

FED TOR AL POLICIES

Quality Assurance
Project 7:

Impartiality (TV News Content)

Final Report
July 2009

Advise. **Verify.** Review



ABC
Australian
Broadcasting
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Editorial Policies

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- give practical shape to statutory obligations in the ABC Act;
- set out the ABC's self-regulatory standards and how to enforce them; and
- describe and explain to staff and the community the editorial and ethical principles fundamental to the ABC.

The role of Director Editorial Policies was established in 2007 and comprises three main functions: to advise, verify and review.

The verification function principally involves the design and implementation of quality assurance projects to allow the ABC to assess whether it is meeting the standards required of it and to contribute to continuous improvement of the national public broadcaster and its content.

Acknowledgements

The Director Editorial Policies acknowledges the contribution of Kerry Blackburn to the design of the methodology for this project, her professionalism in the piloting of it, and her consistent willingness to refine the ABC's quality assurance work and to increase understanding of it among all the affected parties. Jennifer Sterland, Editorial Policies' Information Coordinator, put together the sample and liaised effectively among ABC personnel and the reviewer; Marnie Jones, Editorial Policies' Executive Assistant, facilitated many details. Thanks also to Kate Torney, who became Director of the News Division during the life of this project, for her cooperation, and to Steven Alward, News' Head of Policy, and the other News Division personnel who devoted time – a commodity always precious in daily journalism – to the consultations with the Reviewer.

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Foreword

In this project, the Reviewer, Kerry Blackburn, piloted a methodology she herself had been commissioned to design. She examined the coverage by ABC TV News Sydney 7pm bulletins during February 2009 of the issue of the Federal Government's second fiscal stimulus package.

Thirty items were reviewed in detail and assessed against the following test for impartiality: Would the sample equip a reasonable person to make up their own mind about the issue? She concluded that it would, and along the way made several observations about the coverage from the perspective of a person experienced in TV news. The News Division responded to her draft and she incorporates the exchanges in this final report.

Ms Blackburn's 'Impartiality Template' is reproduced at Appendix V. Readers can trace her application of the template to the sample of content under review in Section III of this report. The items reviewed are listed in Appendix I.

The pilot is regarded as having been a successful test of the new methodology and it will be re-used for future projects.

PAUL CHADWICK
Director Editorial Policies

Note by Director News

The News Division welcomes the findings of this report, which finds the content reviewed met the test for impartiality. News believes the methodology for this review was more sophisticated than that used in the previous review of impartiality in news and current affairs content, and would welcome an opportunity to discuss further the issue of the reviewer speaking directly with staff involved in producing content.

KATE TORNEY
Director News

About the Reviewer

Kerry Blackburn is a senior journalist with more than 20 years experience in newspapers, radio and television. She is a foreign affairs specialist, and "veteran" of the two Gulf wars and the Bosnia conflict. An award-winning producer with BAFTAs, Emmys and Amnesty International Awards to her name, Ms Blackburn has held a variety of senior editorial roles in the UK at ITN and the BBC. Now based in Australia, she remains an Editorial Adviser to the BBC Trust. Ms Blackburn designed the Methodology piloted in this project.

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July 2009

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I. Background

This is a pilot to test the validity of the methodology developed in Quality Assurance Project 7 (QA7), to verify an unknown sample of TV News Content for impartiality. The reviewer followed the steps laid out in the methodology developed for QA7, which has at its heart the Impartiality Template (Appendix V).

No significant problems were encountered by the reviewer in following the methodology. In the reviewer's opinion, it proved sufficiently flexible and robust to cope with the "matter of contention".

For the first time in any of the Quality Assurance Projects, there is provision in the methodology for the reviewer to speak directly to relevant journalists, with any relevant comments incorporated in the draft report provided to the News Division for comment, ahead of the publication of this final report. There was some discussion in the preliminary stages of the review about the basis on which contact should take place between the reviewer and relevant ABC journalists. Some simple ground rules were agreed, allowing the reviewer access to those journalists, provided that anything the reviewer intended to use in the report would first be checked for accuracy with the individuals concerned. As the value and validity of this step is yet to be determined, and as this was a pilot, comments from the News Division in this regard were invited at the draft stage. This was News Division's response:

During the review, News raised some issues about the section of the methodology allowing the reviewer to speak directly to two senior staff members involved in the coverage. News would hasten to point out that the staff involved in this project, including the two staff interviewed, found the reviewer's approach professional and transparent and she had a strong understanding of TV news operations. But News would like to have further discussion about whether this aspect of the methodology is used again, particularly if there is any prospect of less senior people being approached directly by a reviewer. News would suggest that we approach this part of the methodology on a case-by-case basis for future reviews.

Two journalists were interviewed for the pilot; their cooperation and that of others in the News Division is appreciated by the reviewer, as are the comments from News Division in response to this draft. In the reviewer's opinion, the opportunity given to meet with the two journalists, was a useful step in assessing the impartiality of the material under review. That is not to say that the review could not have been conducted without their input, but that the findings were better informed as a result. The reviewer also felt that it wasn't just a one-way process: in her opinion the journalists were afforded a greater insight into the quality assurance process as applied to their material than they might otherwise have got from just reading the report, in addition the opportunity to comment pre-draft removed the slightly "adversarial" feel of some of the earlier pilots, where the reader was on occasion left with the impression – rightly or wrongly – that News Division was having to "defend" itself.

There may be occasions in the future where a reviewer may not feel the need to discuss their report pre-draft, particularly if the reviewer is especially knowledgeable about either the subject under review, or the workings of the particular newsroom involved. But this reviewer feels that the pilot has demonstrated that it is a valid tool in the methodology, of benefit to both the review process and to the journalists involved. The reviewer therefore recommends that the option to interview staff remains in the methodology, with the same conditions as agreed with News Division for this review (i.e. prior notice and an opportunity to check the accuracy of the material to be published). But taking on board the concerns of News Division as outlined in their response above, consideration should be given to allowing a variation to these "ground rules", on a case-by-case basis, should circumstances (such as the level of experience of a journalist) dictate. In such a circumstance, one way forward might be for questions to be communicated via e-mail, or for a senior member of the editorial team to be present during any meeting,

The remainder of comments made by News Division in response to the draft report have been incorporated in the relevant sections below.

The Impartiality Template and appendices, as customised to the "matter of contention", is the pilot in its entirety. The template was adapted from the standard methodology to reflect the relevant sample

content. As provided for in the methodology, some of the explanatory notes which are in the standard template have been removed from this customised version where they are not relevant to the matter of contention.

II. Scope and Subject

Matter of Contention Federal Government's Second Fiscal Stimulus Package

Scope Sydney 7pm Bulletin for the month of February 2009

Review Material Those 30 items which were broadcast on the bulletin during the review period which specifically mention the federal government's second stimulus package; 30 items are reviewed in detail. A further 40 economy-related stories from the same period were viewed, to supply a greater appreciation of the wider news context in which the review items were broadcast.

III. Impartiality Template

A. Accuracy

A number of references in the Editorial Policies relate to the requirement that the ABC output is accurate. The key reference is in section 5.2.2:

(c) *Be accurate.*

(i) *Every reasonable effort, in the circumstances, must be made to ensure that the factual content of news and current affairs is accurate and in context.*

For this Quality Assurance review, not every single line of every item under review has been fact-checked against external references. If this were a quality assurance review purely of accuracy, this would of course have been necessary. However, it is very unlikely that a single failure of accuracy, even if serious, would lead to a failure of the entire impartiality verification test. The reviewer undertook the steps outlined below to ascertain the key facts in the matter of contention, taking particular care to cross-check the main policy announcements and the principal strategic positions of the relevant "constituencies" (politicians, reserve bank, unions etc.).

A serious breach is defined by either (or both) of the following:

- It materially alters the viewer's understanding of the story,
- It seriously misrepresents an individual or an organization.

A serious breach *could* lead to a failure of impartiality, but not necessarily. For a breach of accuracy to lead to the sample content failing the QA, the breach would have to both be "serious" as defined above AND require the reviewer to say "no" to the impartiality test question.

The reviewer assessed the sample content against the above guideline. As required under the methodology, the reviewer undertook background research using the following sources:

- Australian newspaper archives, particularly articles in The Australian and the Daily Telegraph;
- content (video and written) from Nine MSN,
- ministerial and government web pages (for press releases) and Hansard (on specific dates to double-check interview clips used in various stories).

1. Considerations

- Has there been a breach of accuracy in any of the content?
- Have any important facts been omitted, such that they distort the content and render it effectively inaccurate?
- If so, can it (they) be deemed serious?
- If so, would it (they) prevent a viewer from reaching an informed and independent judgement of the issue?

2. Analysis

With the exception of the item below, no inaccuracies were noted in the 30 items under review.

Parliament 03/03/09

This was the lead package in the bulletin. It gave details of what was in the stimulus package. The top half mainly comprised soundbites from the House of Representatives, intercut with graphics detailing the measures. There was one graphic section, in which slightly misleading information was given.

This is what the script said:

2.7 billion will be spent on giving small businesses a 30% tax deduction on assets worth more than a thousand dollars.

The accompanying visual was a graphic with the words:

\$2.7bn on 30% business tax deduction

However, the measure isn't exactly what the script suggested. It is an investment tax break on the purchase of NEW assets. This is the correct detail:

Small Businesses and General Business Tax Break

A 30 cent in every dollar investment tax break for small and general businesses buying eligible assets.

Source: Prime Minister of Australia, "\$42 Billion Nation Building and Jobs Plan", media release, 3 February 2009, http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Release/2009/media_release_0784.cfm.

In other words, the business is obliged to spend some money, it is not a straightforward taxback on EXISTING assets.

The reviewer first considered whether the necessarily brief summary of the measure, compressed the detail to such a point that the item was in breach of the guidelines which require that output "*be accurate*". The reviewer concluded that the script suggested small businesses would be getting a general tax break on the value of 30% of all of their assets worth more than a thousand dollars. It was felt that including the word "new" would have been all that was needed to clarify the point and render it accurate:

*2.7bn will be spent on giving small businesses a 30% tax deduction on **new** assets worth more than a thousand dollars.*

The reviewer then considered whether this was a serious inaccuracy, within the criteria outlined above. The reader will note that in order to fail the verification test for Impartiality, the breach of Accuracy is required to be "serious". The consideration here is whether the inaccuracy materially affects the viewer's understanding of the story.

The focus of the story is not the tax break for businesses, it is just one element of a larger item outlining the federal government's \$42bn fiscal stimulus package. In addition, the reviewer is conscious that this element of the item would have been of particular interest to business people. It is probable that a business person watching the bulletin would have implicitly understood the measure to relate to the purchase of *new* assets, even though that fact wasn't spelt out in the script.

For these two reasons, the reviewer does not regard this as a serious inaccuracy, such that would materially alter the viewer's understanding of the story.

B. Context

The reference to context is from this clause in 5.2.2:

Every reasonable effort, in the circumstances, must be made to ensure that the factual content of news and current affairs is accurate and in context.

Context can comprise a host of definitions. In relation to impartiality, or the potential failure to be impartial, it is generally accepted to mean whether the journalist gave enough background information for the viewer to reach an informed and independent judgement of the facts.

1. Considerations

- Has the subject matter been oversimplified at the expense of clarity?
- Has enough context been given (overall in the sample)?
- If not, is it because information became available more recently than the time-frame covered in the review?
- Is there any consistent omission of a key area of context?
- If taking a partial viewpoint, was it sufficiently signposted?
- Would it have met audience expectations re: its timing and slot?
- Could any failures to contextualise be mitigated by what else was happening that day (shortage of airtime)?

