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Mr David Anderson
Managing Director, ABC

Ms Ita Buttrose AC OBE
Chair, ABC

Minister for Communications
Hon Michelle Rowland MP

Minister for the Arts
Hon Tony Burke MP

Proposed ABC Staffing cuts

The Professional Historians Australia strongly objects to the proposed job cuts affecting specialist content management staff at the ABC.

Professional Historians Australia represents over 450 professional historians working in the GLAMR (galleries, libraries, archives, museums and repositories) industry across the whole of Australia. We are the peak body for professional historians in Australia, supported by state and territory associations.

Our members work across the media, university, heritage, museums and cultural institution sectors. Many of us are clients of the ABC Archives. Our members professionally benefit from the considerable expertise and institutional knowledge of the ABC's archivists, librarians and researchers, and the extraordinary historical materials that they care for.

Our members, along with the ABC's archivists, librarians and researchers, have developed their expertise through tertiary qualifications and years of professional experience.

We are concerned at the suggestion that journalists will have the time and the skills required to do the highly specialised work currently undertaken by cataloguers and researchers, such as entering metadata and navigating copyright restrictions. Effective cataloguing requires expertise, institutional knowledge, and an understanding of cataloguing principles, such as the need for consistent and accurate keywords. Archivists systematically assess and save today's content in anticipation of future research needs.

Shifting this work away from trained archivists/cataloguers and towards journalists will lead to a deterioration of standards and searchability. Good research depends on accurate cataloguing and curating, and the reduction of staff in areas such as the News Libraries could result in the loss of irreplaceable, historically significant content simply because it has not been adequately catalogued and is no longer accessible.

As our members well know, digitisation does not automatically make materials easier to locate. Researchers have the skills and institutional knowledge to identify and retrieve items that are uncatalogued or have only skeleton information attached. They can access items that are held non-centrally in small program libraries, as well as correcting or appending records to make the items easier to find by the next researcher. Digital archives also have more demanding preservation needs than non-digital archives.

The Australian community benefits directly from the high-quality collection, maintenance, and curation of our precious audio-visual heritage by skilled professionals. The quality of ABC content is also likely to suffer, further alienating audiences. We urge you to reconsider this short-sighted proposal and redundancies which will have a disastrous impact on our ability to tell stories about our history and culture.

At a time when Australians are increasingly relying on robust and reliable journalism, we urge you to reconsider these short-sighted redundancies as the ABC approaches its 90th anniversary.

Regards,

C. Black

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