

Labor Candidate for Richmond – Justine Elliott

24/7/04

Dear Mr Jennings,

Thank you for your inquiry on behalf of the Northern Rivers Friends of the ABC. I have detailed the Labor's Party's position on the ABC, and also included my personal perspective on the role of the ABC.

Labor is committed to *Friends of the ABC's* objective of a well resourced, independent and comprehensive national broadcaster. We will also ensure the ABC remains focused on its core charter objectives and remains non-commercial and committed to quality Australian programming.

Labor will restore the ABC's independence from Government. Labor has promised to reform the board appointment process to ensure an arms length short-listing of ABC Board appointments. This will see an end to the appointment of political stooges to the ABC Board and restore the Board's integrity.

Labor will also maintain the staff appointed director position as requested by the *Friends of the ABC*. Labor is considering policy to open up the ABC Board to greater public accountability.

The Howard Government has starved the ABC of the funding it needs to produce decent public broadcasting services. In last year's budget the Howard Government rejected the ABC's funding bid forcing the ABC to shut down its important educational program *Behind the News*, axe its digital multi-channels *ABC Kids* and *Fly TV*, and cancel plans to roll out ABC radio services to around 60 towns in regional Australia.

When the Howard Government came to power they soon cut around \$66 million a year from the ABC's funding. This cut in funding has never been properly restored. Increased programming expenses and expenditure on new services like ABC Online has finally caught up with the ABC.

The ABC warned the Government that it would not be able to continue with its existing output if the Government did not meet its request for funding in last year's budget. The Government chose to ignore that warning and is now trying to blame the ABC for the cutbacks caused by the Government's inadequate funding.

While Labor has not yet released the full details of its ABC funding policy, we are committed to restoring adequate funding to the ABC. We do not intend to be overly prescriptive with any funding increase we may provide. While we may suggest areas that new funding should be directed to ultimately it will be for the ABC to decide where to

spend any new money in order to best meet its charter objectives. For that reason Labor will not be directing the ABC to restore any particular programs or undertake specific transmission initiatives in any new funding we give to them. It will be up to the ABC how to spend any new funding to further fulfil their charter requirements.

Labor is committed to restoring the independence and integrity of the ABC after years of Howard Government attacks. We want the ABC to be adequately funded so it can transmit quality broadcasting programs to all Australians. We welcome the *Friends of the ABC's* involvement as we develop policies for these objectives.

I personally believe that the ABC plays a vital role in presenting informed and educational programs. I particularly enjoy the Australian content, which is of great importance to the community.

Regards,

Justine Elliot

Labor Candidate for Richmond