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New ABC chair must fight for increased funding, says MEAA

The new chair of the ABC must be a champion for our national broadcaster by protecting the independence of its journalism and fighting hard for more funding, says the union for journalists, performers and screen crew.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance congratulates Justin Milne on his appointment as chair of the ABC for the next five years. Mr Milne replaces James Spigelman, who will leave the position at the end of the month.

MEAA chief executive officer Paul Murphy said the ABC was one of the most important public institutions in Australia, and the chairperson had a great responsibility in ensuring it met its legislated charter.

“Justin Milne comes to the position with considerable experience in the private sector and it is to be hoped that he recognises the ABC belongs to all Australians,” Mr Murphy said.

“The ABC consistently ranks as one of Australia’s most trusted and respected institutions but it has been undermined in recent years by political attacks on its journalism and a series of funding cuts.

“As chairperson, Mr Milne must be prepared to publicly defend the ABC from politicians who attack its journalists when the stories they report run counter to the views of a particular political party.”

Less than a fortnight ago, Pauline Hanson’s One Nation party banned ABC journalists from attending their function on the night of the WA election. Hanson followed this by accusing the ABC of running a ‘leftist’ agenda and calling for it to be privatised.

Mr Murphy said the chairperson of the ABC must be prepared to challenge such politically-motivated attacks on the organisation.

MEAA will also be expecting the new ABC chair to forcefully make the case for better funding for the broadcaster.

Since 2014, about \$270 million has been cut from ABC funding, and ABC base funding has been cut – in real terms – by almost 25% over the past 30 years.

“These funding cuts have placed enormous stress upon the ABC, which is being asked to do more with less, particularly on digital platforms,” Mr Murphy said.

“The impact of the cuts can be seen in the constant redundancies being implemented, the axing of popular programs like *Catalyst* on ABC TV and music programs on Radio National, the doubts about the future of ABC Classic FM, and the outsourcing of comedy and drama programming to private producers.

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“ABC journalists , editorial and support staff have more than delivered higher productivity in these difficult conditions, continuing to produce high quality and independent news and current affairs content and programming. But this is unsustainable without increased funding.”

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The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance - the people who inform and entertain