



New Complaints Handling Process

- The ABC has strengthened its complaints management processes to enable it to identify, respond to and report on complaints in a more transparent and impartial manner. These changes are reflected in the new Editorial Policies, which have been endorsed by the ABC Board.
- All program complaints will be channelled through a single unit, Audience & Consumer Affairs, which is independent of ABC output divisions. All complaints will be assessed and those that raise editorial issues will be investigated by Audience & Consumer Affairs. During this investigation, comments will be sought from the manager with editorial responsibility for the program, but program makers will no longer respond directly to these complaints.
- After assessment, Audience & Consumer Affairs will refer complaints which raise issues of personal taste and preference to output divisions for direct response to the complainant. This direct dialogue between program managers and audiences allows program makers to keep in touch with stylistic and other presentation issues.
- The ABC has established the position of Complaints Review Executive (CRE). The CRE is a senior ABC manager with significant editorial experience. The CRE is also independent of output divisions. The CRE's role is to
 - adjudicate on complaints where Audience & Consumer Affairs cannot reach agreement with a division about a response to a complaint;
 - review complaints where an audience member expresses concern or dissatisfaction with a response received from Audience & Consumer Affairs; and
 - in extraordinary circumstances, inquire into serious complaints in the first instance
- If still not satisfied, a complainant may lodge a complaint with the government regulator, the Australian Broadcasting Authority, or the ABC's Independent Complaints Review Panel, depending on the nature of the complaint. Both these forms of review are external and entirely independent of the ABC. The composition of the Independent Complaints Review Panel is detailed in the attached paper.
- These changes will contribute to good corporate governance within the ABC. The ABC Board will be presented with regular reports providing comprehensive information about all complaints to the ABC, better assisting the Board to meet its statutory obligations.
- Due to the extent of these structural changes, it is expected to take approximately six months to fully implement the new procedures. This will include establishing a telephone team to provide a better service to those who wish to make complaints orally. Audience members in regional areas will not be disadvantaged by the establishment of a centralised team – it is expected that the team will be able to be phoned during extended hours for the cost of a local call.
- A flow chart explaining the entire process, including external reviews, is attached

Independent Complaints Review Panel

Background

The ABC Board established the Independent Complaints Review Panel (ICRP) in May 1991. Members are appointed by the Board on the basis of their backgrounds in:

- Journalistic ethics and practice
- Media operations
- Electronic media and program production
- Complaints handling or other review processes
- Assessing public issues.

Membership

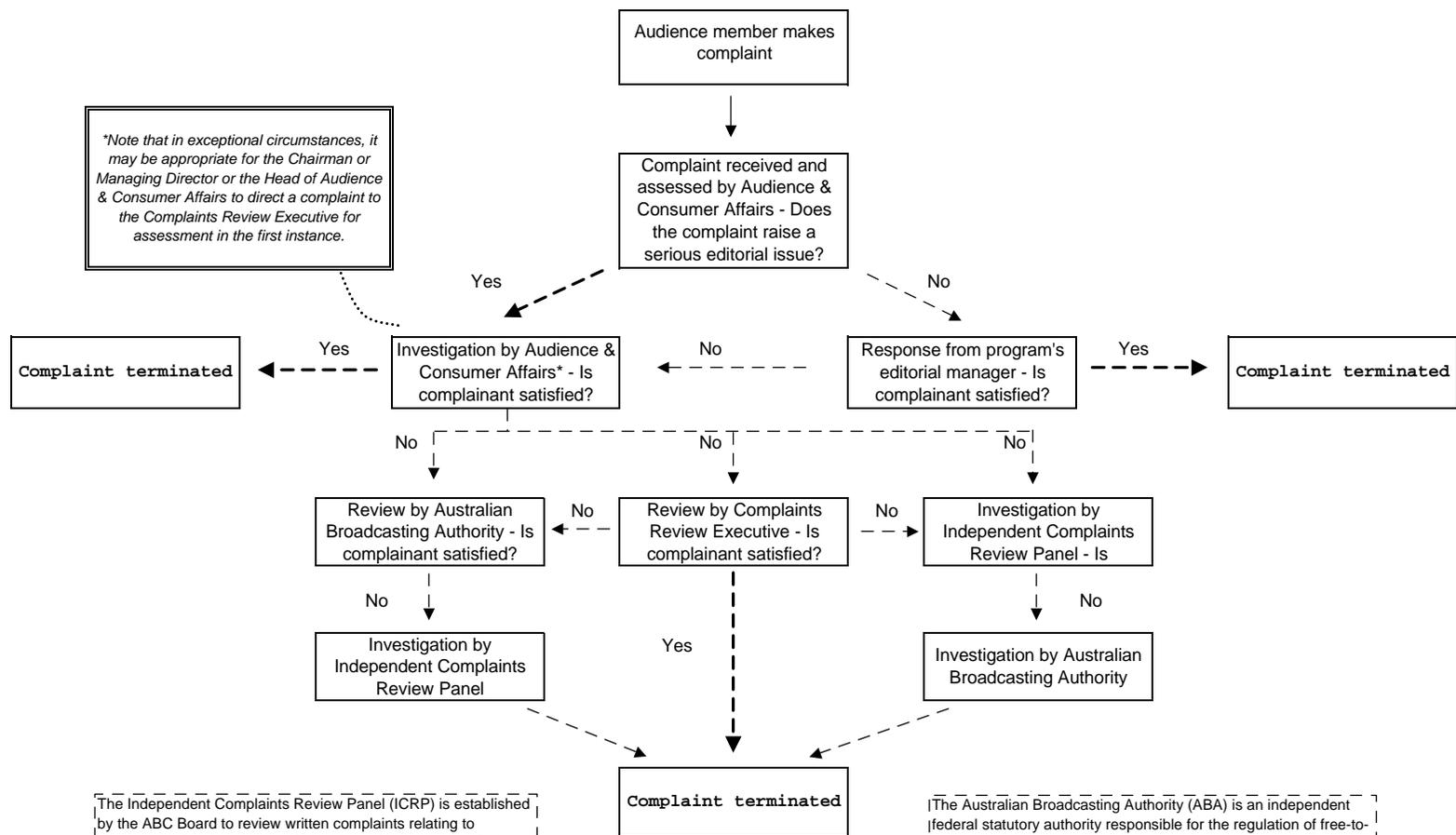
The current Panellists are:

