

To: Chief of Staff      **MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **First for Australia – a law to stop governments stacking the ABC Board**

A ground-breaking bill was passed in the Senate last night and is expected to be carried by the House of Representatives soon.

In a first for all public appointments in Australia, governments will be required to adhere to a new merit-based process for appointing ABC and SBS board members when the National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill is carried.

“It won’t stop a government that is hell-bent on stacking the ABC Board, but it will significantly increase the pressure on all future governments to do the right thing,” said Glenys Stradijot, a spokesperson for Friends of the ABC (Vic).

“The bill recognises that the ABC is meant to be independent. Governments can no longer regard its board as a place to give jobs to mates or the national broadcaster as a vehicle to pursue political agendas.

Importantly, the Bill will also restore the staff-elected director position to the ABC Board.

“This position is critical. It ensures there is at least one member of the ABC Board who has intimate understanding of public broadcasting and is entirely independent of government.

“Prior to the Labor Government putting into practice a new merit-based board appointment process, stacking of the ABC Board was in danger of spiralling out of control. It was damaging public trust in the national broadcaster’s independence and the integrity of government. This legislation is important to ensure there is not merely a pause in inappropriate appointments to the ABC and SBS boards,” said Glenys Stradijot.

*Ends*

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**Summary of the Bill** - merit-based selection process for the ABC and SBS boards with the following features:

- . board vacancies to be advertised
- . former politicians and senior political staff ineligible for appointment for 12 months after ceasing office
- . assessment of applicants to be undertaken against selection criteria by an independent Nomination Panel to be convened by the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet and established at arms-length from government
- . the Panel to provide a short list of recommended candidates to the Communications Minister, with the Minister required to provide reasons to Parliament in any instance the Minister’s appointment departs from the shortlist; and with the Prime Minister obliged to consult the Opposition Leader on the selection of the Chairman
- . the staff-elected director position on the ABC Board to be restored. [The position was abolished by the Howard Government in 2006, with an amendment to the ABC Act.]

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