2. Analysis

In the reviewer's opinion, each of the 30 items was presented clearly and in context. This was also the conclusion for the sample as a whole. In forming this conclusion, the reviewer took into account the 40 other items (referred to in section II above), which although they fell outside of the scope of the study (by not mentioning the fiscal stimulus package *per se*), demonstrated that the matter of contention was being presented in the context of the global economic crisis. Across the month under review there were a number of stories from North America, China and the UK reporting on the effect of the economic slowdown in those countries. There was also Alan Kohler's nightly finance slot: it featured only three times in the review sample, but on every other evening it served as a backdrop to the item on the stimulus package. And finally, there were a number of homegrown stories about jobs and company profits: the airlines, the car industry, mining and retail were among the sectors reflected in this period.

The reviewer notes that this was essentially a political story, particularly in the period under review (in which the policy had been announced and implemented but not yet delivered, and during which there was

lively debate in both the House and the Senate). Therefore the expectation would be that the bulk of the sample would comprise Canberra-originated stories. This was indeed the case: 70% of the items in the sample came from the Canberra bureau, and a further 5% were from state reporters (reflecting the New South Wales government's role in the process). The remainder comprised mainly economic takes on the stimulus package.

The final important factor in considering the context in which the story was presented, were the bushfires. The role of that "event" in determining the extent and breadth of coverage – occurring just as the fiscal stimulus package story had been gaining momentum – is discussed in detail in the next section.

C. Perspectives

In 5.2.2(d) of the Editorial Policies, journalists are required to "be impartial". The definition includes the following statement:

Do not unduly favour one perspective over others.

There are often plausible explanations for why a particular perspective may be present more often or more prominently in the sample than its importance would suggest is reasonable. The questions in this section are designed to alert the reviewer where that might have happened, and then to seek to understand the reasons, or in the absence of explanation, to consider whether there has been a failure of impartiality.

1. The Grid (Appendices III and IV)

The "Perspectives Grid" of this impartiality template is the heart of the study. It provides for the most comprehensive overview of the body of material under review, and as such is the most likely to flag up any issues which could lead to a failure to verify. The colour key in Appendices III and IV refers to the reviewer's judgement of the prominence of the perspective in the item – as main perspective (green), second most prominent perspective (yellow) or third in prominence (red).

The purpose of the grid is to enable the reviewer to answer all the points at III(C)(2). It is not intended to provide a scientific answer to the verification test. As the methodology makes clear, the Impartiality Template is essentially a tool which may serve to highlight potential issues requiring further attention, and also to provide a set of data to support and/or explain the reviewer's conclusions.

Appendix III documents the space devoted to each perspective. Eleven perspectives were defined by the reviewer as being relevant to the story. They were arrived at by watching the entire sample, after which an initial list was drawn up. This was cross-referenced with the external sources listed in III(A). The sample was then viewed a second time, during which an assessment was made of the percentage of time (shown as %) devoted to each perspective.

The allocation of percentages to each perspective is a matter of judgement more than of science. Some of the perspectives overlap or may appear to be sub-sections of a larger heading. For example is **Infrastructure** a perspective in its own right or actually a sub-section of **Stimulus Package Detail**? The distinction is that in the latter, the perspective is presented in the context of the federal government's political strategy, whereas in the former it reflects the delivery aspect of the proposal, presented outside of a party political context. In allocating the % scores the calculation was often particularly fine. On these occasions the reviewer split the % allocated between the perspectives. There is a summary of each item in Appendix I, which will aid the reader in understanding the basis for the reviewer's % allocation in each case.

Economic Indicators	representing the % time devoted to discussion of economic and fiscal indicators which inform the federal government's fiscal stimulus strategy, as opposed to detail of the fiscal stimulus package itself. This is a non party political perspective
Stimulus Package Detail	representing the % time devoted to the reporting of the detail of the stimulus package in the context of the government's proposals; this should be assumed to include the occasions when the government is using the platform to make a political point. This is broadly the federal government's perspective
Coalition Politics	representing the % time devoted to the Coalition's opposition to the federal government's proposals; this should be assumed to include the occasions when the Coalition is jousting with the government. This is broadly the coalition perspective
The Electorate	representing the % time devoted to reflecting policy areas relating to population sectors (families, consumers, unemployed). Some of course overlap
Infrastructure/Building	representing the % time devoted to specific discussion of the allocation to building and infrastructure projects in the stimulus package
Business	representing the % time devoted to reflecting the perspective of business and industry in relation to the stimulus package
Jobs	representing the % time devoted to specific discussion of the strategy of defending jobs and job creation (as opposed to strategy to deal with the unemployed)
Interest Rates	representing the % time devoted to discussion of interest rates
Independents/Greens	representing the % time devoted to the minor parties and independents
Global Economic Crisis	representing the % time devoted to the crisis in an international context
Senate	representing the % time devoted to the passage of the bill in the Senate (where not otherwise counted in the Coalition Politics and Independents/Greens heading)

Appendix IV (Voice), is by contrast relatively straightforward, consisting of grouped headings to represent the identity of the interviewees heard across the sample period.

2. Analysis

The following questions were posed across the entire sample, rather than item by item, after the numerical data had been compiled and analysed:

- Was any perspective particularly dominant across the sample?
- Is there an explanation for that (e.g. most important perspective)?
- Were any relevant perspectives omitted or rarely mentioned?

- Is there an explanation for that (e.g. what else was happening that day)?
- Did any perspective receive less prominence than its importance would suggest it deserved?

The reviewer first looked at each item, to examine to what extent the relevant perspectives were covered in relation to news developments on that particular day. The reviewer then looked at the grid as a whole, to ascertain how far the relative space devoted to each perspective and time given to each voice, reflected the narrative of the matter of contention. The story fell into a series of (overlapping) phases or thematic clusters, which can be summarised thus:

- Announcement of the fiscal stimulus package, including the detail;
- Reaction to the fiscal stimulus package;
- Political debate in the House and Senate involving the Government, the Coalition and the minor parties,
- Political and economic “fall-out” from the passage of the bill.

On the basis of these phases of the story, the expectation would be that detail about the package’s contents (along with the government’s point of view), would dominate the early days of coverage, with the emphasis shifting from discussion of fiscal detail to political debate, as the story unfolded. However, it should be noted that 14 of the 30 items which comprise the review, were broadcast over just two days in February. The remaining 16 items occupied the rest of the month, almost always on separate days. As noted in III(B)(2) above, this is partly accounted for because of the bushfire tragedy which occurred just after the stimulus package was announced. In the reviewer’s opinion, due to the fact that half of the review sample covers just two bulletins, **caution should be exercised in reading too much into the percentage totals at the foot of the chart**, as the majority of space was “available” to the story when it was in its announcement phase.

The “event” of the bushfires is an extreme example of how an unexpected major news story (in this case a national tragedy of unparalleled magnitude), can squeeze out what had been the only show in town, and which had until then, been increasing rather than decreasing in newsworthiness. In the reviewer’s opinion, the bushfires entirely and justifiably account for the fiscal stimulus package going from the story which dominated the news, to making it on air only when significant news developments demanded.

The stimulus package was announced on February 3, and on February 7 bushfires engulfed a number of Victorian towns, killing 173 people and injuring hundreds more. As the ABC TV Political Editor noted in conversation with the review author:

We were expecting a row in the House over the intended size of the cash payouts. The bushfires, understandably, robbed the story of an enormous amount of oxygen; even Question Time was cancelled and that meant that Turnbull never got to directly confront Rudd. It wasn’t just that airtime wasn’t available, but MPs’ minds were now on other matters.

The ABC Network News Editor expanded on the same thought: while the main political developments relating to the stimulus package continued to be covered, the “second” story (which may well have comprised business reaction and business case studies) just wasn’t commissioned after February 7 – both due to lack of bulletin space and lack of resources:

The bushfires were all encompassing. It was a whole new world and all our resources were focused in on covering that one story. ANY other story faced a real challenge to make it on air.

a. Appendix III (Aspect)

As discussed in III(C)(2) above, 50% of the review sample covers just two days of output. While the initial phase of a story generally gets greater coverage than subsequent days, it is not usually quite so stark a contrast. For this reason, caution is urged in reading too much into overall totals.

In compiling the data, the initial calculation was made item by item. The reviewer counted the time each perspective received in a given item, and assigned a percentage share for that item. The percentage assigned to each 'perspective was then aggregated across the sample, to reach the total. When reading the grid totals therefore, the percentages are proportionate, rather than representations of real time.

The grid copes effectively with being able to demonstrate the thematic clusters identified in III(C)(2). The truncation of available airtime notwithstanding, the trend of the coverage is clear. The key perspectives in the first week were the economic detail and the explanation of the Government's proposals. It is not until week two that the Coalition arguments get a real airing (mainly in the form of Malcolm Turnbull's opposition to the package). Just as the political battle begins, time devoted to the fiscal detail recedes. There is also a brief period where the Independents and Greens come to the fore. All this entirely accords with developments in the story.

Beyond the Canberra political story, there are a number of "constituencies" which also receive specific coverage in the context of the stimulus package: the unemployed, families, construction workers.

While the grid suggests that just 4% of airtime is devoted in the sample to the perspective, "Global Economic Crisis", this apparent shortfall of what might be considered a key perspective, is explained in III(B)(2) above. The global context is mostly reflected in stories which fell outside of the sample under review. While those stories did not specifically mention the stimulus package, it was nevertheless the "elephant in the room" in all 70 items.

Overall, thematic and political balance appears to have been achieved, with discussion of the key issues getting the coverage which would be expected relative to their importance, and to competing news events.

The reviewer does have one specific comment about the prominence given to one of the perspectives in the sample. Each evening there is a short "Finance" section presented by Alan Kohler. Time and again it offered real insight and analysis in an accessible format. On three occasions in February the segment was dominated by discussion of aspects of the fiscal stimulus package. On other days, the relationship was understood if not explicit. In the reviewer's opinion it may have been helpful if, on at least some of these occasions, the Finance section had been attached to the fiscal stimulus package "belt" in the programme. Instead, it often felt like it was an island, suggesting the contents bore little relation to the main story of the day, which had aired around twenty minutes earlier.

Outside of the financial press, business and finance has traditionally been a ring-fenced "ghetto" in news: the assumption being that only business people and those with stocks and shares could possibly be interested in the Dow Jones, RBA minutes or the yen/dollar rate. But as The Australian reported on June 9 for example, Australians have far more exposure to the share market than any other nation, with 80 per cent of assets in shares or mutual funds (most countries have 10 per cent or less, with no other country above 60 per cent, according to the IMF). In other words, especially in Australia, stock market movements seriously affect the financial security of ordinary people. The global economic crisis has only served to increase public interest in the economy.

The lack of prominence given to the Finance section in this key period may be considered an issue of editorial judgement, rather than an Editorial Policies matter (and therefore outside of the scope of this review). It is not serious enough to constitute a failure of impartiality. Nevertheless, the reviewer recommends, in the interests of better serving the viewer, that on "big" economic days, where a finance-

related story leads the bulletin, or occupies a high slot, that consideration be given to moving Finance up the running order to reflect that.

In conversation with the TV Network News Editor, the reviewer was advised that although the preference had traditionally been for the Finance Section to occupy a consistent slot towards the end of the bulletin, it wasn't unknown for it to be moved higher up the running order. So a precedent has been set, perhaps it could be further experimented with?

