



# Executive Council of Australian Jewry

## MEDIA STATEMENT

22 June 2021

### ECAJ meeting with ABC Managing Director

The ABC's coverage of Israel - in particular, its highly controversial Q + A program which focused on the recent Israel-Hamas war - was the subject of a high-level meeting between the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) and the ABC leadership at ABC headquarters in Sydney on Monday, 21 June 2021.

It was attended by ABC managing director David Anderson and his chief of staff Michael Rippon, and ECAJ president Jillian Segal, co-CEO Peter Wertheim and newly-appointed ECAJ consultant Vic Alhadeff. ABC chair Ita Buttrose was also scheduled to attend, but had suffered an injury and sent an apology.

The meeting had been sought by the ECAJ in a detailed letter of complaint delivered to the ABC Chairman and Managing Director shortly after the program went to air.

The ECAJ letter complained of "*a pervasive culture of bias, if not antipathy, towards Israel and the mainstream Australian Jewish community, within the unit responsible for organising and producing the Q + A program*".

It said that the program had "*featured an outpouring of undiluted and uncontested falsehoods and vitriol from two panellists (one of whom seems to have her own page on the Q + A section of the ABC's website, which describes her as 'a Muslim of Palestinian and Egyptian heritage'), with passive support from two other panellists and only one lone voice, not from the Jewish community, swimming against the tide and trying to put the other side of the argument despite repeated interruptions. The selection of questions from the audience and of tweets that were screened was similarly skewed.*"

Pointing to a pattern of conduct over many years, the ECAJ stated that the Q + A program "*was merely the latest unfortunate example of a long history of exclusion of an authentic Jewish community viewpoint on Q + A and elsewhere by the ABC on matters of vital concern to our community, including gross misrepresentation or exclusion of the mainstream Jewish community's perspective on matters related to Israel. We emphasise that the culture of bias and exclusion against our community is not limited to the Q + A program. The ABC's overall news and current affairs coverage of the armed conflict between Israel and Hamas on this occasion, and in the past, is part of the same pattern.*"

The letter added that "*the urgency of our request for a meeting is due to the dramatic upsurge in antisemitic incidents which have negatively impacted on the safety, security and wellbeing of Jewish communities around the world, including Australia.*"

During the course of a wide-ranging discussion, David Anderson readily acknowledged that the Q + A program and the ABC's news and current affairs coverage of the conflict had contained "many errors" for which he apologised. He also acknowledged the validity of the ECAJ's earlier detailed critique of an "Explainer" document that had been published on the ABC website at the start of hostilities, before being corrected. That matter is still under investigation by the ABC complaints unit.

*"The meeting was held in a very positive spirit and Mr Anderson was keen to explore specific constructive steps to prevent a recurrence of the problems we raised and improve the quality of the ABC's news coverage," ECAJ President Jillian Segal said after the meeting. "Despite the obvious difficulties, we have secured a commitment for follow-up meetings and engagement with both key ABC staff and leadership, and have reason to hope for a productive outcome."*

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