



Why Is The Coalition Planning To Give More Money To The ABC?

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Given the spite and the scorn with which many at the national broadcaster view the Coalition and mainstream Australians, one would think that the last thing that a Coalition government worth its salt would want to do is give more money to the ABC.

But this is exactly what they've done. Last week [the Guardian](#) ran an exclusive that Treasurer Josh Frydenberg plans to add public broadcasters the ABC and SBS to the revenue sharing arrangements as part of the proposed mandatory news code, which means they will receive payments from Google and Facebook for using their content.

It is frankly bizarre that a Coalition government is considering a new financial windfall for the ABC, on top of its annual \$1.2 billion in public funding.

While the commercial media has been smashed as a result of the COVID pandemic, the ABC has remained untouched.

Last month, ABC staff rejected a plea from the Federal Government to freeze their pay for six months, to show some shared sacrifice with



their colleagues in the commercial media. Instead, they voted overwhelmingly to give themselves a pay rise.

In doing so, the employees of our national broadcaster considered themselves morally superior and more worthy of a 2% pay rise than staff at Services Australia, Centrelink, the Department of Health and the Department of Social Services, who have all been on the front line of the response to this pandemic and have all taken a six-month pay freeze.

The ABC has continued to show its hostility towards the Coalition throughout the pandemic and its disdain for commercial media.

The ABC has been a loud cheerleader for former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's petition for a "Murdoch Royal Commission".

In just over one month since the petition was launched, the ABC across all its platforms has mentioned "Murdoch" and the petition over 3,000 times, highlighting its ideological obsession with its perceived enemies.

Defenders of the ABC constantly gloat that the ABC is 'free from commercial influence or interests', making its news editorial stances fiercely independent.

They will not be able to use that defence anymore now that a key revenue stream for the ABC will be dependent on the commercial success of Google and Facebook.

Indeed one of the ABC's [key editorial standards](#) is to "Ensure that editorial decisions are not improperly influenced by political, sectional, commercial or personal interests". The ABC grovelling for this new source of funding puts it at conflict with its own editorial standards.

The idea that the ABC, which is entirely funded by the government, would be a beneficiary of this scheme puts a lie to the idea that the mandatory media code is about levelling the playing field between news media businesses and digital platforms due to a loss in advertising revenue.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg was correct in pointing this out only a few months ago in [the Australian](#) :

Importantly, the bargaining arrangements relating to the payment of remuneration will not be available to public broadcasters as they are principally funded by the government and not through advertising revenue. Public broadcasters will, however, benefit for the minimum standards for non-remuneration matters set out in the draft mandatory code.

The ABC is a taxpayer-funded behemoth with guaranteed funding of over \$1.1 billion per year. Therefore, it has not lost any money through the existence of Google or Facebook eating up advertising revenue.

Indeed, it is the other way around, The ABC's 2019-2020 annual report reveals an advertising spend of \$5.5 million, which is a significant increase from a \$2.7 million advertising spend reported from 2018-19.



Much of this is buying up Google advertising to increase ABC websites' positions in news searches.

So, the ABC will be giving money to Google with your tax dollars, only to receive it in return. The relationship between big tech and big public broadcaster will inch that bit closer in a cosy deal that puts mainstream Australians last.

Surely a better outcome both for the ABC, and taxpayers, would be to reform the ABC into a subscription service like is being proposed for the BBC in the UK, privatise it completely, or at the very least, allow the ABC to air commercials since they are so keen on a slice of advertising revenue in the first place.

The ABC wants the perception of being independent from commercial interests while cashing in on revenue from commercial organisations like a seagull to a chip.

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