News Division responded:

There have been occasions when this package has been moved up in the bulletin. But there is some reluctance to do this from local bulletin executive producers and by Alan Kohler himself. Executive Producers think it slows the pace of the bulletin and Alan Kohler thinks there is an audience switch-on for his segment later in the bulletin. An alternative is to point to the Kohler segment at the end of the main related story that is run at the top of the bulletin.

The reviewer accepts the News Division response as valid, and agrees with the argument about pacing of the bulletin. The suggestion of "promo'ing" (in television parlance), the Kohler segment, is an excellent idea. On any of the occasions it is used, thought might also be given to "backreffing" to the main story in the handover to Alan Kohler.

b. Appendix IV (Voice)

The second element examined under perspectives, is Voice. Voice represents any soundbites or interview clips (live or pre-recorded) in the sample under review. The detail is on the attached grid. The percentage calculation is made item by item, by adding up the total voice time in a particular item, and arriving at a percentage based on the proportion of that time each interviewee received. As in the "Aspect" calculation, the percentage assigned to each "voice" in each item is then aggregated across the sample, to reach the total voice time. When reading the percentages therefore, they are proportionate, rather than absolute.

The majority of "voice time" was taken up by politicians, as would be expected from what is essentially a political initiative. These are the headlines:

- Kevin Rudd received 5% less airtime than Malcolm Turnbull.
- By contrast, the Treasurer Wayne Swan, received 2% more airtime than opposition counterpart Julie Bishop and her successor, Joe Hockey (who took over the portfolio at the end of February).
- Government/ALP voices combined received 13% more airtime than Coalition voices.
- Adding Independents and Greens to the Opposition total, Labor Party voices still received proportionately more political airtime – 5% more than the Coalition and Independents/Greens combined.

No conclusion should be reached on the division of voice time alone: it does not in itself constitute a breach of the Editorial Policies Standard, which states that "it is not necessary to give all sides equal time". The apparent disparity in total "voice time" between the ruling party and the Opposition does however require further examination. The reviewer needs to establish whether there is an explanation. Are there other factors for example that should be taken into account?

This is not an election campaign, there is no requirement for absolute balance during a set time period. And indeed even at election time, "stop-watching" has fallen out of favour as the only method by which to judge fairness and impartiality. What the reviewer is looking for is a sense of fair play: that over the period each entity gets a fair hearing.

These are the factors considered by the reviewer in reaching her finding:

- When the stimulus package was announced, it was “the only show in town”. There was ample room to let the packages breathe on those first few days – and that played well for the government’s perspective. As reflected in the comment of the TV Political Editor in II(B) above, the lobby was gearing up for a face-off between Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull at Question Time. Then the bushfires happened: the story went into cold storage for a few days. It effectively lost momentum, which it never fully regained.
- It would be expected that the government proposals and the details of the package would occupy most airtime on the day of the announcement and even the day after, as the Coalition absorbed its contents, framed its strategy and formulated its responses.
- It wasn’t just a political story: the bulletin needed to communicate the substantial detail of the measures in the package to its viewers, and that inevitably would include more Government “voice time” than Opposition (whether coalition or minor parties/independents). A cross-reference of the “Aspect” grid with the “Voice” grid, suggests that the Government “voice time” was particularly high in the early days when the main theme was discussion of the measures in the stimulus package.
- When the focus turned to political strategy, there is a higher “voice time” count from the Opposition benches.
- On a number of occasions, the “balance” was provided by non-political voices: for example, an economist or a pressure group.
- The reviewer examined particularly the key period for the Opposition, when the bill moved to the Senate and was voted down as a result of the Coalition’s opposition. This was between February 6 and 13. Over this period, Coalition and Government voices were virtually evenly split, even allowing for the chunk of “voice time” devoted to hearing from the Senate Greens and Independents.
- Voice time is not the only indicator of balance, and as noted above the Editorial Policies Standard does not require that all sides be given equal time . Not only does a “stop-watch” method fail to take account of prominence or content, but it also fails to take account of the commentary: to what extent, for example, the Opposition arguments might be paraphrased in the script. Here cross-referencing with Appendix III (Aspect) is important. If there was a significant imbalance in the airing given to opposition views, the reviewer would expect to see that reflected in the percentage count on the Aspect grid (which takes into account both commentary and voice). In fact, across the entire sample, the Coalition’s perspective was second only to the perspective reflecting Economic Indicators. And in what has been identified as the key period for the Coalition, from the 6th to the 13th, the Coalition viewpoint received more coverage than the government point-of-view, 26% of the airtime, compared with the government’s 21%.
- Finally, as has been discussed earlier, the review artificially ring-fenced 30 items, from a possible total of around 70 economy-related stories in the bulletin in February. Many of those excluded items will have contained political voices, which didn’t qualify to be counted here, because they didn’t actually mention the fiscal stimulus package.

Because of the extraordinary circumstances of the bushfires, clustering the phases of the story proved more meaningful on this occasion than taking a single overview of the sample. The thematic clusters, identified by the reviewer and demonstrated in both grids, proved crucial in determining the extent to which the perspectives were fairly represented.

The reviewer concluded that analysis of the perspectives found a fair airing for all views and all voices in relation to the matter of contention. Accordingly, in the opinion of the reviewer, the sample has fulfilled the requirement for impartiality in relation to this section of the study.

D. No conflicts, no prejudgement

The relevant clause of the editorial policies reads:

5.2.2 Staff must ... observe the following principles:

(a) The ABC takes no editorial stand in its programming.

(b) Avoid conflicts of interest.

....

(d) Be impartial. Editorial judgements are based on news values, not for example on political, commercial or sectional interests or personal views. . .

It is virtually impossible to detect pre-judgement when the reviewer only has access to the broadcast item. For this reason the methodology allows for the reviewer to interview the relevant personnel if and when the reviewer, having viewed the broadcast item, regards it as necessary.

1. Considerations

A failure of impartiality can be the result of pre-judgement and may be the only explanation available in the absence of other explanations. It is not necessary to test for this *per se*, as the reviewer is required to judge the output on its own merits, and the EFFECT of the failure as opposed to the cause. But if the output is found lacking for no obvious reason, it may be one explanation, and the ABC would be expected to account for the failure.

Occasionally though, it will be possible for a reviewer to detect a personal bias in the reporter. This may be because the same reporter is continually reaching a conclusion not based on the evidence presented, in a series of reports.

2. Questions

- Is there anything in the way the reporter frames the questions which suggests they have a point of view?
- Can it be explained because there is no-one available “from the other side” to challenge the interview, so the reporter has to be seen to be asking the difficult questions?
- If the reporter appears to reach a professional judgement is it based on sound evidence?
- Is the evidence presented in the program or is it already notorious?
- Is the reporter qualified, by virtue of their specialism to reach a judgement?
- Does the reporter appear to take a particular angle on the story, or omit a particular viewpoint, **on more than one occasion** that cannot be readily explained?

3. Analysis

The reviewer did not note any issues in relation to this section of the study.

E. Pictures and Sound

Whilst neither this, nor the following section on the conduct of interviews, relate to specific clauses in Section 5 of the Editorial Policies, they receive specific attention because of their importance to the verification process. They serve to prompt consideration of important elements in any test for fairness and impartiality.

1. Questions

- Do the images support the words (or vice versa) or are they at odds in any way?
- If the images have been censored or were filmed by an interested party (e.g. a PR agency handout), were they clearly labeled as such?
- Is there any sense that strong images have skewed the news values of the story, and resulted in greater prominence for the story than it would otherwise have received?
- Is there any sense that the lack of images has resulted in a story being underreported?
- Do on-screen labels (of interviewees for example) describe their position sufficiently (e.g. player/influencer/expert/lobbyist)?
- Has any sound been obviously added to the material for broadcast, which was not on the footage when it was shot?
- Does the additional soundtrack materially alter the viewer's interpretation of the events being depicted?
- In relation to the tone of an interview, or an exchange of views within an item, is there anything on the soundtrack which would affect your understanding of the event, which the script or pictures alone would not convey (for example a belligerent or badgering tone from the presenter)?

2. Analysis

The reviewer did not note any issues in relation to this section of the study.

F. Interviews

Interviews can be the most problematic to assess in relation to impartiality. It is generally accepted in a live or as-live situation, that the interviewee – purely by virtue of being given airtime – has a fair chance to make their point, unless they are clearly treated unfairly by the interviewer. However, clips within film reports are an entirely different matter – particularly as the question is more often than not omitted, and the interviewee's response is rarely broadcast in full. As in sections III(D) and III(E) above, this section does not relate to a specific part of the editorial standard, but its intention is to focus on sound clips as distinct from commentary. If there are any shortcomings in this section, the relevant editorial standard will be applied.

1. Questions

for live or as live interviews or discussions

- Was the interviewee allowed to put their point across?
- Did the reporter challenge the interviewee (most important in a one on one situation)?
- If the interviewee was controversial, were their views rigorously tested?
- Did the reporter appear sufficiently briefed to conduct the interview?
- Was the introduction to the interviewee fair?
- Were the questions relevant?
- Were any important questions not asked?

for soundbites within filmed reports

- Is it clear what question the interviewee was asked?
- Does their response appear to reflect their perspective or is there any suggestion their remarks have been taken out of context?
- Have vox pops been well chosen and do they appear representative of the constituency they are intended to reflect (single mothers, teenagers, soldiers in Iraq, voters in Sydney)?

General Questions

- Were appropriate interviewees included in the report?
- Across the sample, was there a fair balance of views represented?
- If only a limited range of voices, was there some explanation (e.g. access to a war zone)?

2. Analysis – Identification of interviewees

There is a concern relating to the editing and identification of a number of interview clips. As can be seen in the detail below, there are a number of occasions when the soundbite is too short to be identified by an on-screen name super. The ABC style guide advice on such occasions is that the interviewee should instead be introduced in the script:

Grabs of less than five seconds are too short to super. Indicate them on the script.

This guideline was not followed on any of the occasions listed below. This is the detail of the items of concern:

Stim Reax 03/02/09

There were two unidentified soundbites in this package. The first was in a sequence about the announcement that \$14bn was to be spent on school infrastructure. The images preceding the script appeared to be footage from a school in Adelaide. But it looked like the interviewee was in a totally different location, surrounded by a forest of microphones. There was time to introduce the speaker, and it

would have been straightforward to have done so, as the clip followed a section of commentary. The unidentified voice said:

We'd expect that over 70% would be allocated to public schools.

The reviewer didn't recognise the speaker. And it wasn't clear from the context which "constituency" he represented. Without knowing who the voice was, the clip is ambiguous – is it stating a desire from an educator or a policy pledge from a member of the government? The ABC archivist tracked down the information for the reviewer. The speaker was Angelo Gavrielatos of the Australian Education Union.

The second unidentified soundbite was only three seconds long and would have been difficult to introduce as it was directly off the back of a soundbite from Malcolm Turnbull. The speaker was recognised by the reviewer as Bob Brown, the Leader of the Greens in the Senate. He said:

I'll give this a 6.5 out of ten.

This is less problematic than the previous clip, as Bob Brown would be a well-known figure to most of those watching the ABC bulletin, and the meaning of his soundbite is clear: he is giving Kevin Rudd's package 6.5 out of 10.

Parliament 04/02/09

There are three soundbites of senators butt-joined together. None of them are individually identified, although the script did make clear that they were all senators. The reviewer recognised and was therefore able to identify the final two speakers, but did not recognise the first speaker.

