

Mr Kim Williams, AM
Chair
ABC Board
Australian Broadcasting Corporation
Sydney NSW

Cc ABC Board members: Mario D'Orazio, Peter Lewis, Nicolette Maury, Louise McElvogue, Peter Tonagh, Georgie Somerset, Laura Tingle

30 August 2024

Dear Mr Williams,

Please re-evaluate the ABC's ties with ACON to restore independence and credibility

We are a non-partisan coalition of feminist and LGB groups writing to you to express our concerns about the ABC's relationship with the advocacy group ACON. We are especially concerned that the ABC's membership of ACON/Pride in Diversity and its participation in ACON's Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) compromises the ABC's independence and undermines the national broadcaster's capacity to gather and present accurate and impartial news and information on a range of important matters.

We are writing with optimism, Mr Williams, inspired by your Redmond Barry Lecture and especially your call to cherish our public institutions – which must provide the structures that support reason, truth, freedom of expression, and mutual understanding. We truly hope that your understanding and principled leadership will prompt the ABC Board to address this longstanding issue, which has eroded public trust in the national broadcaster for too long.

You may be familiar with the issue through the controversy that arose in late 2022 when the ABC's own Media Watch and Big Ideas programs¹ presented compelling evidence that the ABC's relationship with ACON had influenced ABC journalists and content-makers to avoid certain topics that conflicted with ACON's policies and advocacy. These topics include the debate surrounding gender dysphoria treatment in children, and women's sex-based protections and rights, including in sports. The programs also reported on how the BBC had withdrawn from Stonewall's Diversity Champions scheme² – the model for ACON's AWEI – acknowledging that the BBC's participation raised concerns about impartiality on issues that Stonewall championed.

In response to these 2022 Media Watch and Big Ideas programs, the ABC issued a statement³ in which the ABC did not deny selective non-reporting of certain issues, but argued that transgender and gender identity issues were complex, requiring careful editorial judgement. The ABC did not address the risk that its relationship with ACON undermined ABC impartiality.

To be frank, Mr Williams, this response left us incredulous. We entrust our national broadcaster to investigate and report on many complex and sensitive issues without self-censoring. We were also disappointed that the ABC did not take the opportunity to address the perception of bias, which its relationship with an advocacy group has created, and which is corrosive to public confidence in our institutions.

¹ [ACON & the ABC - Media Watch](#), ABC TV, October 2022.

² [BBC statement on Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme - Media Centre](#), BBC, November 2021.

³ [ABC statement to Media Watch - About the ABC](#), ABC, October 2022.

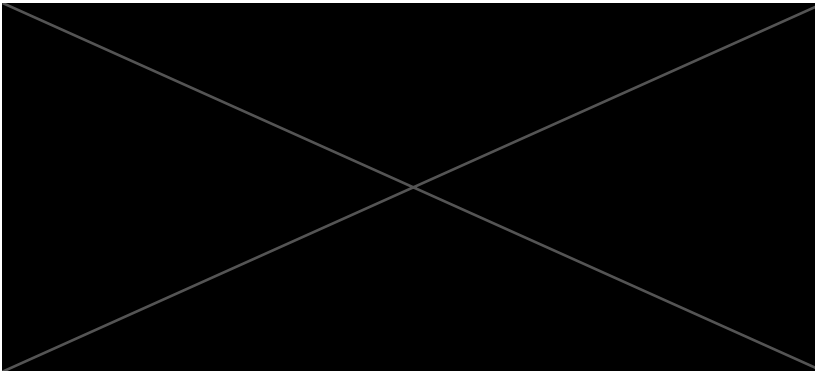
We believe that the ABC's selective and biased coverage on key issues continues⁴ and is evident⁵ in its limited and one-sided treatment of the final Cass Review of the Tavistock Clinic⁶ and the Review's adverse findings against Australian Standards of Transgender Care; the proliferation of studies⁷ demonstrating that the evidence base for medical interventions is weak and the corresponding trend in many European countries is to restrict medical interventions for children; the lived experiences of a growing cohort of detransitioners who contend they have been harmed by medical interventions; and the revelations of the leaked WPATH files.⁸

Of course, we anticipate that ABC editors would deny this bias, as they did in 2022, and point to particular instances where they believe they have demonstrated balance on specific gender issues. But whereas in other circumstances we might agree to disagree, the fact that the ABC remains a member of ACON's Pride in Diversity and is committed to gaining ACON's approval through its participation in ACON's workplace equality index (AWEI) means Australians cannot trust the ABC's impartiality on issues where ACON takes a stance.

