

**From:** [Mark Tapley](#)  
**To:** [Kirstin McLiesh](#)  
**Subject:** Response to bragg  
**Date:** Wednesday, 10 November 2021 6:26:41 PM  
**Attachments:** [Letter from David Anderson ABC Managing Director to Senator Bragg Re Editorial Standards 210921.pdf](#)

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Hi Kirstin,  
The Epstein reference is in the middle of page 3  
Cheers  
MT

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Tuesday 21 September 2021

Senator Andrew Bragg  
Parliament Office  
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CANBERRA ACT 2600  
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*Andrew*

Dear ~~Senator Bragg~~,

Thank you for your correspondence of 30 August 2021 on editorial standards at the ABC, your correspondence of 15 September 2021 concerning specific JobKeeper coverage, and your interest in the integrity of ABC reporting, particularly on economic policy.

#### **Letter of 30 August 2021**

I agree that public broadcasting is essential to the health of our democracy. As you observe, the ABC is required to present news and information fairly, accurately and impartially. Any mistake is regrettable which is why the ABC devotes more resources to scrutinising its output than any other media organisation in the country.

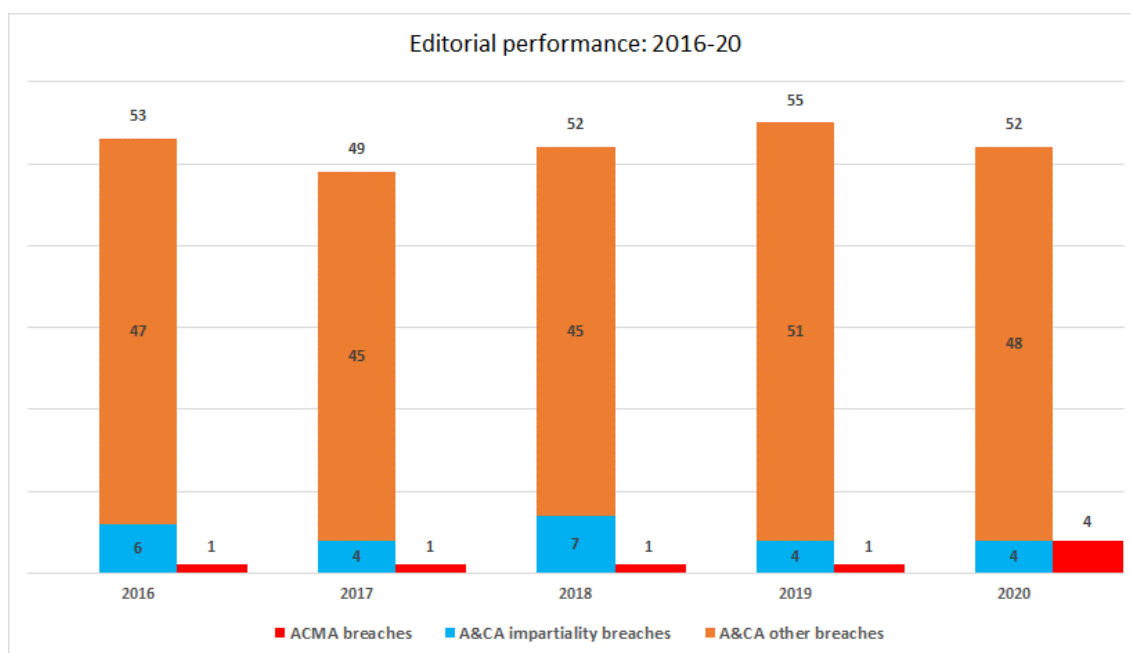
Given its multiple broadcast and digital platforms and level of engagement with audiences, it isn't surprising that the ABC receives a number of complaints in any given year. All editorial complaints are assessed by a small independent team of expert investigators in Audience and Consumer Affairs (A&CA) – minor issues are referred to program teams to respond to directly, while all serious matters are investigated and any breach of standards is publicly reported.

In 2019/20, AC&A investigated 1743 complaints, 6% of those complaints were upheld, 70% were not upheld and 24% were resolved. Resolved cases represent instances where the relevant content areas took prompt and appropriate action to remedy the cause of the complaint.

