

PUBLIC REPORT ON AUDIENCE COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2003

1. ABC Complaint Handling Procedures

The ABC is responsible for the quality and standards of all programs on its services.

With so many program services being provided each day, from time to time errors may occur. The ABC aims to ensure that they happen as rarely as possible. However, should they occur, the ABC accepts responsibility and will respond promptly and appropriately.

The ABC aims to respond to complaints as quickly as possible and no later than 28 days after receipt of a complaint.

The roles of ABC Audience & Consumer Affairs and the ABC's Complaints Review Executive are described below.

ABC Audience & Consumer Affairs

ABC Audience & Consumer Affairs deals with written complaints about ABC programs.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, it will either be investigated by Audience & Consumer Affairs or referred to the relevant division for direct response. All written complaints alleging a breach of the ABC's Editorial Policies will be investigated by Audience & Consumer Affairs.

Audience & Consumer Affairs is independent of program making divisions within the ABC.

Complaints can be sent to Audience & Consumer Affairs at GPO Box 9994 in your capital city, or submitted by email to comments@your.abc.net.au.

If a complainant expresses dissatisfaction with a response received from Audience & Consumer Affairs, the complaint and response will be forwarded to the ABC's Complaints Review Executive (CRE) for independent review.

Complaints Review Executive

The ABC established the role of Complaints Review Executive (CRE) to provide an additional level of internal review for complainants who express dissatisfaction with ABC Audience & Consumer Affairs' response to their complaint.

The CRE has broad scope to independently review the broadcast and the manner in which the complaint was originally dealt with, and determine whether the ABC acted appropriately. The CRE is independent of both ABC Audience & Consumer Affairs and all program makers.

This additional tier of internal review does not preclude complainants from seeking external review via the Australian Broadcasting Authority, or the ABC's Independent Complaints Review Panel, depending on the nature of the complaint. Both these forms of review are external and entirely independent of the ABC.

2. Overview

This report provides information about audience complaints finalised by ABC Audience & Consumer Affairs and the ABC's Complaints Review Executive between 1 July and 30 September 2003.

Specifically, the report outlines

- the overall composition of audience contacts
- timeliness of ABC responses
- the subject matter of complaints received
- the number of complaints upheld by the ABC

The report also provides summary details of all complaints upheld by Audience & Consumer Affairs and all investigations finalised by the Complaints Review Executive during this period.

Overall, there were **8026** contacts finalised during this period. Of these, complaints made up the majority of contacts with **5363** (or **67%**) complaints. Of these complaints, **93** were upheld either fully or partially. This represents **1.7%** of all complaints, or **1.1%** of all contacts to the ABC, which were finalised during this period.

Overall composition of audience contacts

Between 1 July and 30 September 2003, ABC Audience & Consumer Affairs dealt with 8,026 written contacts from audience members. The significant increase in complaint numbers in the past three months is due to cuts to programs and services announced following the Federal Budget in May.

Table 1: Written contacts finalised.

Type of contact	Email	Letter	Total	% of Total
Complaint	3878	1485	5363	67%
Appreciation / Request / Suggestion	2069	386	2455	30.5%
Other contacts	127	81	208	2.5%
Grand Total	6074	1952	8026	100%

Timeliness of responses

Table 2: Timeliness of responses provided.

Type of contact	Average response time	% of responses provided within 28 days
Complaint	17 days	86%
All written contacts	15 days	88%

Subject matter of complaints finalised

From 1 July to 30 September 2003, Audience & Consumer Affairs dealt with 5,363 complaints. Topics of complaint were as follows:

		% of
	Number of	complaints
Subject	complaints	finalised
Matters of fairness, accuracy and independence		
Other bias	206	3.8%
Party political bias	169	3.2%
Factual inaccuracy	92	1.7%
News values / News content	55	1.0%
Lack of balance	35	0.7%
Discrimination	18	0.3%
Harm to individuals / organisations featured in programs	13	0.3%
Unfair treatment		0.2%
	13	
Incidental advertising	7	0.1%
Racism	6	0.1%
Invasion of privacy	3	0.1%
Sexism	1	0.0%
Matters of taste and standards		
Scheduling / program changes	204	3.8%
Standards of interviewing / presentation	199	3.7%
Quality - general	102	1.9%
Poor taste	78	1.5%
Bad example	33	0.6%
Bad language	30	0.6%
Offence to religious feeling	26	0.5%
Sex and sexuality	26	0.5%
Program classifications	20	0.3%
Language - other	18	0.4%
• •	10	0.3%
Language - pronunciation / grammar		
Sensitivity and portrayal	10	0.2%
Violence	4	0.1%
Too many repeats	5	0.1%
Intrusiveness	1	0.0%
Other		
Management issues*	3754	70.0%
Other	79	1.5%
Sport	52	1.0%
Customer service / complaints handling	27	0.5%
Promotions - ABC programs and products	27	0.5%
Transmission	16	0.3%
Internet - technical difficulties	13	0.2%
Weather	5	0.1%
Captions	2	0.0%
Grand Total	5363	100.0%

Table 3: Topics of complaints finalised

* Note that the large number of complaints classified as "Management issues" relate to cuts to ABC programs and services announced after the Federal Budget in May.

Number of complaints upheld

During the period 1 July to 30 September 2003, 92 complaints were upheld either fully or partially -1.7% of the total complaints finalised; 1.1% of the total contacts finalised.

3. Summary of complaints upheld by the ABC

The following summary provides details of all complaints finalised by the ABC's Audience & Consumer Affairs unit between 1 July and 30 September 2003 where the complaint was either fully or partially upheld. The extent to which the complaint was upheld is indicated in each summary. In all cases, the complainant received a written response outlining the ABC's findings.

(i) Matters of fairness, accuracy and independence

- The ABC received nine complaints regarding the tone of an ABC TV news item on the welcome home march for Australian armed forces involved in the war in Iraq. The ABC accepted that the tone and line of questioning to the troops was inappropriate.
- There was a complaint about *The Religion Report's* Stephen Crittenden authoring an opinion piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The ABC agreed the article should have clearly stated that Mr Crittenden's views were made as an independent religious commentator, and were not those of the ABC.
- An ABC Online user complained that an item entitled "Abbott accused of threatening national security" was politically biased, as it did not include reported problems with the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). The ABC did not agree that the story was biased, but acknowledged that the story was outdated and contained inaccurate information. The item was removed from ABC Online.
- The ABC received one complaint that an *ABC News Online* item, "Brown says back burning not the answer", incorrectly quoted Senator Bob Brown. We apologised for this error and advised that the item had been removed from the website.
- Three listeners complained that ABC Illawarra radio presenter Tony Arthur failed to present an alternate view during an interview with Michael Organ MP, Member for Cunningham (The Greens), about the Villawood Detention Centre. During the interview Mr Organ spoke out against the Government's policy of mandatory detention and against the conditions of the detention centres. The ABC acknowledged that the interview constituted a serious lapse in program standards. Staff involved had been reminded of their responsibility to adhere to the ABC's Editorial Policies.
- An ABC viewer complained about a 7pm News item which incorrectly referred to the Thomas Embling Hospital in Victoria as "The Thomas Embling Institute for the Criminally Insane". We acknowledged that the use of this phrase was inappropriate as it was not an accurate description of the facility.
- A listener complained about an *AM* item that incorrectly referred to Jane Campion as an Australian, rather than a New Zealander. We apologised for this error.
- A listener complained that a *Triple J* news item incorrectly referred to the Persian Gulf as the Arabian Gulf. We apologised for this error.