This was the sequence:

REPORTER	<i>The Coalition has some support in the Senate for applying scrutiny to the government's spending.</i>
(female – not recognised)	<i>We're not going to be bullied.</i>
(Senator Xenophon)	<i>You don't buy a \$42bn car without having a good look under the bonnet.</i>
(Senator Fielding)	<i>They are just asking us to vote for it. Well that's crazy.</i>

The issue here is not one of comprehension, as the point is clear, as is the broad designation of the speakers. Two of the three senators are fairly well known. The reviewer would have liked to have known the political affiliation of the first speaker. A trawl of images on Google identified her as Greens Senator, Christine Milne.

Parliament 05/02/09

There is a soundbite of Senator Bob Brown which is neither labelled on screen nor introduced. However, he effectively introduces himself. This is the script:

The Greens are going to be constructive about it.

Shortly afterwards, five state premiers are featured in a series of short soundbites. None are labelled on screen nor individually introduced, however three of them effectively introduce themselves.

(Brumby, Victoria):	<i>The task here is to turn this in to projects quickly.</i>
REPORTER:	<i>Each premier has several billion reasons to be happy.</i>

- (Bligh): *Queensland's share is....*
- (Rees) *A rule of thumb is a two-thirds share for NSW.*
- (Rann, SA) *We also have \$200m of schools maintenance projects ready to go right now.*
- (Barnett): *I would expect WA to get 10% of it.*

Should viewers be expected to instantly recognise which states Rann and Brumby represent?

Parliament 13/02/09

There is a soundbite of Senator Barnaby Joyce, the Nationals Leader in the Senate, speaking in Parliament following the passage of the bill. He is neither labelled nor introduced. The clip follows a section of commentary about the price Senator Xenophon had extracted from the government in return for his support for its stimulus package. The clip was too short to super on screen, however it would have been possible to introduce him. The clip said:

It was a political masterstroke.

There is an added issue here, which is not strictly related to the labelling of the clip, it relates instead to comprehension of its meaning. In the reviewer's opinion, it would have been helpful for the soundbite's context to have been clearer. This is the full transcript of the sentiment he expressed:

For Senator Xenophon, even though I do not agree with his position, it was a political masterstroke. He has left them all in his wake. He has managed to get more than Minister Wong got from her own cabinet.

Source: Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, , 12 February 2009, page 978
(Senator Joyce, Leader of the Nationals in the Senate),
<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/dailys/ds120209.pdf>.

It's clear from the context that Senator Joyce intended it as a compliment to Senator Xenophon and as an attack on the government. Due to the clip's brevity and the decision not to identify the speaker, the meaning may be ambiguous, or at the least confusing.

In this example, in the reviewer's opinion, extra context (by taking a longer soundbite), would have helped enormously.

Considerations

A failure to observe house style does not necessarily also constitute a breach of the editorial standards. In the majority of the instances detailed above, the omission of the information as to the identity of the speaker is irritating rather than misleading: it could generally be worked out from the context. In addition, the majority of those who aren't named are reasonably well known, and the majority (though certainly not all) of the bulletin viewers, are likely to know the identity of the speaker in each case.

There are also legitimate occasions when a short unidentified soundbite can work very effectively, almost as a tease. But in the reviewer's opinion, this should be the exception rather than the rule, and such a device is only acceptable when used consciously, sparingly and when its purpose is clear.

That leaves two instances (February 3 and February 13) in the sample under review, where identification is a real issue: the identity cannot be construed from the context, and the lack of identification may be the defining factor as to whether a viewer is able to fully determine the meaning of the clip. In both cases, it would have been straightforward to have introduced the speaker in the commentary.

The reviewer discussed the points with both the TV Network Editor and the Political Editor. The Network Editor said that it was an issue about which he was already aware. He also shared the reviewer's concern that on occasion very short soundbites might rob a sentiment of its meaning. It was, he said, often the result of the story length over-running in the edit suite. In an effort to keep the report to the time allocated (e.g. 1'45" or 2'00"), rather than edit out a whole sequence, the reporter might instead shorten a soundbite, thus losing the ability to put a name super on the screen, and possibly on occasion also inadvertently losing the meaning.

The Political Editor of TV News confirmed that he had been made aware that omitting to specifically identify an interviewee was not generally acceptable. He also made the same point as the Network Editor, that he and his colleagues are often trying to convey a lot of information in limited time:

My reports are generally under 2'. If I get a longer piece on air it is generally considered an indulgence.

This review is of material that was aired three months ago. The reviewer has been assured that action is already being taken to ensure clearer identification and context for soundbites.

There has clearly been a failure to observe house style. But has it also resulted in a failure of impartiality, either for an individual item or for the sample as whole? The failure to clearly identify a trade union official on one occasion, and the Nationals leader in the Senate on another were the only two occasions in which the omission may have led to confusion in the mind of a viewer. This would fall within the Editorial Policies standard relating to Accuracy, i.e. whether it resulted in misleading content being aired. In the reviewer's opinion, the lack of identification and context for Barnaby Joyce's soundbite would not have altered the viewer's perception of the report. The lack of identification of the official from the Education Union may have encouraged the viewer to believe it was the voice of a member of the government, pledging that 70% of the education funding would be going to public schools. But even though it wasn't a government pledge, the figure is about right. Therefore, in the context of the overall focus of the story, which was general reaction to the announcement of the stimulus package, the reviewer considered that it did not constitute a serious inaccuracy.

In conclusion, in the reviewer's opinion, the examples of failure to observe house style in regards to identification of interviewees, does not in this sample constitute a breach of the guidelines. However, it is a matter of concern that the viewer is not being best served by the custom; that News has already taken the issue on board is reassuring.

News Division responded:

News agrees that it should be clear from either supers or scripting who is speaking in grabs that are included in stories. Occasionally a person is so well known that it might be unnecessary (for instance, the Prime Minister). But where there is the potential for confusion or even the possibility of accidentally misleading the audience, the identity of the person speaking must be made clear. This is an issue that the Network Editor for TV News has discussed with the Canberra bureau and it has largely been remedied since the reviewed content went to air. He says the problem has partly arisen because the bureau staff often feel under pressure to bring their stories in under two minutes because of the competing demands of stories in other states. This has resulted in the use sometimes of very short grabs without supers. And while two minutes should be the average, there are often cases where the story is so important that a longer duration is warranted. The Network Editor has encouraged bureau staff to adopt the philosophy that the duration of a story should depend on its merit, not on the other stories that are around. They need to liaise with the TV Network Editor who can warn the states that the package is going to go long and why.

G. Balance, Fairness, Impartiality

These are the relevant clauses from the Editorial Policies:

5.2.1 All news and current affairs content will be accurate, impartial and objective, and thereby avoid bias....

5.2.2 Staff must ... observe the following principles:

....

- (d) *Be impartial. Editorial judgements are based on news values, not for example on political, commercial or sectional interests or personal views. Do not unduly favour one perspective over others.*
- (e) *Be balanced. Balance will be sought but may not always be achieved within a single program or publication; it will be achieved as soon as reasonably practicable and in an appropriate manner. It is not essential to give all sides equal time. As far as possible, present principal relevant views on matters of importance.*

This section is best judged not by examination of each story, but by looking at the sample content as a whole, with the benefit of the answers to the questions in the previous four sections.

1. Considerations

To fail this section, the content is likely to have failed on a number of occasions in the previous four sections, such that the combined impact of these failures would lead to a failure to pass the impartiality test. For the sample to pass that test, the reviewer must be able to state:

In my professional opinion, the sample would equip a reasonable person to make up their own mind about [insert brief description of the matter of contention which is the subject of the Quality Assurance Project].

2. Questions

This is an edited list of the questions from section 7.2 of the Impartiality Template. The bullet points omitted are those which are not relevant to this sample.

- Have there been repeated failures in the previous four sections?

None that amounted to a breach of the guidelines either for individual items or for the sample as a whole.

- Was the story overall given reasonable prominence in relation to its importance in the Australian news cycle? If not, could the occasions on which it wasn't given greater or lesser prominence be explained by other news events?

The fiscal stimulus package was covered on the 7pm bulletin from Sydney with the prominence and frequency which would be expected in relation to the strength of the story. It received lesser prominence during the acute phase of the bushfires tragedy. On most other occasions when there was a development in the story, it occupied lead or second position in the bulletin.

- Did the ABC give reasonable prominence to what in the professional judgement of the reviewer are the principal perspectives in the story?

The reviewer considers that the principal relevant perspectives were given the correct prominence in relation to their importance.

- Did the framing of the stories (headlines, introduction, position in bulletin) reflect the story's importance on most occasions?

Yes

- Was the questioning of participants in live or pre-recorded interviews fair?

Yes

IV. Conclusion

ABC TV News coverage of the federal government's second fiscal stimulus package during the period of this review met the test of impartiality developed for this review pilot. That is, in my professional opinion, the sample would equip a reasonable person to make up their own mind about the government's second fiscal stimulus package

KERRY BLACKBURN
July 2009

Appendix I: List of Review Items

List of Review Items

DATE TX	ITEM SLUG	POS.	DUR	PLASMA	STORY SUMMARY
Mon 2nd	Fed Pols	1st	1'59"	BUDGET BLACKHOLE	Rudd: financial crisis means \$115bn has been wiped off fed budgets over next 4 years. Rudd says his aim is to boost economy and protect jobs. IR cut by Reserve Bank could be more than 1 percentage point
Mon 2nd	Uhlmann 2way	2nd	1'50"		Figures today only an indication and will probably get worse; second stimulus package expected this week
Tues 3rd	Parl	1st	2'59"	ECONOMIC CRISIS	\$42bn stimulus package to support jobs and growth. Graphics showing where money going and the effect on the budget deficit. Interest rates cut to lowest in 40 years
Tues 3rd	Stim Reax	2nd	1'50"	ECONOMIC CRISIS	reaction from families, money into schools for repairs and maintenance, environmental protesters calling for more action on climate change, spending on insulation, infrastructure spending. Economists support too
Tues 3rd	Economy 2-way	3rd	1'		Unemployment predicted to rise to 7%, growth "anaemic", forecasts could be further revised downwards. Where does this leave the opposition? Being presented as national security crisis: anyone who questions the proposals is being painted as traitor. Around the world other methods being adopted. But this is an enormous amount of public spending and it is fair to question parts of the package. Turnbull has all of his work in front of him
Tues 3rd	Rates Cut	4th	1'50"	RATE RELIEF	Renters can now afford a mortgage. Presented in the context of the global economic downturn and the economic stimulus package. Said cut and the package should help "cushion the blow". Business been given less interest rate relief than home borrowers. Banks beginning to announce they'll pass on full 1%
Tues 3rd	NSW Econ	5th	1'45"	TALKING SHOP	Rees calls meeting to discuss plans to respond at state level. Says it's all about jobs.

