

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Eminent Australians call on ABC to Support Arts

**Tim Winton, Nick Cave, Betty Churcher, Geoffrey Rush** and **Elizabeth Ann Macgregor** are among a group of local artists who are dismayed and outraged at ABC management's decision to chop *Art Nation*, the ABC's sole TV arts magazine program, and disband the national broadcaster's TV arts unit.

Their names are included in a veritable 'who's who' of people prominent in the arts and other parts of life who have issued an open letter to the ABC Board to complain at what is happening.

The letter has the support of **SA Premier Mike Rann** and **Melbourne Lord Mayor Robert Doyle**. Signatories like leading scientist **Sir Gustav Nossal**, football legend **Ron Barassi** and economist **Saul Eslake** reflect the breadth of interest in this issue.

"We fear the arts are being marginalised by the ABC's concentration on prime-time programming," said Jonathan Biggins, a leading Australian theatre director and writer.

The reasons cited for the planned cuts to arts by the head of ABC TV in a memo to ABC staff and reported in the media, are: "falling audiences" and an interest to "focus its limited financial resources on prime-time programming". In other words, ratings.

"What separates the ABC from commercial networks is the rigour and imagination to seek out the poets, the myth-makers and painters. If the cultural life of this country is not considered worthy of the national broadcaster's continuous attention, then what is?" said Biggins.

"This act of cultural vandalism will also seriously diminish the ABC's role as the nation's cultural archivist," said Michael Shrimpton, a former head of ABC TV Arts and Entertainment. "The ABC is a chronicler of our greatest artistic achievements."

The ABC Charter gives the public broadcaster a responsibility to produce "programs of cultural enrichment" and "encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia".

"The Board will have failed if it does not ensure a strong and viable television arts unit which can both commission and create great programs," said Biggins and Shrimpton.

*Ends*

GS:FABCmedia folder

\* The community is largely unaware that there is a short window of opportunity to express their views about recent ABC program changes and the shutting down of ABC in-house production capacity. Senate inquiry submissions close on September 9.

[http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ec\\_ctte/abc/info.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ec_ctte/abc/info.htm)

\* A copy of the letter to the ABC Board and its list of signatories is attached/follows.

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