- A listener and an ABC Online user complained about inaccuracies in reports about the debate in the Uniting Church concerning the ordination of gay ministers. The ABC apologised for incorrectly referring to the Queensland "Senate" of the Uniting Church instead of "Synod". The ABC also acknowledged that it had incorrectly referred to Uniting Church Ministers as "priests".
- A viewer complained that a *7pm News* report about a forthcoming Vietnam War commemoration incorrectly stated that the commemoration was marking the end of the Vietnam War, rather than the Battle of Long Tan. The ABC apologised for the error.
- A viewer complained that a *7pm News* report incorrectly stated that the Pan Am 103 incident occurred during a flight from New York to London, when in fact it was a New York bound flight from London. The ABC apologised for this error.
- An ABC Online user complained that a news item inaccurately stated that Anaconda Nickel's Murrin Murrin operation had been placed under administration. The ABC acknowledged that the story was inaccurate and advised that it had been removed from the website.
- A listener complained that a report on *The World Today* down-played crowd numbers for the return of the Australian troops from Iraq. The ABC apologised for the error.
- A viewer complained about factual inaccuracy in a *Stateline* report on the proposed Portland Wind Energy Project in Victoria, which inaccurately stated that there were 120 wind towers on three Capes. The report should have specifically stated that 102 wind towers were planned for the three Capes, and 18 at Yambuk. We apologised for the error and also acknowledged that the statement, "This is what the coastline will look like...", which accompanied a futuristic photomontage of Cape Bridgewater, could have been less categorical.
- A viewer complained about an *ABC TV News* item regarding the death of Idi Amin, which made reference to the Entebbe hijack. We acknowledged that the item should have provided more detail.
- A viewer complained about lack of balance in the *Four Corners* program 'The Killing Zone'. The complainant also expressed concern about inappropriate postings on the *Four Corners* guest book relating to this program.

While the ABC did not agree that the program lacked balance, we did acknowledge that some postings on the *Four Corners* online guest book contained inappropriate language. These postings had been removed. While all ABC forums include a disclaimer which states that personal views were not shared by the ABC, the ABC apologised for any offence caused.

 An ABC Online user complained of poor wording in the headline "ACTU to launch test case for part-time mums". The ABC agreed that the headline was poorly constructed, but no offence had been intended. The headline had been changed.

- A listener complained that Roger Montgomery, a regular guest on 702 ABC Sydney's Mornings program who presents a finance segment, used the spot to promote his approach to investment and his company. While listeners were referred to an inquiry website on the program - not to Roger Montgomery's website – the ABC acknowledged that this may have given an impression of endorsing the services Mr Montgomery offered through his company. The ABC no longer refers listeners to an inquiry website and Mr Montgomery's contact details have also been removed from the ABC web page.
- A listener complained about advertising in a regional *Breakfast* program presented by Michael Criddle. The ABC advised that while presenters are able to discuss items such as cook books and music CDs for the purposes of review, the ABC Editorial Policies do not allow presenters to provide information on where such items can be purchased. The ABC advised that the presenter had been reminded of his responsibilities in relation to the Policies.
- A representative of a local newspaper complained about factual inaccuracies in an ABC Riverina news item which claimed that the paper declined to publish letters from two children concerning injuries sustained at a swimming pool complex. After the original bulletin, the reporter became aware that the letters from the children had not been posted to the newspaper and a correct version of events was broadcast in the 12.30pm bulletin the same day. The ABC apologised for this error.
- A viewer complained that an *Inside Business* report inaccurately stated that the Mortgage Industry Association of Australia (MIAA) was in favour of self-regulation and compulsory membership. The ABC agreed that the story in question had not been thoroughly researched and was inaccurate, and that an initial response to the complainant from the reporter was also inappropriate. The ABC apologised for these errors.
- An ABC Online user complained about factual inaccuracy in a news item concerning the appointment of Mr Graeme Samuel to the ACCC. The item incorrectly referred to a 'majority' of states and territories rejecting Mr Samuel as the Federal Government's choice. The ABC acknowledged that the story was inaccurate, apologised for the error and advised that subsequent stories accurately reported the situation. The item had been removed from the website.
- The ABC received one complaint about Triple J's Breakfast presenter Wil Anderson jokingly referring to Senator Alston as a "right-wing pig-rooter". The ABC deemed that the comment, which was intended as political satire rather than opinion, was inappropriate during a newsbreak.
- A viewer complained about news reports referring to John Newman's death as the first political assassination in Australia, when Percy Brookfield, member for Broken Hill had been assassinated in the 1920s. We advised that ABC News & Current Affairs reporters and producers had been informed of this.
- A viewer complained that a *7pm News* item contained an error regarding the year that the Falun Gong became know to Chinese authorities. The ABC apologised for this

error.