DATE TX	ITEM SLUG	POS.	DUR	PLASMA	STORY SUMMARY
tues 3rd	Rees Studio i/v	6th	1'45"		Rees on what he calls the war on unemployment
Tues 3rd	Finance	17th			local share market steady and Aus\$ up: resulting from the twin boost of the stimulus package and rate cut: Short term measures in fiscal package are fine, but lowest mortgage rate since '68
Wed 4th	Parlt	1st	2'05"	ECONOMIC CRISIS	Government is asking for approval in 42 hours to spend \$42bn: Opposition refuse to support. Turnbull says he knows it won't be popular. Correspondent says some will say it's courageous
Wed 4th	Building	2nd	2'04"	ECONOMIC CRISIS	Public spending projects could take a while, but homeowners already want to take advantage of roof insulation grants. Could it turn round the 50,000 job losses feared by the industry?
Wed 4th	Uhlmann 2-way	3rd	1'15"		Opposing is a risk for the Opposition, and it's hard to see the reward. Greens and independents say they want to be cooperative. Should pass the Senate
Wed 4th	Rees ulay + sot	4th	32"		Will Rees be able to deliver on the infrastructure projects promised at federal level? Says he'll do all he can to ensure fast-tracked. Work on state schools could start very quickly
Wed 4th	Barangaroo ulay + sot	5th	19"		Keating says a Sydney foreshore development should benefit from state handouts as part of stimulus package
Wed 4th	O'Farrell studio	6th	1'45"		O'Farrell says that everyone supports a package, only Nathan Rees doesn't. Calls for a reduction in payroll tax. Says it's all about jobs.
Wed 4th	Finance				The negative tone continues despite yesterday's stimulus package and rate cut and solid rise on Wall St. Now down 10% in Oz this year and 11% in US, despite each govt announcing fiscal stimulus packages and in Oz, a rate cut. Market is giving all this stimulus a bit of a yawn. Retail sales December up 3.8% because of last FSP. Message from retail sales figures is that govt handouts do at least get partly spent. Re. deficits, over the last 30 years: 3 of the budgets have been in the red and deficits all bigger than the biggest surplus

DATE TX	ITEM SLUG	POS.	DUR	PLASMA	STORY SUMMARY
Thurs 5th	Parliament	1st	2'04"	ECONOMIC CRISIS	Passes House of Reps after an all-night sitting. Senate is now where it all matters as no Government majority. State premiers going home to spend the money.
Thurs 5th	Dole Laws	2nd	1'34"	ECONOMIC CRISIS	Allegations that unemployed have been stigmatised by not getting the handout that everyone else will benefit from. Govt Minister says they will benefit them as it is all about supporting jobs.
Fri 6th	Fed Pols	1st	1'46"	PACKAGE DEBATE	Independents say package doesn't do enough for low income earners and unemployed. 200 groups in Canberra to hear the details. Sen Fielding says \$4bn needed to find 100,000 jobs. Govt says 95% will benefit overall. Govt says Liberals need to back the package, but Turnbull says it's irresponsible
Bushfires Sat 7th	Fed Pols	7th	1'	PACKAGE ROW	the Federal Govt hopes the Liberals will change their minds to help the package through. Swan focussing pressure on Turnbull: he asks how long it will take to pay off \$200bn
Sun 8th	Fed Pols	21st	1'46"	PACKAGE DEBATE	Fed govt. under pressure to give more to low income and unemployed. Greens want to take from the rich to give to the poor. Govt says package must pass by Friday . Turnbull says level debt unsustainable: 22-27 bn less debt and spending is the package he'd support. First signs Turnbull could do a deal. Treasury examining fielding's \$4bn proposal for unemployed
Tues 10th	Parliament	16th	1'42"	AID PLEDGE	Mostly about bushfires. Rudd promises access to building funds from stimulus package. Vict has \$1.5bn of housing fund from the package. Turnbull put in difficult position. He asks for specific legislation re bushfire rather than using stimulus package money

DATE TX	ITEM SLUG	POS.	DUR	PLASMA	STORY SUMMARY
Thurs 12th	Parliament	11th	1'51"	SENATE REJECTION	Just one vote blocked the passing of the stimulus package. Sen Xenophon held the decisive vote. Govt offered to bring forward \$410m spending on the Murray Darling to buy off Xenophon, but not enough. Turnbull says policy in disarray, Treasury says unemployed up from 4.5% to 4.8%. Swan says govt voted for jobs and libs/nats voted against. Stimulus package now has Greens policy: \$50 reduction in some cash handouts so \$400m freed up for community work programmes. Senate to stay extra day to reconsider package.
Fri 13th	Parliament	11th	1'58	PACKAGE PASSED	Xenophon's deciding vote in return for \$900m advance on MD money. Rudd says Coalition play politics with the economy. Turnbull says Govt. are mortgaging the future. Water buy-back and water scarcity planning, stormwater harvesting. Turnbull says he knows their decision wasn't popular, but it was right. Poll in WA newspaper puts Coalition down 6pts and Labor up 6. Turnbull playing a long game and says "Labor debt train has left the station"
Sun 15th	Fed Pols	8th	1'42	PRESSURE MOUNTS	Julie Bishop is fighting for her political life, being blamed for Opposition's decision to oppose stimulus package. May take a while to know whether it has worked; Tanner says it could take 12 months: the path back to surplus involves discipline not increased taxes. Unions concerned paid maternity leave is now off the agenda. Reporter says Gillard not allaying concerns. There's speculation an early election is on the cards. Tanner: doesn't want to talk about the election: elections don't create jobs. Bishop's job on the line, office denied she is considering quitting. Turnbull says Bishop has his total confidence

DATE TX	ITEM SLUG	POS.	DUR	PLASMA	STORY SUMMARY
Tues 17th	Fed Pols	7th			Story mainly about Costello turning down Shadow Treasurer job. It turns the corner by saying all this is a sideshow to the main economic game. Reserve Bank minutes from beginning Feb note that Oz will struggle to avoid recession. Govt's billions and interest rates at an all time low meant "a very significant macroeconomic stimulus had been applied to the domestic economy". It would take time to be effective and could be expected to have only a modest effect on the near-term outlook in Oz. Swan: RBA says significant stimulus that'll have an impact over time. Hockey: everything will come down to jobs over next 2-3 years
Fri 20th	RBA	1st	1'43"	POSITIVE FORECAST	RBA Governor says Oz well placed to benefit from renewed expansion. Upturn could start in second half of year, due to rate cuts and stimulus package "comfortable enough with what's been done". Governor spoke about growth forecast of just above zero for this year: already accounts for impact of stimulus and rates cuts and suggested rates low enough to meet current crisis. Commentator says Governor signalled lower cuts and further spaced. Oliver: for more cuts needs deterioration in global and local outlook and we will see that. Correspondent: the Governor drew a distinction between local and other countries, said most cuts have been passed on here. Governor: if we need to use more IR stimulus, then if prudent then we can.
Fri 20th	Finance	14th			shares finished week down. Graph on fiscal stimulus and recessions. Shows private and govt investment spending as % of GDP. Private sector spends 5 times as much as govt. If falls as much as in last recession, govt. spending would have to more than double to replace it - that's \$70bn. So far \$10bn has been announced, so more required

DATE TX	ITEM SLUG	POS.	DUR	PLASMA	STORY SUMMARY
Tues 24th	Parliament	1st	1'57"	BACK TO WORK	govt. spending millions to help retrenched workers. Paid maternity leave looks like it'll have to give. \$300m for immediate access to govt help and more training places on top of \$150m announced last week for new training programs. \$53bn spent on two stimulus packages, an extra \$15bn for new agreement with states, nearly \$5n on infrastructure and billions more for the car industry. Hockey: "where are these new jobs.." Swan: "This govt won't be diverted by the opposition. Correspondent: the Govt can't afford all this, as budget approaches the wish list will have to be pruned. Maternity rights advocate Broderick: advocating paid leave for 30 years, now's the time to deliver
Thurs 26th	Parliament	1st			Rudd told Australians to brace themselves for more bad news. Ind Min said because of economic crisis no job is safe. More jobs go. Poor company results. Business Inv. Up 6% last quarter 08, bucking the trend of other world economies. Turnbull says government announcements are destroying confidence, frightening workers. Victorian Premier pleads companies not to cut staff. ACTU: "take a hit on your profits". Correspondent: companies are taking hits, and so far not cutting jobs. Swan: things will get worse before they get better, but thankfully the Government moved early

Appendix II: All Economy-Related Items

All Economy-Related Items

Date	Item Slug	Pos	Dur	Plasma	Main Elements
Sun 1st	Fed Pols	1st	2'01	IN THE RED	IMF announcement that Fed Budget will go into deficit due to huge shortfalls in tax revenue over next few years. Swann says \$50bn corporate tax fall over four years. IMF say .2%↓ Is Rudd a neo-liberal or social democrat using old archive pre crisis. Turnbull asks if the real Rudd will please stand up
Sun 1st	World Econ Forum	2nd	1'48	TRADE ROW	trade minister Simon Crean at WEF concerned over protectionism with EU minister re dairy subsidies. Trade become a casualty of global economic crisis
Sun 1st	Rees ULAY/SOT	3rd	32"	REES PLAN	nsw may bring forward some planned infrastructure projects and also add some new ones to boost nsw economy
Mon 2nd	Fed Pols	1st	1'59"	BUDGET BLACKHOLE	Rudd: financial crisis means \$115bn has been wiped off fed budgets over next 4 years. Rudd says his aim is to boost economy and protect jobs. IR cut by Reserve Bank could be more than 1 percentage point
Mon 2nd	Uhlmann 2way	2nd	1'50"		figures today only an indication and will probably get worse, second stimulus package expected this week
Mon 2nd	Finance	17th	1'40"		explanation of why us\$ rising and au\$ continuing to fall, also about varied views on house price falls, and continuing share price falls
Tues 3rd	Parl	1st	2'59"	ECONOMIC CRISIS	\$42bn stimulus package to support jobs and growth. Graphics showing where money going and the effect on the budget deficit. Interest rates cut to lowest in 40 years

Date	Item Slug	Pos	Dur	Plasma	Main Elements
Tues 3rd	Stim Reax	2nd	1'50"	ECONOMIC CRISIS	reaction from families, money into schools for repairs and maintenance, environmental protesters calling for more action on climate change, spending on insulation, infrastructure spending. Economists support too
Tues 3rd	Economy 2-way	3rd	1'		Unemployment predicted to rise to 7%, growth "anaemic", forecasts could be further revised downwards. Where does this leave the opposition? Being presented as national security crisis: anyone who questions the proposals is being painted as traitor. Around the world other methods being adopted. But this is an enormous amount of public spending and it is fair to question parts of the package. Turnbull has all of his work in front of him
Tues 3rd	Rates Cut	4th	1'50"	RATE RELIEF	Renters can now afford a mortgage. Presented in the context of the global economic downturn and the economic stimulus package. Said cut and the package should help "cushion the blow". Business been given less interest rate relief than home borrowers. Banks beginning to announce they'll pass on full 1%
Tues 3rd	NSW Econ	5th	1'45"	TALKING SHOP	Rees calls meeting to discuss plans to respond at state level. Says it's all about jobs.
tues 3rd	Rees Studio i/v	6th	1'45"		Rees on what he calls the war on unemployment
Tues 3rd	China Jobless	7th	1'30"	CHINA ECONOMY	how important chinese economy is to world recovery looked at also through job losses in China
Tues 3rd	Finance	17th			local share market steady and Aus\$ up: resulting from the twin boost of the stimulus package and rate cut: Short term measures in fiscal package are fine, but lowest mortgage rate since '68
BACKHEADS					

