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Local coverage to suffer as ABC cuts journalistic experience

The ABC's decision today to axe 20 journalists around Australia will undoubtedly impact local newsrooms.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance condemns the disappointing decision made by ABC News management today to axe 20 journalists out of local newsrooms.

It appears the majority of those being tapped for redundancy are senior, experienced journalists.

Staff who are on the chopping block are local journalists dedicated to local storytelling. Despite assurances from management that local coverage will not suffer, it is difficult to understand how axing senior, experienced journalists out of state newsrooms is not going to have an impact.

“While MEAA understands more digital-facing roles will be created in this move by ABC to cater to audiences moving increasingly to online, our public broadcaster has to ensure it doesn't throw the baby out with the bath water,” said the Director of MEAA Media, Katelin McInerney.

“The ABC has a poor track record of skilling their staff up adequately to meet the challenges of digital and online news production – the redundancy rounds in 2014-15 and subsequently have seen more than 130 talented, dedicated journalists made redundant, and have been marked by widespread under-investment in skills training and a dearth of opportunities to work in new digital areas to cement those skills.

“The ABC has a duty to their audiences to ensure their senior, often older and more experienced staff are provided with opportunities to gain the skills needed to pivot to online.

“We need experienced journalists in the newsrooms of our public broadcasters, journalists whose expertise in the business of newsgathering and in investigative journalism not only benefits their audiences but also the next generation of reporters coming up the ranks.”

After several years of pressure from ABC union members, management finally announced late last year the creation of a dedicated annual budget for training staff. Prior to that there was no dedicated corporation-wide plan or budget for upskilling editorial staff. Staff regularly complain that access to training is incredibly difficult to balance with a 24/7 news cycle.

The ABC should be providing their senior staff, their most valuable asset, with the skills required to move news into new areas.

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