



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 10 November 1999

AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.32 a.m.): I have much pleasure in seconding the motion proposed to the House by the Premier. What is happening today is really quite unprecedented: politicians from both sides of the House are coming together and saying that we believe that the fair and objective coverage that the ABC in Queensland applies to the political process should continue and it should continue in its present form. In fact, in terms of the will of any Parliament throughout Australia on such an issue, this is probably unprecedented.

I would like to say that I understand that, in terms of the revised programming arrangements for the ABC, obviously that will involve the end of the Carolyn Tucker program. I understand also that there will be significant changes in the afternoon, which will mean that the Cathy Border program at drivetime will also be leaving us. I want to say that I do not think that that is acceptable. I regard both of those journalists as true professionals. We have seen that from both sides: the Premier has been Opposition Leader and I have been Premier. On occasions, we have both felt the heat. However, I think that we can be very proud of the standard of public affairs reporting that the ABC in Queensland has applied to political events in this State.

Yesterday, I wrote to Mr Donald McDonald AO, the Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, expressing my concern. Mr Speaker, I would seek your indulgence to also have that letter incorporated into the Hansard record of the Parliament.

Leave granted.

Dear Mr McDonald

I write to advise of my significant disquiet at programming changes announced for ABC Radio's Brisbane-based services, which appear to be further evidence that the Corporation has forgotten its vital role in effectively and fairly covering State affairs.

The Carolyn Tucker morning current affairs show is to end. This is the first time to my knowledge that Queensland has been denied its own ABC programme in this important listening slot. The afternoon State affairs coverage is also to be substantially reduced. These changes will disadvantage Queenslanders who demand quality, objective coverage of political and civic issues—the kind of quality and objectivity we pay to receive from the public broadcaster—and inevitably will lead to a decline in coverage of State affairs.

It is of particular concern that the announced changes to ABC current affairs coverage in Queensland follow the ABC's abandonment of the flagship television current affairs show *The 7.30 Report* as a State-produced programme. As the national public broadcaster, the ABC has a clear duty to support (and report) the regional imperatives that drive State affairs, and in my view cannot fulfil these duties with maximum effectiveness without locally-produced and local focused current affairs radio and television.

I would be grateful for an assurance that maximum coverage of State affairs remains a central ABC objective, and for an indication from you as to how the Corporation proposes to achieve this by reducing dedicated programming.

Mr BORBIDGE: This morning, I have much pleasure in joining with the Premier in signing this formal request to the ABC. I hope that the ABC will take what I believe should be the unanimous will of the Parliament of Queensland into account.

A few years back, we lost the *7.30 Report* and political coverage in Queensland has not been the same since. We have suffered before because of this Sydneycentric view of the world by ABC

management. I hope that Mr McDonald and Lucy Broad, who is the acting State General Manager, take on board the very strong concerns that have been expressed on both sides of politics in this place today.

I believe that it is important for the Parliament but, most importantly for the people, that the program formats that have been presided over by Carolyn Tucker and Cathy Border continue. They have our mutual respect. They are part of the political landscape of the State of Queensland. I think that it is quite wrong that, for whatever reason, ABC management has decided that Queensland can apparently do without these two programs. I do not think that is acceptable. I urge the ABC from the top to really have a good look at this proposal and make sure that, once again, Queensland is not short-changed, particularly when both sides of politics respect the enormous professionalism of the ABC reporters who come to this place and report on this place.