Date	Item Slug	Pos	Dur	Plasma	Main Elements
Wed 4th	Parlt	1st	2'05"	ECONOMIC CRISIS	Government is asking for approval in 42 hours to spend \$42bn: Opposition refuse to support. Turnbull says he knows it won't be popular. Correspondent says some will say its courageous
Wed 4th	Building	2nd	2'04"	ECONOMIC CRISIS	Public spending projects could take a while, but homeowners already want to take advantage of roof insulation grants. Could it turn round the 50,000 job losses feared by the industry?
Wed 4th	Uhlmann 2-way	3rd	1'15"		Opposing is a risk for the Opposition, and it's hard to see the reward. Greens and independents say they want to be cooperative. Should pass the Senate
Wed 4th	Rees uly + sot	4th	32"		Will Rees be able to deliver on the infrastructure projects promised at federal level? Says he'll do all he can to ensure fast-tracked. Work on state schools could start very quickly
Wed 4th	Barangaroo uly + sot	5th	19"		Keating says a Sydney foreshore devt should benefit from state handouts as part of stimulus package
Wed 4th	O'Farrell studio	6th	1'45"		O'Farrell says that everyone supports a package, only Nathan Rees doesn't. Calls for a reduction in payroll tax. Says it's all about jobs.
Wed 4th	BHP Profit	17th		PROFITS DOWN	Global downturn big hit on company profits. BHP say economy will take longer than expected. Profits fell 60% written off \$4bn. Qantas echoed sentiment. Profits down 66%. Looking to shareholders to raise money to cut debt
Wed 4th	Finance				The negative tone continues despite yesterday's stimulus package and rate cut and solid rise on Wall St. Now down 10% in Oz this year and 11% in US, despite each govt announcing fiscal stimulus packages and in Oz, a rate cut. Market is giving all this stimulus a bit of a yawn. Retail sales december up 3.8% cos of last fsp. message from retail sales figures is that govt handouts do at least get partly spent. Re. deficits, over the last 30 years 3 of the budgets have been in the red and deficits all bigger than the biggest surplus

Date	Item Slug	Pos	Dur	Plasma	Main Elements
Thurs 5th	Parliament	1st	2'04"	ECONOMIC CRISIS	Passes House of Reps after an all-night sitting. Senate is now where it all matters as no Government majority. State premiers going home to spend the money.
Thurs 5th	Dole Laws	2nd	1'34"	ECONOMIC CRISIS	Allegations that unemployed have been stigmatised by not getting the handout that everyone else will benefit from. Govt Minister says they will benefit them as it is all about supporting jobs.
Thurs 5th	Macquarie Jobs	15th	ro		financial crisis hits Macquarie group - 7.5% job cuts since Oct. CEO warns profits expected to fall 50% this year, first in 17 years
Thurs 5th	Finance	16th			small shareholders hit for six, big shareholders getting shares cheap;
Fri 6th	Fed Pols	1st	1'46"	PACKAGE DEBATE	Independents say package doesn't do enough for low income earners and unemployed. 200 groups in Canberra to hear the details. Sen Fielding says \$4bn needed to find 100,000 jobs. Govt says 95% will benefit overall. Govt says Liberals need to back the package, but Turnbull says it's irresponsible
Fri 6th	Reserve Talks	2nd		RECESSION SIDESTEP	gloomy report on recession. Reserve bank slashes GDP forecast and inflation forecast. Sig. rise in unemployment. News Corp report biggest quarterly loss and job cuts. ANZ and NAB show indicators they're suffering. Banks doing reasonably well in global context. Prediction no more big rate cuts. NAB say future RBA cuts may not be passed on in full in future
Fri 6th	US Stimulus	3rd			Obama, echoing rudd, time to act is now
Fri 6th	Finance	13th			oz dollar up. Shares down

Date	Item Slug	Pos	Dur	Plasma	Main Elements
Bushfires Sat 7th	Fed Pols	7th	1'	PACKAGE ROW	the Federal Govt hopes the Liberals will change their minds to help the package through. Swan focussing pressure on Turnbull: he asks how long it will take to pay off \$200bn
Sun 8th	Fed Pols	21st	1'46"	PACKAGE DEBATE	Fed govt. under pressure to give more to low income and unemployed. Greens want to take from the rich to give to the poor. Govt says package must pass by Friday . Turnbull says level debt unsustainable: 22-27 bn less debt and spending is the package he'd support. First signs Turnbull could do a deal. Treasury examining fielding's \$4bn proposal for unemployed
Mon 9th	NOTHING RELEVANT TODAY				
Tues 10th	Parliament	16th	1'42"	AID PLEDGE	Mostly about bushfires. Rudd promises access to building funds from stimulus package. Vict has \$1.5bn of housing fund from the package. Turnbull put in difficult position. He asks for specific legislation re bushfire rather than using stimulus package money
Tues 10th Finance		20th			business conf slumps. Headed for recession. Good retail month. Businesses not investing. Slashing jobs. Exports record low
Wed 11th	Finance	20th			consumer sentiment slump, housing finance up. Mainly about fiscal stimulus in US

Date	Item Slug	Pos	Dur	Plasma	Main Elements
Thurs 12th	Parliament	11th	1'51"	SENATE REJECTION	Just one vote blocked the passing of the stimulus package. Sen Xenophon held the decisive vote. Govt offered to bring forward \$410m spending on the Murray Darling to buy off Xenophon, but not enough. Turnbull says policy in disarray, Treasury says unemployed up from 4.5% to 4.8%. Swan says govt voted for jobs and libs/nats voted against. Stimulus package now has Greens policy: \$50 reduction in some cash handouts so \$400m freed up for community work programmes. Senate to stay extra day to reconsider package.
Thurs 12th	Finance	16th			good profit results oz shares, employment 1200 new jobs in jan - it's a survey not a count - margin of error - anybody's guess what happened
Fri 13th	Parliament	11th	1'58	PACKAGE PASSED	Xenophon's deciding vote in return for \$900m advance on MD money. Rudd says Coalition play politics with the economy. Turnbull says Govt. are mortgaging the future. Water buy-back and water scarcity planning, stormwater harvesting. Turnbull says he knows their decision wasn't popular, but it was right. Poll in WA newspaper puts Coalition down 6pts and Labor up 6. Turnbull playing a long game and says "Labor debt train has left the station"
Fri 13th	Finance	16th			share market higher;rio tinto do deal with chinese and shares go down.
Sat 14th	NOTHING				

Date	Item Slug	Pos	Dur	Plasma	Main Elements
Sun 15th	Fed Pols	8th	1'42	PRESSURE MOUNTS	Julie Bishop is fighting for her political life, being blamed for Opposition's decision to oppose stimulus package. May take a while to know whether it has worked; Tanner says it could take 12 months: the path back to surplus involves discipline not increased taxes. Unions concerned paid maternity leave is now off the agenda. Reporter says Gillard not allaying concerns. There's speculation an early election is on the cards. Tanner: doesn't want to talk about the election: elections don't create jobs. Bishop's job on the line, office denied she is considering quitting. Turnbull says Bishop has his total confidence
Mon 16th	Fed Pols	6th			bishop resigns - no mention of stimulus package but broader mention of economy portfolio - given yesterday that McKechnie's report said being held to blame for MT opposing it
Mon 16th	Finance	17th			japan big slump. Jap far worse shape than U.S. oz market down 50% and we're not even in recession yet
Tues 17th	Fed Pols	7th			Story mainly about Costello turning down Shadow Treasurer job. It turns the corner by saying all this is a sideshow to the main economic game. Reserve Bank minutes from beginning Feb note that Oz will struggle to avoid recession. Govt's billions and interest rates at an all time low meant "a very significant macroeconomic stimulus had been applied to the domestic economy". It would take time to be effective and could be expected to have only a modest effect on the near-term outlook in Oz. Swan: RBA says significant stimulus that'll have an impact over time. Hockey: everything will come down to jobs over next 2-3 years
Tues 17th	Finance	14th			local share market down. Oz\$ down.

Date	Item Slug	Pos	Dur	Plasma	Main Elements
Tues 17th	Airline Woes	16th			Virgin cuts jobs cos of GFC, Qantas cutting down services to Beijing and Shanghai
Wed 18th	Car Jobs	7th			holden future under cloud cos of strategy in US. SA treasurer says can't say there'll be no job losses. Chap from MWU says it's a tough time, need to ensure no enforced redundancies. Company making new 4 cylinder car with help of \$6bn from govt fund to keep car industry afloat
Wed 18th	Retail	8th	1'55"	RETAIL THERAPY	Christmas retails biggest increase in a year. Govt says directly due to cash handouts in Dec. RBA says economy well placed to battle recession. Consumer spending is 25% of GDP. Swan: solid result, shows econ. Security strategy has supported employment in Oz during this period. Turnbull: no evidence cash splash generated one job, let alone 75,000. lower IR also played a part. edey: reasons why oz will fare better in diff. times. Correspondent says stronger banks, weaker dollar, nab man says RBA too optimistic, chinese investors queuing up
Wed 18th	Virgin Cuts			TOUGH DECISION	up to 400 jobs go Brisbane. Unions say shock. Tourism ind say necessary to do it now to avoid problems later. Anna Bligh says talking to company. Union discussing how to avoid further cuts
Wed 18th	Finance				data says oz econ is heading to recession. Global gdp collapses. Wall Street falls. Europe and Asia news alarmingly worse. Local market didn't do as bad as US - but down 3.7% on the week. Fortescue shares up, seems also talking to Chinese. Retail sales, staying home much more 13% reduction on going out.
Thurs 19th	Gillard				fed funding to take on apprentices. Up to \$2800 for apprentices who've been laid off...

Date	Item Slug	Pos	Dur	Plasma	Main Elements
Thurs 19th	Finance				oz shares rallied. Mining shares continue to surge. Commsec says Credit card stats show christmas money was used to pay off debt (first stim package) - repayments up by 22.2%
Fri 20th	RBA	1st	1'43"	POSITIVE FORECAST	RBA Governor says Oz well placed to benefit from renewed expansion. Upturn could start in second half of year, due to rate cuts and stimulus package "comfortable enough with what's been done". Governor spoke about growth forecast of just above zero for this year: already accounts for impact of stimulus and rates cuts and suggested rates low enough to meet current crisis. Commentator says Governor signalled lower cuts and further spaced. Oliver: for more cuts needs deterioration in global and local outlook and we will see that. Correspondent: the Governor drew a distinction between local and other countries, said most cuts have been passed on here. Governor: if we need to use more IR stimulus, then if prudent then we can.
Fri 20th	Finance	14th			Shares finished the week down. Graph on fiscal stimulus and recessions. Shows private and govt investment spending as % of GDP. Private sector spends 5 times as much as govt. If falls as much as in last recession, govt. spending would have to more than double to replace it - that's \$70bn. So far \$10bn has been announced, so more required
Sat/Sun	NOTHING RELEVANT				
Mon 23rd	Super Losses			SHRINKING NEST EGGS	Supers lost 1.85% in Jan, 18% in last 12 months. Virgin Blue big first half loss and job cuts, bluescope steel first ever half yearly loss. Fairfax lost \$365m in first half. Loan losses expected to increase across the board

Date	Item Slug	Pos	Dur	Plasma	Main Elements
Mon 23rd	Finance				Gold price up. Local share market fell heavily again, resource stocks dumped. Local market dropped another 10% since Jan 1st.
Tues 24th	Parliament	1st	1'57"	BACK TO WORK	Govt. spending millions to help retrenched workers. Paid maternity leave looks like it'll have to give. \$300m for immediate access to govt help and more training places on top of \$150m announced last week for new training programs. \$53bn spent on two stimulus packages, an extra \$15bn for new agreement with states, nearly \$5n on infrastructure and billions more for the car industry. Hockey: "where are these new jobs.." Swan: "This govt won't be diverted by the opposition. Correspondent: the Govt can't afford all this, as budget approaches the wish list will have to be pruned. Maternity rights advocate Broderick: advocating paid leave for 30 years, now's the time to deliver
Tues 24th	US Markets	2nd			markets in OZ five year low - but all eyes on Wall St
Tues 24th	Submarine	6th			more than \$25bn on new sub fleet. Abc understands project will run up to \$35bn over life of project. Subs appear to have survived cost cutting and budget shrinking. Not clear what other things sacrificed to pay
Tues 24th	Finance	15th			heavy share market falls, but Oz emerged relatively unscathed.
Wed 25th	Parliament			JOB CUTS	1800 jobs go at Pacific Brands. Manuf in Oz no longer viable. Now going to China, 1850 jobs go. Company received more than \$17m of fed govt assistance. Acerbic exchange between MT and KR: "almost as if each time you hear job losses you can hear champagne corks pop in the LNP room". Swan "One can only imagine how much worse it would be if we hadn't of acted last October". govt knew 3 weeks ago, expects a lot more.