- The ABC received two complaints from ABC Online users about a news item which used the term "Roman Catholic" when describing the Real IRA. The ABC agreed that it was not acceptable to use the term Roman Catholic when referring to the Real IRA. The ABC apologised for not identifying the error in the original copy and advised that the reference had been removed.
- An ABC Online user complained about a story entitled "US army raid kills 82 fighters Iraq-Syria border". The ABC agreed that the report, which was filed by a news agency, lacked editorial rigour. The ABC advised that staff should have demonstrated a much greater sense of urgency in checking the veracity of the information, and at the very least sought responses from the US authorities to some of the specific implications contained in the story. ABC staff concerned were counselled and the story was withdrawn.
- An ABC Online user complained that aspects of a *World Today* online report were factually inaccurate. The ABC agreed that the report incorrectly stated that Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi had been charged with Mafia collusion. The ABC advised that the story had been removed from the website.
- An ABC Online user complained about an item entitled "Party drug' symposium to be held in Melbourne", which incorrectly referred to ecstasy as a hallucinogen. The ABC apologised for this error and advised that the story had since been removed.

(ii) Matters of taste and standards

 There were five complaints about the 7.30 Report's story on the Harry Potter phenomenon and specifically host Kerry O'Brien's comment regarding a young female Harry Potter fan.

The ABC agreed that Mr O'Brien's ad-lib was ambiguous and apologised for the regrettable comment. The ABC explained that Mr O'Brien had meant to express his admiration for the intellectual display of an 11-year-old girl who was able to read an 800-page book in two days and give such an intelligent digest of it. Mr O'Brien had since received a letter of thanks from the parents of the young girl, expressing their appreciation for the program.

- There were four complaints that the ABC's coverage of the hijack attempt on a Qantas plane was sensationalist and did not correctly reflect the facts of this incident. The ABC agreed and advised that, soon after this story went to air, senior editorial management had spoken to the program-makers. They counselled staff and advised that it was inappropriate to suggest that the incident had "thrown airline security into crisis", as the facts of the story did not support such a claim.
- Three listeners complained about guest co-host Jill Singer's comments about the Prime Minister and his family during *The Conversation Hour* on 774 ABC Radio. The ABC acknowledged that Jill Singer's remarks about the Prime Minister's two residences and

tongue-in-cheek comments about the Prime Minister's children were inappropriate. The matter had been raised with her.

- An ABC listener complained that Margot Kingston used the term "nigger in the woodpile" on *Late Night Live*, and that Philip Adams had appeared to be amused by this incident. The ABC agreed that the use of this term transgressed the ABC's Code of Practice.
- An ABC listener complained that an item on *The World Today* about anorexia nervosa in pre-teenage children made reference to the *Saddle Club*. We agreed that the choice of music and references to *Saddle Club* in this report were inappropriate and apologised for this error of judgement.
- A viewer complained about insensitive language used during a segment on *The Glass House*, about a news story "Not mad, sisters have designs on fashion world" which reported that three Sydney fashion designers had invented a "designer straitjacket". We agreed that comedian Corrine Grant's monologue, which intended to satirise the shallowness of the fashion industry and media reporting, did not maintain its intended focus. The ABC apologised for the stereotypical language used and advised that those with editorial responsibility for the program had been counselled.
- An ABC viewer complained about a 7pm News item which showed graphic pictures of dead Iraqis and Liberians without warning. We agreed that a warning should have preceded the item and advised that staff had been reminded about this.
- A listener complained about Australia All Over presenter Ian McNamara's on-air comments regarding a listener's letter. The ABC agreed that the tone adopted by Mr McNamara and the comments he made were not appropriate. The ABC advised that the presenter had been counselled.
- An ABC Asia Pacific viewer complained that a news item about the Rugby World Cup was offensive. The item included an attempt at humour which suggested that New Zealanders were inappropriately fond of sheep. We acknowledged that the item was in poor taste and apologised for any offence caused. Prior to receiving the complaint, concerns had been raised about the item during the editorial review process and as a result, the item had been rewritten. Unfortunately, a communication breakdown between ABC's Sydney newsroom and producers in the ABC's Perth Bureau resulted in the original piece being broadcast on ABC Asia Pacific. The ABC apologised for any offence caused.
- A listener complained about a Melbourne ABC radio newsreader who contributed an opinion piece to The Age newspaper, in which he expressed agreement with the banning of the movie *Ken Park*. The ABC agreed that this was a breach of the ABC's Code of Conduct and advised that the newsreader concerned had been counselled.
- A listener complained about the use of the word "bigoted" in an AM story regarding the recent decision by Canon Jeffery John to decline his appointment as Bishop of Reading. We agreed that the use of the word "bigoted" changed the whole tone of the