- Mr Ted Thomas, Convenor, former General Manager of Channel 7, Sydney
- Ms Margaret Jones, Deputy Convenor, journalist, author and member of the Australian Press Council
- Professor Michael Chesterman, Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of NSW, part-time Commissioner of the Australian Law Reform Commission, part-time judge NSW, teacher and commentator on media law.
- Mr Stepan Kerkyasharian, NSW Ethnic Affairs Commissioner, formerly of SBS Radio
- Mr Bob Johnson, formerly Channel 7 News and Current Affairs.

Previous Panellists included:

- Ms Robin Hughes, broadcaster, film and television producer, Managing Director of Film Australia 1985-89 (initial Convenor of the Panel)
- Mr Fred Brenchley, media commentator, former Fairfax senior executive and Editor of the *Australian Financial Review*
- Ms Julie Flynn, Macquarie Network
- Dr Julianne Schultz, journalist, media academic, columnist *Courier Mail*.

People with current or recent ABC employment will not normally be considered as prospective Panellists.



**Note that in exceptional circumstances, it may be appropriate for the Chairman or Managing Director or the Head of Audience & Consumer Affairs to direct a complaint to the Complaints Review Executive for assessment in the first instance.*

The Independent Complaints Review Panel (ICRP) is established by the ABC Board to review written complaints relating to allegations of serious cases of bias, lack of balance or unfair treatment arising from ABC broadcasts.

The ICRP consists of Ted Thomas (Convenor), Margaret Jones (Deputy Convenor), Professor Michael Chesterman, Stepan Kerkyasharian AM and Bob Johnson. Members of the Panel are appointed by the ABC Board for their knowledge of or experience in journalistic ethics and practice, media operations and program production, complaints handling and other review processes.

ICRP reviews are conducted entirely independent of the ABC. The results of ICRP reviews are published each year in the ABC's Annual Report.

The Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) is an independent federal statutory authority responsible for the regulation of free-to-air radio and television, pay TV, digital broadcasting and internet content in Australia. The ABA investigates complaints that the ABC has breached its Code of Practice.

The ABA consists of a Chairperson, Professor David Flint, Deputy Chairperson Ms Lyn Maddock, five members, Mr Michael Gordon-Smith, Mr Robert Le Tet, Ms Jane Marquard, Mr Malcolm Long and Mr Ian Robertson and two associate members, Dr Robert Horton and Mr Ross Jones.

Outcomes of ABA investigations are published annually in the ABA's annual report. The ABC's annual report includes a summary of findings relating to the Corporation.