Date	Item Slug	Pos	Dur	Plasma	Main Elements
Wed 25th	Finance	14th			flat share market, but signs econ didn't go back in Dec. Pacific Brands share price down 37%
Thurs 26th	Parliament	1st			Rudd told Australians to brace themselves for more bad news. Ind Min said because of economic crisis no job is safe. More jobs go. Poor company results. Business Inv. Up 6% last quarter 08, bucking the trend of other world economies. Turnbull says government announcements are destroying confidence, frightening workers. Victorian Premier pleads companies not to cut staff. ACTU: "take a hit on your profits". Correspondent: companies are taking hits, and so far not cutting jobs. Swan: things will get worse before they get better, but thankfully the Government moved early
Thurs 26th	Jobs Summit	2nd			NSW summit. Roll call industry heavyweights. Painting a bleak picture. Premier says forum is about jobs. Complaint from all at lack of govt support to fast track investments, money goes to other states. Rees responded with "can do" attitude promise. More money announced for training opportunities for school leavers
Thurs 26th	Finance	14th			dec quarter looks pretty good
Fri 27th	Fed Pols	1st			corp greed . Pacific brands bosses gave themselves massive pay rises. Woolworths planning to hire 7000 workers. Govt pay survey only on finance sector.
Fri 27th	Green Jobs	2nd			dubbed green collar jobs. Nsw allocated \$20m in updating people in green skills. Renewable energy precincts and new mandatory targets for retailers
Fri 27th	Finance	13th			local market steady, harvey norman profit slashed 57%, woolworths up 10%

Date	Item Slug	Pos	Dur	Plasma	Main Elements
Sat 28th	NOTHING				

Appendix III: Perspectives (Aspect)

Perspectives (Aspect)

COLOUR KEY	Denotes prominence of perspective in item
	Main
	Second
	Third

														measured in %	
No	Date	Item	KEY EVENTS	Econ Indicators	Coalition Politics	FSP Detail	Electorate	Infrastr/ Bldg	Business	Jobs	Interest Rates	Indep Parties	Global Econ Crisis	Senate	
1	2	Fed Pols		63	6		14			3	14				
2	2	Uhlmann 2-way		49	6	26				6	13				
3	3	Parliament	Announcement	15	8	10	25	18		4	20				
4	3	Stim Reax		13			20	35	12	20					
5	3	Economy 2-way		52	31					11			6		
6	3	Rates Cut	IR cut by RBA			8	26		15		28		23		
7	3	NSW Economy		25	12	21	16		18	8					
8	3	Rees studio l'view					9	10	6	47	13		15		
9	3	Finance		35			14		31		20				
10	4	Parliament		17	59			2	13				9		
11	4	Building				9	37	20	18	16					
12	4	Uhlmann 2-way		12	23	29						13		23	
13	4	Rees uly + sot				27		73							
14	4	Barangaroo uly + sot						54							

measured in %

No	Date	Item	KEY EVENTS	Econ Indicators	Coalition Politics	FSP Detail	Electorate	Infrastr/ Bldg	Business	Jobs	Interest Rates	Indep Parties	Global Econ Crisis	Senate
15	4	O'Farrell studio			50			10	28	12				
16	4	Finance		35		2			54		4		5	
17	5	Parliament	House of Reps pass	5	40	28						7		20
18	5	Dole Laws				18	82							
19	6	Fed Pols			17	16	24	7		9		12		15
20	7	Fed Pols	Bushfires		44	22	BUSHFIRES					24		10
21	8	Fed Pols		14	14	22	22			3		21		4
22	10	Parliament	(only tiny part)		50	50								
23	12	Parliament	Bill falls in Senate	13	4	11	3			6		53	4	6
24	13	Parliament	Senate passes bill	10	29	7		27		1		26		
25	15	Fed Pols		20	41	26	13							
26	17	Fed Pols	(only 40" segment)	44						12	44			
27	20	RBA	RBA Govnr speech	34		7	10				37		12	
28	20	Finance		27					31				42	
29	24	Parliament			15	22	26	4	4	29				
30	26	Parliament		19	14	13			45	7			2	
% total each perspective				17	15	12	11	9	9	6	6	5	4	3

Appendix IV: Perspectives (Voice)

Perspectives (Voice)

COLOUR KEY	Denotes prominence of perspective in item
	Main
	Second
	Third

Date	Item		Rudd	Labor	Swan	T'bull	Coalition	Bishop/Hockey	Other Ind	Greens	Res bank	Business	Econ Pundit	Pressure Group	Unions	Vox Pop	measured in %
2	Fed Pols		41			21							38				
2	Uhlmann 2-way																
3	Parliament	Announcement	39	13	16	32											
3	Stim Reax		12			12	16			10		15	10		10	15	
3	Economy 2-way																
3	Rates Cut	IR cut by RBA										67					33
3	NSW Economy			34			16					32					18
3	Rees studio l'view			100													
3	Finance																
4	Parliament		12		24	21	22	21									
4	Building			12								66			17		5
4	Uhlmann 2-way																
4	Rees uly + sot			100													
4	Barangaroo uly + sot			100													
4	O'Farrell studio						100										
4	Finance																
5	Parliament	House of Reps pass	4	52	9	14	16			5							

ABC Editorial Policies

measured
in %

Date	Item		Rudd	Labor	Swan	T'bull	Coalition	Bishop/ Hockey	Other Ind	Greens	Res bank	Business	Econ Pundit	Pressure Group	Unions	Vox Pop
5	Dole Laws			43										57		
6	Fed Pols		10		24	13			29	8				16		
7	Fed Pols	Bushfires			50	50					BUSHFIRES WEEKEND					
8	Fed Pols			19		37				44						
10	Parliament	(only tiny part)	40			60										
12	Parliament	Bill falls in Senate	7		24	11			24	34						
13	Parliament	Senate passes bill	19	7		37			30	7						
15	Fed Pols			74		26										
17	Fed Pols	(only 40" segment)						100								
20	RBA	RBA Govnr speech									38		62			
20	Finance															
24	Parliament		44	11	13		13	8						11		
26	Parliament			19	22	17		11				14			17	
	% TOTAL		10	24	8	15	8	6	3	5	2	8	5	4	2	3

Appendix V: Impartiality Template

Impartiality Template

This Impartiality Template is extracted from *Quality Assurance Project 7: Impartiality (TV News Content) – Description and Method*, authored by Kerry Blackburn at the request of the ABC, February 2009.

This template should be adapted after the reviewer has completed an initial viewing of the material and has undertaken detailed background reading of the subject.

The reviewer may be concerned that there is some element of overlap in the sections. It is not possible or helpful to strictly ring fence the elements of impartiality: for example, an item can be unbalanced because it lacks context, or because it is inaccurate, or it can be a more straightforward and “pure” form of balance, where one side of the argument is given three times as much airtime as the other. Therefore, when working through the template the reviewer should be aware that a question could appear in more than one section. Generally, the question is in the section which most applies to it, but the reviewer is free to move them around as he or she sees fit. The sections are not important in themselves, they exist to enable the most thorough analysis of the material. Ultimately, there is only thing being verified, and that is impartiality. The aim is for the reviewer to be able to answer the impartiality test question with confidence .

In assessing the content, the reviewer is reminded to take into account headlines (pictures and words) and scripted presenter introductions, as well as the item itself.

Instructions for Use:

- The reviewer should customise as appropriate to the sample under review.
- Questions can be added to or omitted from any of the sections as the reviewer sees fit.
- This is a checklist to prompt further inquiry where necessary, not a route to judgement of the content. It is designed to flag possible breaches.

1 Accuracy

A number of references in the Editorial Policies relate to the requirement that the ABC output is accurate. The key reference is in section 5.2.2:

(c) Be accurate.

Every reasonable effort, in the circumstances, must be made to ensure that the factual content of news and current affairs is accurate and in context.

The reviewer is required to assess the sample content against the above guideline. A thorough understanding of the topic of the sample content is likely to equip the reviewer with the knowledge necessary to detect a serious breach of accuracy.

A serious breach is defined by either (or both) of the following:

- It materially alters the viewer’s understanding of the story
- It seriously misrepresents an individual or an organization

A serious breach *could* lead to a failure of impartiality, but not necessarily. For a breach of accuracy to lead to the sample content failing the QA, the breach would have to both be “serious” as defined above AND require the reviewer to say “no” to the impartiality test question. While the outcome may be different in a

QA project into accuracy rather than impartiality, it is very unlikely that a single failure of accuracy, even if serious, would lead to a failure of the entire impartiality verification test.

1.1 Considerations

The reviewer should have a reasonable recall of the key facts of the story under review.

1.2 Questions

- Has there been a breach of accuracy in any of the content?
- Have any important facts been omitted, such that they distort the content and render it effectively inaccurate?
- If so, can it (they) be deemed serious?
- If so, would it (they) prevent a viewer from reaching an informed and independent judgement of the issue?

1.3 Action

A serious breach, even if it is not likely to lead to a failure of the entire verification process, should nevertheless be noted as such. The reviewer would be required to approach the relevant journalist within the ABC News Division (via the appropriate manager) to invite their response, before the preliminary findings are published.

[INSERT SPACE FOR NOTES]

2 Context

The reference to context is from this clause in 5.2.2

Every reasonable effort, in the circumstances, must be made to ensure that the factual content of news and current affairs is accurate and in context.

Context can comprise a host of definitions. In relation to impartiality, or the potential failure to be impartial, it is generally accepted to mean whether the journalist gave enough background information for the viewer to reach an informed and independent judgement of the facts.

The reviewer is reminded that context is often easier to judge with hindsight. They should therefore take particular care when applying it to the Impartiality Test, to ensure that the context they are expecting to be reflected was information readily available at the time the report was broadcast.

Other areas in which context can be considered is in relation to signposting and audience expectation. In this case, it is better described as “in context”. Signposting could relate to something as simple as informing the viewer that a single viewpoint is to be represented on this occasion (notifying the viewer that there are other viewpoints and this will be a partial picture). Audience expectation can relate to what the viewer expects from a particular programme, and can be as simple as less explicit pictures during times in which children might be watching. In other words the ABC may be accused of bias towards one party in a conflict for censoring the pictures of, say, a bombing. However, the reason for the omission of the more harrowing visuals, could be simply due to the news bulletin being transmitted at a time when children are likely to be watching.

2.1 Considerations

The reviewer should have a reasonable recall of the key facts of the story under review.

2.2 Questions

- Has the subject matter been oversimplified at the expense of clarity?
- Has enough context been given (overall in the sample)?
- If not, is it because information became available more recently than the time-frame covered in the review?
- Is there any consistent omission of a key area of context?
- If taking a partial viewpoint, was it sufficiently signposted?
- Would it have met audience expectations re its timing and slot Could any failures to contextualise be mitigated by what else was happening that day (shortage of airtime)?