story and should not have been used. The reporter concerned had been counselled.

- A listener complained that ABC NewsRadio presenters express their own opinions while reading news items. The ABC advised that David Lord and Phil Kafkaloudes had been reminded of their obligations under the Editorial Policies. The aim of ABC NewsRadio is to be "informal and entertaining and highlight the expertise and background knowledge of the presenters", while avoiding expression of personal opinions on subjects.
- An ABC viewer complained about obscene language in a National Press Club address by Peter Carey. The ABC acknowledged that the language was inappropriate. Unfortunately, as the National Press Club address was broadcast live, the ABC had no advance warning of the language Mr Carey intended to use. The issue had been raised with the National Press Club, and the obscene language had been silenced on the program's master tape.

(iii) Other

- There were nineteen complaints about a voiceover promotion which inadvertently ran during the final scenes of an episode of *MDA*, obscuring the audio track. We apologised for the error which was due to an operational fault within ABC TV's Network Presentation facility, affecting viewers in five States and Territories. The following episode of *MDA* recapped this crucial scene.
- The ABC received one complaint that the *Compass* program "The Power of Chanting" included segments from an interview for another edition of *Compass*, without the permission of the interviewee. We acknowledged that not seeking permission before including the segments was a misjudgement.
- There was a complaint about a typographical error in an *Enough Rope* online transcript, which incorrectly used the word "de-institutionalisation", rather than "institutionalisation" changing the context of a comment regarding the mental health system.
- There were three complaints about the lack of regional temperature information in a *7pm News* weather bulletin. We apologised for this error, which was due to a technical problem.

4. Summary of investigations completed by the Complaints Review Executive

During the period 1 July to 30 September 2003, the CRE finalised reviews into seventeen matters. In five cases, the complaint was either fully or partially upheld.

1. Bias in Iraq war reporting - AM

Background

Senator Alston cited 68 complaints about the ABC current affairs program *AM*. The then Minister complained particularly about 'biased' and 'anti-American' coverage by the program. The complaint was referred directly to the CRE.

Finding

The CRE upheld two of Senator Alston's complaints and rejected 66. The CRE considered that neither of the upheld complaints amounted to evidence of systemic anti-American or anti-Coalition and partisan reporting. The supported complaints were cases of speculative reporting that did not have any evidentiary support in the story that followed, or a tendency towards sarcasm.

In addition, the eight conclusions the Minister outlined in his letter regarding the overall nature of the coverage were also considered. The CRE rejected the inference contained in those statements that the ABC's coverage was biased.

The CRE's report is available in its entirety at www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/s964165.htm.

2. AM – news reporting and analysis

Background

The complaint alleged that an *AM* report about US military briefings during the war in Iraq was not even-handed and implied that the US was hypocritical. In part, this complaint raised the same issue as one of Senator Alston's complaints, as described above.

