



## FAIR, ACCURATE AND BIASED

**Panel (l-r):** **Bob Miller, General Manager, 2UE Sydney**  
**Nick Greiner, Chairman, ASTRA**  
**Malcolm Long, ABA Member (convenor)**  
**Catharine Lumby, Associate Professor Media Studies, University of Sydney**  
**Paul Bongiorno, Canberra Bureau Chief, Network Ten**

The panel assembled for this session along with recorded input from senior journalists: Peter Manning, Professor of Journalism, UTS; Paul Sheehan, journalist with *The Sydney Morning Herald*; and Bruce Page, author of *The Murdoch Archipelago*.

This session discussed bias, fairness and accuracy in relation to the media as whole, and the more specific issue of commercial influence on radio talkback programs. Complexities and nuances emerged with perspectives on the need for, or absence of, fairness and accuracy, varying according to the area of the media involved. Manning took the historical view arguing that news and comment have been blurred for some time in aspects of broadsheet journalism. Others such as Greiner and Sheehan pointed to differences in expectations and standards between

public broadcasters and commercial media. Miller argued the controversy around talkback sponsorships overlooks the large amount of straight news broadcasts by commercial radio, where no charges of commercial influence can be laid.

There was general support for Sheehan's comment that inevitably the media are players – it has to be accepted that media organisations and journalists are not 'neutral' or value free. Hence the terms 'balance' and 'fairness' are probably more useful than 'bias', with Bongiorno pointing to the need for journalists to reflect different viewpoints, while also reasonably bringing their own analysis to news and current affairs comment.

There was broad acceptance of the commercial reality of sponsorship of talkback and accordingly the possibility of impact on content, through, for example, 'live reads'. For most



Bob Miller and Nick Greiner

who commented on this, transparency was the key issue. Opinion varied on whether the community needs further protection through, for example, the tightening of the ABA disclosure rules as suggested by Sheehan. Miller felt those calling for more regulation don't reflect the view of talkback listeners who know what they are getting. He pointed to the key role of talkback in giving ordinary punters a forum for airing grievances, and said this would be jeopardised by banning live reads, for example, as had been suggested by columnist Mark Day.

Lundy agreed that Australians are media literate and able to discern instances of possible commercial influence on program content. She considered there may be more community concern about other aspects of media behaviour such as intrusion into privacy.



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*Report by Marion Jacka, ABA Policy and Research section*



Catharine Lumby