2.3 Action

A serious breach, even if it is not likely to lead to a failure of the entire verification process, should nevertheless be noted as such. The reviewer would be required to approach the relevant journalist within the ABC News Division (via the appropriate manager) to invite their response, before the preliminary findings are published.

[INSERT SPACE FOR NOTES]

3 Perspectives

In 5.2.2 of the Editorial Policies journalists are required to “be impartial”. The definition includes the following statement:

Do not unduly favour one perspective over others.

There are often plausible explanations for why a particular perspective may be present more often or more prominently in the sample than its importance would suggest is reasonable. The questions in this section are designed to alert the reviewer where that might have happened and then to seek to understand the reasons.

3.1 Considerations

In the methodology Section 3.2.5, the reviewer is required note the perspectives which in their professional judgement are relevant. Perspectives include what an earlier QA defined as both aspect and voice: e.g. the issues associated with a story and the voices used to present that story. Here the purpose is to note which perspectives actually feature in the output and with what prominence and at what length. To that end the reviewer is required to compile a simple spreadsheet and conduct some basic numeric analysis of the sample under review. However, there is no word count, stopwatch or other spurious device that in themselves can decide a breach. They are tools at the disposal of the reviewer to use alongside other research methods.

The reviewer is advised to allocate sufficient time to compiling this list. The initial viewing of the material will have given the reviewer a starting point. This should be enhanced by the background reading the reviewer is required to undertake.

It is strongly suggested that the reviewer also refer to external bodies to help in their compilation of a final perspective checklist, particularly in specialist areas about which the reviewer may not themselves have the depth and breadth of knowledge. The reviewer should also read *QA Project 4: Impartiality (Topical and Factual Content)* June 2008 for additional ideas on how to establish the relevant perspectives.

(The reviewer is to devise perspectives spreadsheet appropriate to the project.)

3.2 Questions

These questions should be posed across the entire sample, rather than item by item, after the numerical data have been compiled and analysed

- Was any perspective particularly dominant across the sample?
- Is there an explanation for that (e.g. most important perspective)?
- Were any relevant perspectives omitted or rarely mentioned?
- Is there an explanation for that?
- Was an omission because the perspective didn't have pictures to tell the story?
- Was an omission because the reporter was unable to find a senior voice to reflect the perspective?
- If so was there an explanation for the omission anywhere in the coverage?

3.3 Action

If the reviewer has noted an unexplained omission or poor coverage of a relevant perspective, which cannot be explained and which could lead to non-verification of the sample's impartiality, the reviewer is obliged to formally contact the relevant journalist within the ABC News Division (via the appropriate manager) to invite their response prior to the Preliminary Report being published. A serious breach, even if it does not lead to a failure of the entire verification process, should nevertheless be noted in the final report.

[INSERT SPACE FOR NOTES]

4 No conflicts, no prejudgement

The relevant clause of the editorial policies reads:

5.2.2 Staff must ... observe the following principles:

(c) The ABC takes no editorial stand in its programming

(d) Avoid conflicts of interest

Be impartial. Editorial judgements are based on news values, not for example on political, commercial or sectional interests or personal views.

It is virtually impossible to detect pre-judgement when the reviewer only has access to the broadcast item. That is why the methodology allows for the reviewer to interview the relevant personnel if and when the reviewer, having viewed the broadcast item, regards it as necessary.

4.1 Considerations

A failure of impartiality can be the result of pre-judgement and may be the only explanation available in the absence of other explanations. It is not necessary to test for this *per se*, as the reviewer is required to judge the output on its own merits, and the EFFECT of the failure as opposed to the cause. But if the output is found lacking for no obvious reason, it may be one explanation, and the ABC would be expected to account for the failure.

Occasionally though, it will be possible for a reviewer to detect a personal bias in the reporter. This may be because the same reporter is continually reaching a conclusion not based on the evidence presented, in a series of reports.

4.2 Questions

- Is there anything in the way the reporter frames the questions which suggests they have a point of view?
- Can it be explained because there is no-one available “from the other side” to challenge the interview, so the reporter has to be seen to be asking the difficult questions?
- If the reporter appears to reach a professional judgement is it based on sound evidence?
- Is the evidence presented in the program or is it already notorious?
- Is the reporter qualified, by virtue of their specialism to reach a judgement?
- Does the reporter appear to take a particular angle on the story, or omit a particular viewpoint, **on more than one occasion** that cannot be readily explained?

4.3 Action

A finding of impartiality based on a failure to observe these elements of the Impartiality requirement would have extremely serious consequences for an individual, a program team, the News Division and for the organization. For this reason, the reviewer should alert the News Division as soon as they detect this might be the case and seek to speak directly to the reporter (s) and/or producer(s) involved to get their response and explanation. A finding of a breach of this nature would require legal guidance, even if it didn't result in a failure of the entire verification process.

[INSERT SPACE FOR NOTES]

5 Pictures and Sound

Whilst neither this, nor the following section on the conduct of interviews, relate to specific clauses in Section 5 of the Editorial Policies, they receive specific attention because of their importance to the verification process. They serve to prompt consideration of important elements in any test for fairness and impartiality.

5.1 Considerations

Throughout the viewing of the material, the reviewer should remain alert to the images broadcast, particularly in items which have a strong visual appeal or where the pictures are particularly controversial, for example images of violence. The reviewer should also be alert to the soundtrack which accompanies the filmed report. If the sample contains an abundance of very strong images, particularly if the images themselves have formed part of the legend which now attaches to the story, then the reviewer may decide it is necessary to engage the services of an expert in semiotics. The reviewer is required to seek an expert's opinion if the reviewer is inclined to the opinion that the sample fails the impartiality test wholly or substantially because of images and sound factors.

5.2 Questions

- Do the images support the words (or vice versa) or are they at odds in any way?
- If the images have been censored or were filmed by an interested party (e.g. a PR agency handout), were they clearly labeled as such?

- Is there any sense that strong images have skewed the news values of the story, and resulted in greater prominence for the story than it would otherwise have received?
- Is there any sense that the lack of images has resulted in a story being underreported?
- Do on-screen labels (of interviewees for example) describe their position sufficiently (eg player/influence/expert/lobbyist)
- If any of the images were of a dramatic re-construction, is the material clearly labeled as such?
- Has any sound been obviously added to the material for broadcast, which was not on the footage when it was shot?
- Does the additional soundtrack materially alter the viewer's interpretation of the events being depicted?
- In relation to the tone of an interview, or an exchange of views within an item, is there anything on the soundtrack which would affect your understanding of the event, which the script or pictures alone would not convey (for example a belligerent or badgering tone from the presenter)?

5.3 Action

If the reviewer considers that the use of images or sound has affected the integrity of the sample in any way, they are required to consider precisely which element of Impartiality they may have breached. The reviewer should then contact the relevant journalist within the ABC News Division (via the appropriate manager) to invite their response, before the preliminary findings are made. If there is the possibility that the sample may fail the QA wholly or substantially as a result of the images used, then if an expert in semiotics hasn't already been engaged, now would be the appropriate time to do so.

[INSERT SPACE FOR NOTES]

6 Interviews

Interviews can be the most problematic to assess in relation to impartiality. It is generally accepted in a live or as-live situation, that the interviewee – purely by virtue of being given airtime – has a fair chance to make their point, unless they are clearly treated unfairly by the interviewer. However, clips within film reports are an entirely different matter – particularly as the question is more often than not omitted, and the interviewee's response is rarely broadcast in full.

6.1 Considerations

Most of these points will have been dealt with under the previous sections. This section is included purely for insurance, to ensure that all relevant areas have been covered. The reviewer needs to take an overview of the impact an interview can have – particularly if the interviewee is a key player. There may be cause for concern if the sample content under review, for example, included six live interviews with the Prime Minister and none with the leader of the Opposition, even if the Opposition viewpoint was put by the interviewer.

6.2 Questions

for live or as live interviews or discussions

- Was the interviewee allowed to put their point across?
- Did the reporter challenge the interviewee (most important in a one on one situation)?
- If the interviewee was controversial, were their views rigorously tested?
- Did the reporter appear sufficiently briefed to conduct the interview?
- Was the introduction to the interviewee fair?

- Were the questions relevant?
- Were any important questions not asked?

for soundbites within filmed reports

- Is it clear what question the interviewee was asked?
- Does their response appear to reflect their perspective or is there any suggestion their remarks have been taken out of context?
- Have vox pops been well chosen and do they appear representative of the constituency they are intended to reflect (single mothers, teenagers, soldiers in Iraq, voters in Sydney)

General Questions

- Were appropriate interviewees included in the report
- Across the sample, was there a fair balance of views represented?
- If only a limited range of voices, was there some explanation (e.g. access to a war zone)

6.3 Action

If the reviewer considers that interviews or sound bites have breached the impartiality requirement, the reviewer is required to consider precisely which element of impartiality has not been met. Likely areas would be fairness and balance. If the failure is likely to lead to a failure of the entire verification process, it may be appropriate for the reviewer to contact the interviewee (s) involved to gauge their response. Under all circumstances, the reviewer should contact the relevant journalist within the ABC News Division (via the appropriate manager) to invite their response, before the preliminary findings are made.

[INSERT SPACE FOR NOTES]

7 Balance, Fairness, Impartiality

These are the relevant clauses from the Editorial Policies:

5.2.1 All news and current affairs content will be accurate, impartial and objective, and thereby avoid bias...

5.2.2 Staff must ... observe the following principles:...

(e) (d) Be impartial...Editorial judgements are based on news values, not for example on political, commercial or sectional interests of personal views. Do not unduly favour one perspective over othersBe balanced. Balance will be sought but may not always be achieved within a single program or publication; it will be achieved as soon as reasonably practicable and in an appropriate manner. It is not essential to give all sides equal time. As far as possible, present principal relevant views on matters of importance.

This section is best judged not by examination of each story, but by looking at the sample content as a whole, with the benefit of the answers to the questions in the previous four sections.

7.1 Considerations

To fail this section, the content is likely to have failed on a number of occasions in the previous four sections, such that the combined impact of these failures would lead to a failure to pass the impartiality test. For the sample to pass that test, the reviewer must be able to state:

In my professional opinion, the sample would equip a reasonable person to make up their own mind about [insert brief description of the matter of contention which is the subject of the Quality Assurance Project].

7.2 Questions

- Have there been repeated failures in the previous four sections?
- Has the ABC offered reasonable explanations for the failures?
- Was the story overall given reasonable prominence in relation to its importance in the Australian news cycle?
- If not, could the occasions on which it wasn't given greater or lesser prominence be explained by other news events?
- Did the ABC give reasonable prominence to what in the professional judgement of the reviewer are the principal perspectives in the story?
- Did the framing of the stories (headlines, introduction, position in bulletin) reflect the story's importance on most occasions?
- Did the ABC cover the story more frequently than would be reasonable?
- Was the questioning of participants in live or pre-recorded interviews fair?
- Were the views of controversial participants rigorously tested?
- If external censorship (such as the imposed by governments or military authorities) was operating in any form, was it explained in the report on every occasion? Did the story develop in a way that showed a rational connection with the evidence?

7.3 Action

If the reviewer believes a single issue is likely to lead to the overall sample failing the impartiality test, the reviewer is required to contact the relevant journalist or journalists in the ABC News Division (via the appropriate manager), to invite their response.

If a series of significant failures in previous sections are such that, in the reviewer's professional judgement, the sample overall fails the impartiality test, then it is anticipated that individual responses already will have been solicited in relation to those significant failures. In this circumstance, the preliminary report will be provided for response to the News Division and that response will be considered by the reviewer in reaching the final conclusion.

[INSERT SPACE FOR NOTES]