Finding

The CRE concluded that the tone and language of the introductory comment exceeded reasonable critique of the Pentagon briefing that was being described. The CRE noted that it was quite appropriate for a reporter to be vigorously questioning but sarcasm was a rare and difficult mode for a reporter to reflect and write in.

Other aspects of the complaint, relating to references to 'clean killing skills' and 'obfuscation' on the part of the military, were not upheld.

The complaint was partially upheld.

3. Australia Talks Back – anti American bias

Background

The complaint alleged 'anti-American' bias by *Australia Talks Back* presenter Sandy McCutcheon. The CRE observed that the complaint related to comments made during a discussion about a forthcoming program on Radio National, which concerned the difficulty in establishing the accuracy of events in the war in Iraq. During this discussion, Sandy McCutcheon said that he was surprised that the Australian Defence Minister had been unaware of the effect of Coalition cluster bombs on Iraqi civilians.

The complainant also felt that it was not clearly stated that Iraqi authorities oversaw journalists in Iraq.

Finding

The CRE concluded that Sandy McCutcheon's comments were impartial, and emphasised that the presenter had cited reported information regarding civilian casualties. The presenter's conduct fulfilled the expectations of the ABC Charter of Editorial Practice which urges editorial staff to uphold the public's right to know about issues which affect society and the individual.

The complaint was not upheld.

4. AM - standards of news reporting

Background

This complaint, about an *AM* report regarding the arrest of Abu Abbas, focused on three unresolved concerns: the use of the word 'touted' as a pejorative; the lack of an Israeli response; and the suggestion that the US was in breach of its international obligations in arresting Abu Abbas.

Finding

Taking into account the definition of the word 'touted', the CRE was satisfied that its use in the *AM* report was not necessarily derogatory or negative in relation to the character of this US communication. The CRE noted that the context of the use of 'touted' was that the United States pressed the view that the arrest was an indication of Iraq harbouring terrorists.

In terms of balance, the CRE emphasised that the requirement for balance did not mean that each perspective should be present in one particular story, but rather over a range of stories. The CRE added that it was not clear how an Israeli response was pivotal to the way in which the US arrest of a Palestinian terrorist in Iraq should be reported. However, the CRE did note that a news report at the time stated that Israel was yet to comment on the arrest.

The CRE highlighted that the view expressed in the report was that of a Palestinian Authority Cabinet Minister and it was clear that the Palestinian comment was from a partisan observer. While the US State Department may have had a different understanding of the 1995 agreement, the CRE concluded that it was not necessarily incumbent on a reporter to counter every interpretation of an interviewee.

The complaint was not upheld.

5. AM - standards of interviewing

Background

The complainant was concerned that an *AM* interview with Prime Minister John Howard did not question him about possible civilian causalities from a potential war in Iraq.

Finding

The CRE emphasised that the report was focused on the then imminent report from Chief weapons Inspector Hans Blix, rather than other related issues regarding a war in Iraq. The CRE concluded that *AM* had fulfilled the requirements of accuracy and impartiality in reporting, as outlined in the Code of Practice. The CRE also noted that the reporter's questioning on these issues was sufficiently probing and challenging, and that *AM* subsequently covered a range of issues related to the war with Iraq.

The complaint was not upheld.

6. AM - reports of Anzac Day ceremonies

Background

The complaint alleged inaccuracy in ABC News and Current Affairs reports of Anzac Day at Gallipoli, in particular the location of the ceremonies.

Finding

The CRE concurred with the complainant that the Anzac Cove dawn service was not in fact at Anzac Cove but at North Beach. However, the CRE noted that locally and colloquially the area where North Beach is located has been generically described as Anzac Cove for the purposes of the Dawn Service, and local descriptions of the historic location. In conclusion, the CRE determined that the complainant was technically correct in his identification of where the ceremony was held. However, it was also entirely reasonable for *AM* to use the more generic and colloquial term as part of its report.

The complaint was not upheld.

