

Mr Mark Scott
Managing Director
Australian Broadcasting Corporation
GPO Box 9994
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Cc Mr Michael Mason, Acting Director Radio
Ms Deborah Levitt, Acting Manager RN

Dear Mr Scott

HINDSIGHT AND REAR VISION

The public historians who form the membership of our Association have recently been made aware of the possibility that *Hindsight* and *Rear Vision*, the two dedicated history programs on ABC Radio National, may be closed down.

The PHA NSW & ACT strongly urges you and your management team to **not proceed with any such closure**, and instead to look at ways to expand these programs and the history content generally on RN.

Hindsight's record of achievement and high-quality production has been reflected over the years in its being nominated for and winning many awards and prizes. The accumulation of such honours is testimony to the value of the program, both among its peers in the media and history communities, and also among its many audiences who continue to support the program. This record is not something to discard lightly.

Our members would find the loss of these programs, especially *Hindsight*, particularly disturbing considering the generally low levels of history programming or content in the Australian media, and the poor quality and narrow content of much of what is available. This is an area in which we would be expecting to see the ABC expanding its coverage rather than diminishing it.

More specifically, the following points have been made by our members:

- History is at the core of any civic engagement and national identities, and we believe it is consistent with the ABC's charter to continue making and broadcasting programs such as *Hindsight* and *Rear Vision*.
- New interpretations and understandings of history are continually being developed and presented to the public. This is an integral part of the dynamic that keeps history vital and able to inform current community debates. For public historians such as our members, who work beyond the academy in public and community institutions and as independent scholars, *Hindsight* in particular

offers some of the few opportunities available to make our contributions to historical scholarship available to wider audiences and the general public. Without such opportunities, the diversity and creativity inherent in the work of public historians would be excluded from wider audiences.

- Radio provides ways of presenting history that consume fewer resources and are more accessible to public historians. Radio's emphasis on oral and aural transmission of stories encourages the use of the human voice in all its forms (speech, singing, etc) along with the soundscapes that shape a historical narrative, such as those of a working harbour. The use of radio as a medium when linked with the social history focus of *Hindsight* replicates a very long human history of passing on knowledge and understandings of the past through personal and engaging story telling, especially from one generation to the next.
- We understand that *Hindsight* has a large and diverse audience within Australia and overseas. This must surely be consistent with both fulfilling the ABC Charter and with the ABC playing its role as a good corporate citizen in facilitating the sharing of histories among the diverse communities of Australia and other societies for the mutual benefit of all concerned.
- Public historians work in a diverse range of spaces, including the media and radio in particular. *Hindsight* has provided a training ground for many historians who have gone on to work in other media. This 'college' role should not be undervalued in the continuing professional development and growth of public historians.
- Many programs, on both radio and television, are located within historical periods and settings and portray or refer to historical characters and events. The importance of sound historical research and analysis to the credibility and veracity of such programs cannot be overstated. Programs such as *Hindsight* are, we believe, critical to maintaining the ABC's well-deserved reputation as a provider of historical programming through both stand-alone history programs and through the integration of sound historical interpretations in documentary, drama, cultural, political and other programs. The choice is not between one or the other, they exist within an iterative process that is highly valued and needs to be maintained.

The PHA NSW & ACT appreciates that any large organization is always evaluating and assessing its priorities and the availability of resources. This necessarily involves the making of choices. Thus submission argues that, in making such choices at this time, ABC RN should be seeking to develop its coverage of history and the contributions of historians in ways that do not result in reducing or terminating exemplary history programming like *Hindsight* and *Rear Vision*. Both historians and the general community need programs such as these to enhance and evolve the civic values that promote social cohesion and chart ways to a common future.

PHA NSW & ACT

Professional Historians Association
NEW SOUTH WALES AND AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY



*Professional Historians
Association (NSW & ACT) Inc
GPO Box 2437
Sydney NSW 2001*

www.phansw.org.au

For the reasons set out in this letter, I implore you to retain and continue supporting
Hindsight and *Rear Vision*,

Yours sincerely

Bruce Baskerville

CHAIR

Professional Historians' Association NSW & ACT