

It's hard work, but this kind of discipline will make you a better journalist or content-maker.

Appendix four

Editorial Audit No. 1: ABC Radio Interviews with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition during the 2013 Federal Election Campaign

Item	Date	Program	Interviewee	Duration	Summary of Key Perspectives
1	5.8.2013	AM	Kevin Rudd (phone)	14'51"	Australian media bias Australia's negative politics Government economic record ALP commit \$200 million to car sector Asylum policy Official corruption – Eddie Obeid Campaign debates
2	5.8.2013	AM	Tony Abbott (phone)	12'00"	Campaign debates Australian media bias Popularity of Rudd as PM Coalition mandate if win election Abolition of carbon tax Government's \$17 billion cuts Public service job losses Schools reform plan (Gonski) Industrial relations Minority government led by Malcolm Turnbull
3	10.8.2013	AM	Tony Abbott (pre-recorded)	6'38"	Coalition appointment of ALP's Warren Mundine to chair proposed Indigenous advisory council Land councils Pre-election fiscal outlook
4	3.9.2013	AM	Kevin Rudd (phone)	12'01"	Opinion polls ALP and Coalition climate change policies Syria Papua New guinea Asylum Policy
5	5.9.2013	AM	Tony Abbott (phone)	16'25"	Coalition's economic blueprint and plan for a Commission of Audit Public service cuts Government mandates Parental leave scheme Climate change - 5% cut in emissions by 2020' Greenhouse reduction fund Role of Reserve Bank's Roger Corbett in election campaign UNESCO decision re Tasmanian forests First Australians
6	6.9.2013	RN Breakfast	Kevin Rudd (phone)	8'54"	Polls Failure of ALP campaign Julia Gillard's legacy and ALP record Kevin Rudd 'lost in translation'
7	26.8.2013	RN Breakfast	Tony Abbott (phone)	13'06"	Election campaign Election costings Paid Parental Leave scheme Economy Gay Marriage Appearances on RN Breakfast
8	26.8.2013	triple j Hack	Kevin Rudd (phone)	18'22"	NBN Same sex marriage Negative politics Election costings Housing affordability Apprentice loans

9	6.9.2013	triple j Hack	Tony Abbott (phone)	14'07"	Campaign slip up NBN Climate Change Same sex marriage Housing affordability Pitch to Triple J audience
10	6.8.2013	612 Mornings	Kevin Rudd (studio quality) *debate – included other candidates for seat of Griffiths	24'36"	Rudd's pitch Federal/State cooperation Local issues Local business Asylum policy
11	5.8.2013	612 Mornings	Tony Abbott (phone)		Funding Queensland infrastructure Cutting red tape for small business Public service redundancies End of the Age Entitlement speech Supermarket duopoly Tony Abbott's mortgage Presidential style election campaign
12	4.9.2013	774 Mornings	Kevin Rudd (phone)	17'42"	NBN ALP record in infrastructure in Victoria Infrastructure investment Roger Corbett's criticism of Rudd ALP economic record Disability scheme vs paid parental leave Asylum policy Clive Palmer's campaign Murdoch influence on campaign Steve Bracks New York Envoy Opinion polls
13	30.8.2013	774 Mornings	Tony Abbott (studio quality)	24'08"	Vandalisation of election office Syria Election costings Carbon tax Jobs Paid Parental Leave scheme Same sex marriage Asylum policy 457 visa Job prospects
14	26.8.2013	702 Mornings	Kevin Rudd (phone)	16'22"	NBN Election costings GST Unemployment figures ABC privatisation Education reforms Second Sydney airport Syria
15	6.8.2013	702 Breakfast	Tony Abbott (phone)	11'57"	Jaymes Diaz Ramadan event Carbon tax and other policy responses to climate change TA's position on climate change Interest rates Second Sydney Airport
16	7.8.2013	891 Breakfast	Tony Abbott (phone)	7'19"	Election campaign Company tax Elections costings Negative campaigning
17	29.8.2013	774 Breakfast	Kevin Rudd (phone)	8'55"	Final campaign debate (Rooty Hill) Election campaign ABC privatisation Negative campaign approach Syria

18	9.8.2013	936 Hobart Mornings	Tony Abbott (phone)	9'45"	Coalition's Tasmanian package Foreign aid budget Asylum policy Health and hospital system Labor celebrity candidates
19	12.8.2013	702 Sydney Mornings	Kevin Rudd (phone)	6'01"	Voter enrolment First Leaders' debate Homelessness Aged care policy Transport – Sydney's second airport
20	22.8.2013	702 Sydney Breakfast	Kevin Rudd (phone)	10'14"	Paid parental leave Budget deficit and forward estimates Asylum policy Manufacturing – car industry subsidy
21	27.8.2013	774 Melbourne Drive	Tony Abbott (phone)	21'52"	Election costings Head of Treasury under Coalition Government Transport: Melbourne's East West link Paid parental leave Climate change Asylum policy Cuts to ABC
22	4.9.2013	891 Adelaide Drive	Kevin Rudd (phone)	5'08"	Manufacturing – car industry subsidy Election outcome Aged Care Undecided voters Fringe benefit tax changes
23	5.9.2013	666 Canberra Drive	Kevin Rudd (phone)	5'52"	Election outcome and Rudd's political future Public service job cuts Government's economic record Higher education cuts/investment Broadband

Appendix five

Summary of key perspectives featured in this sample

This summary is neither intended as a 'comprehensive content analysis' nor is it a complete list of all the perspectives covered by the 23 interviews in this sample. Noted below are the significant areas of discussion on contentious subjects and related election campaign issues. For example the Prime Minister mentioned Broadband (NBN) in most of his interviews as part of his 'pitch to voters' however it was only discussed in detail three times. The perspectives marked * are the policy categories used on the ABC's Federal Election 2013 *Australia Votes* website <http://www.abc.net.au/news/federal-election-2013/policy/> I have not used the Policy Announcement heading used here in this summary as it was more appropriate to include the individual announcements under their relevant perspective heading. For example, I have included Tony Abbott's 7 August 2013 announcement that company tax would be cut under a Coalition government under Business.

Perspective	Prime Minister Interviews	Leader of Opposition Interviews
ABC issues	Two	One
Asylum Policy*	Four	Four
Broadband*	Three	One
Business	Two	Three
Childcare and parental leave*	One	Four
Crime	Nil	Nil
Defence*	Nil	Nil
DisabilityCare*	One	
Economy*	Two	Three
Election campaign (opinion polls; campaign debates; and negative campaigning)	Fifteen	Thirteen
Education*	Two	One
Employment (457 Visas)	Three	Six
Environment and climate change*	Three	Seven
Food security	Nil	Nil
Foreign policy (Syria)	Two	Three
Government's economic record	Eight	Four
Health and hospitals* (Aged Care)	Two	One
Housing	Three	Two
Indigenous Affairs*		Three
Manufacturing* (car industry subsidies)	Three	
Media bias	Two	One
Mining*	Nil	Nil
Policy costings	Three	Six
Politics (speculation about future Government; political corruption and popularity of party leaders)	Five	Seven
Same sex marriage	One	Three
Transport*	Four	Three
Workplace relations		One