7. ABC Science Online – factual inaccuracy

Background

The complaint was about inaccuracy in an *ABC Science Online* story "Trams more damaging to the environment than cars". The complainant's primary concern was that the research reported on in this article misleadingly suggested that the proposal for such research originated at a meeting of the Public Transport Users Association (PTUA). The complainant also claimed that his original email had not been responded to.

This complaint had been partially upheld when initially considered by ABC Audience & Consumer Affairs (see previous public report) and the text of the online story had been amended.

Finding

The CRE noted that although the ABC had given an assurance that the story would be altered, it remained substantially unchanged. The CRE requested the editor of Science

Online to review the copy. ABC Science Online contacted the researcher, asking him to reconfirm his recollection. He checked his diary and agreed that he had been in error, and that the meeting he had referred to had taken place at RMIT and not the PTUA. The story was amended, and there is no longer any reference to the PTUA within the story.

The CRE also found that the ABC requirements for complaint handling were not met.

The complaint was upheld.

8. The National Interest - anti-Semitism

Background

The complainant alleged that an anti-Semitic statement was made on *The National Interest,* which was not balanced or challenged by the presenter. The complaint related to an interview with Bishop Frame, which was an extended conversational piece about being a Bishop in the military.

Finding

The CRE concluded that the interview met the ABC's editorial guidelines. On the issue of whether the interviewer should have challenged the Bishop's analysis of the relationship between Judaism and Zionism, the CRE concluded that the comments were personal observations, and the interviewer was correct to allow them to stand. The CRE added that the comments did not amount to misrepresentation of any viewpoint, as the views expressed were those of the Bishop. The CRE noted that the interviewer engaged appropriately with the guest within the format of an extended conversational style interview.

The complaint was not upheld.

9. Various programs – pro-Iraq war and pro-Israel bias

Background

The complainant's concerns covered a wide range of programs, which included allegations of lack of balance in the composition of the panel on *Insiders*, pro-war and pro-Israeli viewpoints on *Australia Talks Back*, and that *ABC Television News*, *Insiders* and *7 Days* coverage of Yasser Arafat's announcement to appoint and delegate power to a Prime Minister displayed pro-Israeli bias.

Finding

The CRE found, in each instance, that the programs complied with the ABC's *Charter of Editorial Practice,* which explains that balance may not be achieved in one program, and that it cannot be expected that all perspectives would be conveyed in the same story.

The complaint was not upheld.

10. Four Corners 'About Woomera'- selective reporting

Background

The complainant alleged selective and irresponsible reporting in the *Four Corners* program 'About Woomera', which investigated the Woomera detention centre and in particular presented the views of former staff members at Woomera.

Finding

The CRE did not agree with the complainant's assertion that the experiences presented on the program were gossip and misunderstanding. The CRE emphasised that as Australian Correctional Management chose not to participate in the program, it was difficult to ascertain whether there were other understandings of events at Woomera.

The CRE did not uphold the complainant's allegation that the ABC stereotyped the Iranian community as one that has endemic issues of child abuse. The CRE concluded that the program made no claim other than presenting the experiences and anxieties of some former Woomera staff.

The complaint was not upheld.

11. Four Corners 'The Killing Zone'- lack of balance

Background

The CRE reviewed four complaints about lack of balance in the *Four Corners* program 'The Killing Zone'.

Finding

The CRE noted that the ABC's *Charter of Editorial Practice* outlines that balance requires the presentation of 'principal relevant viewpoints', but it does not necessarily require all sides of an issue to receive equal coverage. The CRE was satisfied that the conflicting perspectives of both Palestinians and Israelis were represented and placed in context.

The complaints were not upheld.

12. AM – bias and lack of balance

Background

The complaint centred on bias and lack of balance in an *AM* report about the war in Iraq. The complainant's concern was that a report that was critical of France's position regarding the war in Iraq did not include comment from a French spokesperson.

Finding

The CRE concluded that while it may have been desirable to seek comment from the French, the *Charter of Editorial Practice* required balance to be sought through the presentation, as

far as possible, of "principal relevant viewpoints" on matters of importance. The CRE concluded that as the report included the comments of a spokesperson from the UK Government and Opposition, the *Charter of Editorial Practice* was not breached.

