



ABC Friends NSW & ACT
PO Box 1391
North Sydney NSW 2059
Telephone 02 9990 0600 (MessageBank)
E-mail membership@abcnsw.org.au
Website www.fabcnsw.org.au

**SUBMISSION TO THE MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ABC BOARD,
VIA THE AUSTRALIAN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION**

Reports of the proposed closure of the ABC's sound and reference libraries, centralization of collections, the digitization, then disposal of hard copy materials, followed by the retrenchment of ten librarians to save wages, are profoundly disturbing, and require clarification by ABC management.

The ABC is 85 years old. It is part of our cultural DNA. Its collections are part of Australia's national heritage. To lose these, and 200 years of combined experience of skilled specialist librarians would be similar to what is happening to libraries and librarians in conflict zones around the world. Australia is not under attack, yet this unique component of our national heritage is – from within.

The ABC has a well-deserved reputation for being the most trusted source of news and information on the huge variety of subjects on which it broadcasts. To destroy vital repositories of information on which ABC journalists, researchers, presenters, producers and other content creators rely to bring programs to air, would result in a reduction in standards of accuracy, erode its audiences' trust, and undermine the ABC's Charter obligations.

The ABC's audiences in Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia are still mourning the loss of local staff and locally made programs from Hobart, Adelaide and Perth. Now it appears that sound and reference materials used to create those programs are to be disposed of as thoughtlessly as their creators apparently were.

Once these collections are broken up, they can never be put together again.

Over the past decade, many specialist libraries in the Australian public and private sectors have been closed, on the untested assumptions that libraries are a waste of space, that expenditure on them is unnecessary, because everything is online and free, easy to find with Google, and therefore reliable and trustworthy. All of these assumptions are wrong yet they have spread like a scourge amongst senior executives, looking for what they see as an easy fix to budgetary problems. The transition from analog to digital (where necessary, and appropriate) is a complex process and requires librarians and IT departments to work together, not one to obliterate the other. Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly apparent after two decades of library closures, that IT budgets have grown, but the waste of financial and human resources on systems and software that do not work is written off, while services decline.

The centralisation of libraries, the rationalisation of collections, and digitization, are all processes which may be necessary as the national broadcaster restructures, and all are part of normal library practice, but all are labour intensive, and require the skills of knowledgeable, specialised librarians

to perform them. Librarians will also be required to continue the process as the collections grow, and to facilitate access to all material, whether in digital format or hard copy, by ABC staff.

Supplementing the ABC's own collections with published e-books and electronic databases also requires knowledgeable librarians to select them for their relevance to the organization's needs, to negotiate contracts and rights with commercial publishers, and to act as intermediaries between the resources and their users, since electronic materials are not always compatible across all platforms, and all employ different search techniques depending on their subject and the publisher.

Librarians protesting against proposals such as this are too often dismissed as old-fashioned Luddites, yet the profession has been among the first to understand the implications and applications of technological change, and to adapt services and work practices accordingly. It is often forgotten that the Internet was first introduced in Australia via academic libraries, and that librarians have since been at the forefront in the teaching of media and digital literacy skills. For example, in 2017, the International Federation of Library Associations produced an Infographic on "How to Spot Fake News", which has been translated into 38 languages, and is available on the IFLA web-site, where it states: "Critical thinking is a key skill in media and information literacy, and the mission of libraries is to educate and advocate its importance". The replacement of older, more knowledgeable ABC staff with younger "digital natives", whose information horizons may be limited to Google, Facebook and Twitter, makes this mission doubly important if the ABC is to maintain its standards and reputation.

ABC Friends submits that because the working libraries of Australia's public broadcaster are of intrinsic significance and value to the nation, this proposal, as reported, requires far greater thought and consultation with ABC staff, concerned audiences, and other relevant national institutions, such as the National Film and Sound Archive, the National Library of Australia, and the Centre for Digital Humanities Research at ANU.



Gayle Davies
Membership Secretary,
ABC Friends, NSW & ACT
16th February 2018