If a complaint relates to a matter covered by the ABC's Code of Practice, dissatisfied complainants can also take their case to the industry regulator, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA).

An analysis of recent years of distinct breach findings by either A&CA or ACMA doesn't reveal any deterioration in the integrity of ABC reporting, or any systemic non-compliance with standards.

The graph below illustrates editorial performance as against distinct breaches found by A&CA or ACMA between 2016 – 2020.



*Note: In 2020, the four breaches relate to two investigations only (two breaches found for each investigation)*

For 2021, ACMA has not made any breach finding against the ABC and, relevantly, research shows the ABC's 'quality' score in the eyes of the Australian public remains at 88%.

That is not to say the ABC is perfect. It can always do better and I acknowledge your past correspondence on the 29 January 2021 and 1 February 2021 reports by Daniel Ziffer.

On the JobKeeper story, A&CA agreed that a headline and sub-heading in the story were inaccurate and they were changed. An editor's note was added and a post was published on the ABC's Corrections and Clarifications page. A&CA also found that the ATO's perspective was prominently presented in Mr Ziffer's report and that the story was duly impartial.

In relation to Mr Ziffer's reporting of responsible lending laws, further context was promptly added including quotes from Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and video of the Australian Banking Association's Anna Bligh, which A&CA found resolved the complaint. As was noted in the reply to you at the time, it is regrettable that this content was not included in the story as originally published.

On a separate issue, the ABC also corrected a 17 June 2021 online report on superannuation changes to acknowledge that the section of legislation dealing with the best financial interests test had passed the Parliament. A correction was also posted on the ABC's Corrections and Clarifications page. However, I'm advised that this particular story wasn't by Alan Kohler, it was filed by a non-specialist reporter. A lapse in standards nonetheless.

In every case where there is a breach the journalists and producers involved are counselled, where necessary there is further training and additional oversight is provided.

However regrettable, I don't believe that these individual lapses or sustained ABC coverage of the JobKeeper program point to systemic bias against the Morrison Government. The ABC is independent and would not be meeting its statutory responsibilities on behalf of taxpayers, and would be roundly criticised, if it didn't scrutinise the federal government's multibillion dollar wage subsidy scheme.

In relation to Mr Kohler, I realise you have concerns about his work undertaken for the ABC while contributing as a columnist for New Daily. However, Mr Kohler is a highly experienced journalist who understands his obligations to those audiences. His work is subject to pre-publication processes and appropriate editorial oversight. The 7.30 series *The Future of Retirement* was well received by audiences with one complaint and no breach of editorial standards. He also has experience navigating work for multiple publishers, having been a NewsCorp columnist while filing for the ABC.

On the question of Rafael Epstein's post on his personal Twitter account, it is my understanding that he has since corrected the record and apologised on that platform. I would note that the post was not published by the ABC.

In relation to your complaint over the report entitled '*Churches, religious groups received millions of dollars in JobKeeper while staying in the black, records show*', I am advised that A&CA responded to you directly earlier today, outlining their findings following the investigation into the concerns you raised.

Other matters you raise, concerning Mr Maury and any past commercial arrangement between the ABC and New Daily, have already been well canvassed and in my view have had no negative impact on ABC economic reporting.

In terms of your comments on enforcement, 'wilfully inaccurate reporting' is fortunately almost unheard of amongst professional journalists. But as to mistakes, a three strikes rule for reporters who fail to comply with the standards isn't feasible because every circumstance, every story and the relative experience of reporters are all different. Further, it is already the case that a pattern of serious mistakes could certainly have consequences for career advancement or tenure.

On the personal use of social media, as you are probably aware, I have already taken a number of steps to clarify the ABC's expectations of staff under the Code of Conduct and we are enforcing these changes. The BBC has also found this a challenging area and it's something we continue to monitor.

Finally, I agree with you that it is vital that the ABC maintains public trust and confidence. In the news and current affairs context, we do this by continuing to report without fear or favour, even when that might be uncomfortable or unpopular and by upholding the fundamental journalistic principles of accuracy and impartiality, to protect the ABC's independence and integrity.

**Letters of 15 September 2021**

I have provided both of these letters, concerning coverage of JobKeeper, to A&CA for assessment.

Thank you again for your continued interest in the ABC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Anderson', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

David Anderson  
Managing Director