The complaint was not upheld.

13. ABC News Online - accuracy in reporting

Background

The complaint focused on *ABC News Online* reports of the death of British journalist James Miller in the Middle East. The ABC's initial response to this complaint had concluded that the complaint was partially upheld.

Finding

The CRE noted that the ABC had already acknowledged that the first report could have contained 'clearer attribution' and that this was clarified in subsequent news reports. The CRE noted that in each of the stories the ABC cited Israeli spokesmen, who initially expressed regret; then suggested possible Palestinian involvement and then indicated further regret.

The CRE noted that a particular matter raised by the complainant concerned whether the Israeli army had expressed regret for the death or for causing the death. The first story attributed the death to Israeli troops and the last story reported an autopsy finding which attributed the death to Israeli fire. The CRE disagreed that the ABC's reporting of events, which were unfolding, lacked balance or accuracy.

The complaint was not upheld.

14. Various programs - standards of reporting

Background

The complainant expressed concerns about a range of ABC programs including: the use of a grab from a *Lateline* interview with the then Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Philip Ruddock, concerning the future of Peter Hollingworth, the then Governor-General; a further interview with Mr Ruddock on *The 7.30 Report;* and concern about lack of balance on Radio National's *The National Interest*. The complainant also raised concerns about presenters who interrupt interviewees.

Finding

The CRE concluded that the excerpt chosen from *Lateline* for an ABC Radio News story appeared indicative of the Minister's measured approach to the issue of the future of the Governor-General. The CRE added that the headline was not distorted, inaccurate or misleading.

With regard to the complainant's concerns about Kerry O'Brien's interview with the Immigration Minister on the *7.30 Report*, the CRE concluded that Kerry O'Brien fulfilled the requirement for ABC staff to be enterprising in pursuing, perceiving and presenting issues of public importance. The CRE noted that although there were some tense exchanges, this did not constitute rudeness.

The complainant's concerns about perceived partisan analysis from Terry Lane, presenter of Radio National's *The National Interest* were not upheld. The CRE advised that *The National Interest* is expected to meet the guidelines for factual programs, as set out in the ABC's Editorial Policies.

On the general matter of ABC presenters interrupting guests, the CRE stressed that political interviews generate scrutiny of issues, and the style is often interrogative if not combative. An interviewer may be inclined to interrupt if there is a sense that a question may not be being answered or is being evaded.

The complaint was not upheld.

15. AM - language in reporting

Background

The complaint focused on an *AM* item about US requests to expel Iraqi diplomats, prior to the start of the war with Iraq. The complainant felt that the wording of the report suggested that Australia had obeyed a command from the US to expel the Iraqi diplomat, rather than having acted of its own volition. The complainant considered that this seriously misrepresented what had occurred.

Finding

As the story was evolving and there were conflicting explanations from Australian and Iraqi officials, the CRE believed that the story was accurate and was not misleading.

The complaint was not upheld.

16. Catalyst - invasion of privacy

Background

The complainant alleged that an edition of *Catalyst* included footage of the complainant's fire damaged house, without seeking permission.

Finding

The CRE concluded that the *Catalyst* crew's actions did not infringe the ABC's editorial policy on privacy, and added that the crew had attempted to make contact with the owner to indicate their intention to film.

Notwithstanding this, the CRE suggested that, given the sense of anxiety the report had caused the complainant, it might be appropriate for the program makers to express regret for any distress caused. This was subsequently done.

The complaint was not upheld.

17. Various programs - news reporting - bias and lack of balance

Background

The complaint alleged bias and lack of balance in a range of ABC programs including *Lateline, Insiders, Four Corners, the 7.30 Report and Late Night Live*. The complainant outlined specific allegations of partisan broadcasting such as a pro-Iraq War bias, a pro-Israel bias, and generally a right-wing bias.

Finding

The CRE did not uphold the complaints on the content of these programs, but considered that a response from Audience & Consumer Affairs to one of the complaints could have been more specific.

The complaint was partially upheld.