Maintaining the independence and integrity of the ABC requires the ABC Board to manage both real and perceived conflicts of interest.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look to your leadership to restore our trust and we anticipate your response.

Yours Sincerely,



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Australian Feminists for Women's Rights (AF4WR)
Coalition of Activist Lesbians (CoAL)
Feminist Legal Clinic (FLC)
IWD Meanjin Brisbane (IWDMB)
LGB Alliance Australia (LGBAA)
Women's Declaration International Australia (WDI Aus)
Women Speak Tasmania (WST)
Women's Rights Network Australia (WRNA)
Woman Up

⁴ [Women's Coeee](#)

⁵ [Statement on Four Corners report "Blocked: The battle over youth gender care"](#), LGB Alliance Australia, July 2023.

⁶ [Final Report – Cass Review](#), April 2024.

⁷ [Studies | Society for Evidence-based Gender Medicine](#)

⁸ [The WPATH Files](#), Environmental Progress, March 2024.



Affiliation of Australian Women's
Action Alliances (AAWAA)

women@womensactionall.org



Australian Feminists for Women's
Rights (AF4WR)

info@af4wr.org



Coalition of Activist Lesbians (CoAL)

admin@coal.org.au



Feminist Legal Clinic (FLC)

feministlegal.org



IWD Meanjin Brisbane (IWDMB)

iwdbrisbanemeanjin@gmail.com

LGB ALLIANCE AUSTRALIA

LGB Alliance Australia (LGBAA)

contact@lgballiance.org.au



Women's Declaration International
Australia (WDI Aus)

[womensdeclaration.com/en/
country-info/australia/](http://womensdeclaration.com/en/country-info/australia/)



Women Speak Tasmania (WST)

womenspeaktas@gmail.com



Women's Rights Network Australia
(WRNA)

Australia@womensrights.network



Woman Up

womanupqld@gmail.com

ABC standards and ACON External Inbox x



Gavin Fang <Fang.Gavin@abc.net.au>
to me ▾

Fri, 13 Sept, 13:53 (3 days ago) ★ ↶ ⋮

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your letter to the ABC Chair, Kim Williams, regarding the ABC's editorial standards. The Chair has considered your letter and asked me as Editorial Director to respond.

We appreciate your interest in the ABC's standards and take very seriously our responsibility under the ABC Act to maintain independence and to ensure we are gathering and presenting news that is accurate and impartial according to the recognised standards of objective journalism.

The ABC's Editorial Policies set out detailed guiding principles for meeting these obligations and ensure that content makers and journalists must adhere to rigorous processes to meet these standards. You can see our Editorial Policies here.

<https://www.abc.net.au/edpols>

In your letter you raise concerns about the ABC's ability to maintain its impartiality and independence due to its participation in the Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI).

As you are aware the AWEI is a national employee benchmarking index which measures the impact of inclusion initiatives in organisations. There is no connection to ABC content commissioning. The ABC participates in a number of similar indexes.

It is my view that these current corporate programs do not impact the ABC's impartiality in its journalism. I cannot see any evidence of self censorship or conflicts of interests in the ABC's reporting or for that matter any evidence of selective non-reporting.

However, all ABC content is subject to a transparent complaint process via an independent Ombudsman's office that reports to the Board. You can find the details of the complaint handling process here. <https://www.abc.net.au/about/ombudsman/complaint-handling-process/103718522>

If you do have concerns about specific pieces of ABC content I would urge you to make use of that independent review process.

Many thanks



Australian
Broadcasting
Corporation

Gavin Fang
Editorial Director,
Australian Broadcasting Corporation
P: +61 2 8333 2711
M: +61 437479638
E: fang.gavin@abc.net.au

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work.