

# Your ABC or your ASX?

## Coverage of business and economics on the ABC

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*The ABC's ample coverage of business and economics skews towards big business. Small to medium businesses make up a third of the economy, but big business receives three to five times more ABC coverage. Union, NGO and public sector voices are rarely heard in business and economic stories.*

Discussion paper

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# Summary

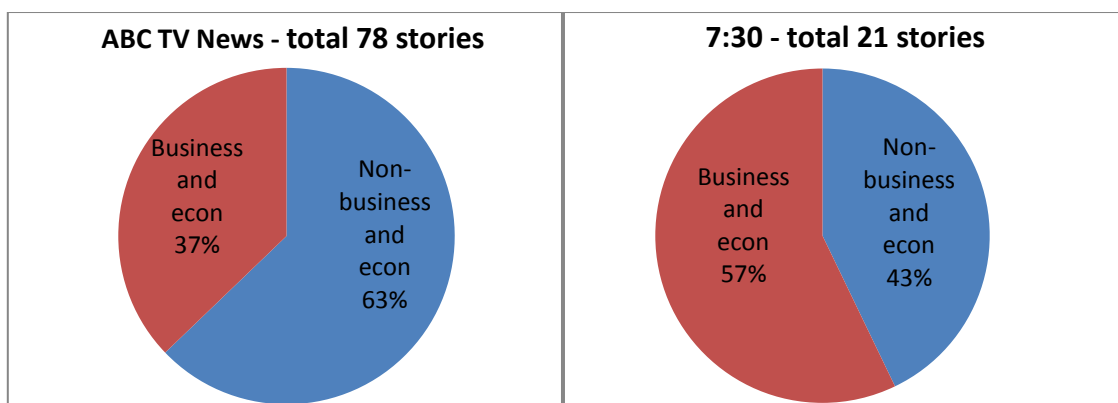
Claims that the ABC is “anti-business” led to an editorial review in early 2016 into the national broadcaster’s approach to business coverage. The editorial review found no evidence of bias, and no breaches of the ABC’s editorial standards.

While the editorial review found no bias against business as a whole, it did not consider whether the ABC was serving all segments of Australia’s business community in line with its charter or their importance to the economy and wider community.

The Australia Institute has undertaken a quantitative review that fills this gap. We reviewed samples of the ABC’s mainstream news and current affairs broadcasts as well as business and economics-specific programming, across television, radio and online platforms. In total we reviewed 438 radio and TV items and 129 online items, noting which included business and economics related content, what subtopics were covered and what voices were heard.

In this sample, general news and current affairs programs include high proportions of business and economics coverage; in some programs more than half of the content. ABC TV news and current affairs devote a large portion of their broadcast to stories relating to business and economics:

## Business and Non Business coverage in ABC News and 7:30



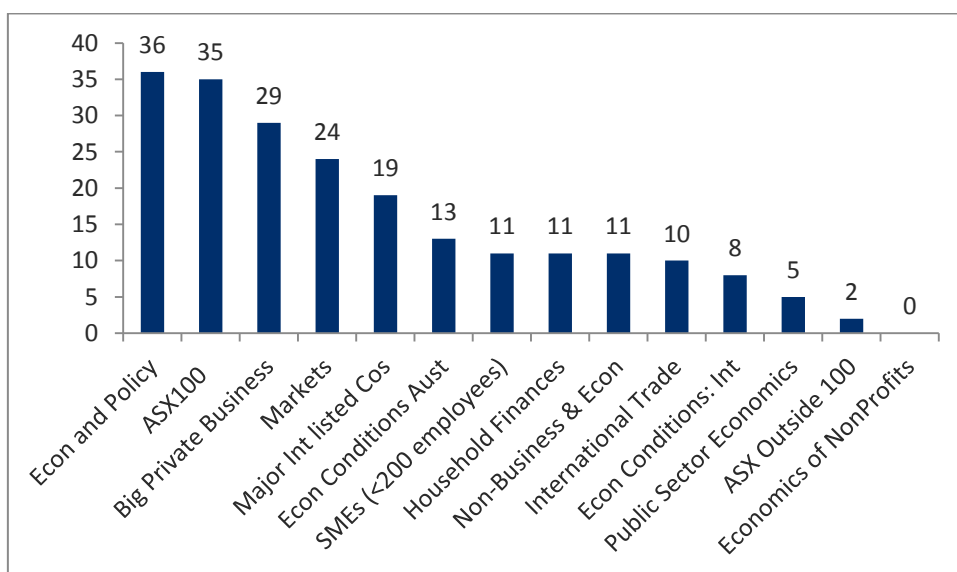
Source: TAI analysis of ABC media content

ABC radio also places emphasis on business and economics news. Flagship current affairs show “AM” covered business and economics topics in more than half its stories, while “Breakfast”, “Mornings” and the 7:45 News broadcast covered business and economics in between 15-30% of stories.

When mainstream news and current affairs programs cover business and economics, coverage focuses on big business and the economic implications of public policy. “AM”, for example, included ten stories on ASX 100 companies or other big private businesses, 12 percent of all stories. By contrast, only three stories related to small business.

This bias towards coverage of big business is even more marked in business and economics-specific programming. In the ABC News online business section the majority of stories concerned big businesses either directly, or through discussion of markets and policy more relevant to big business:

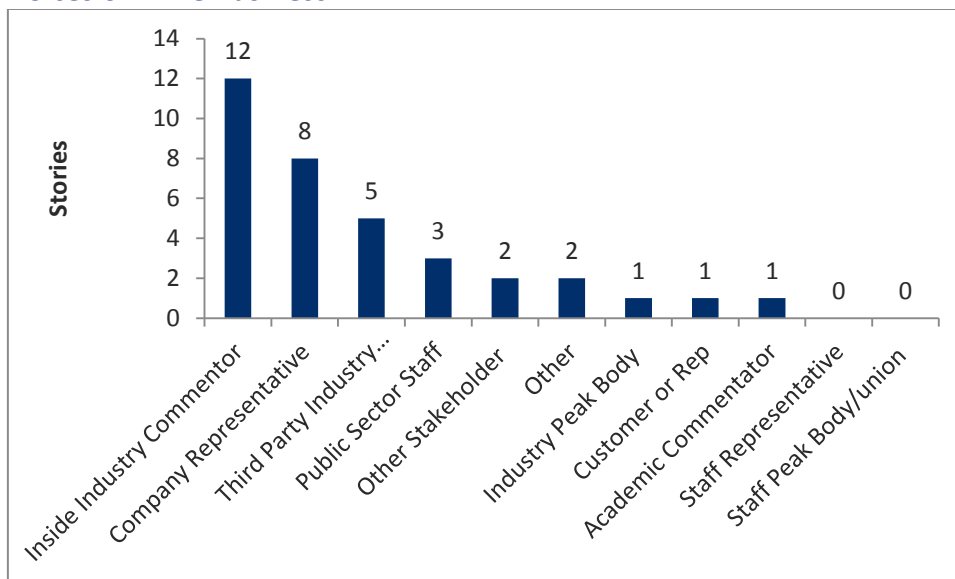
**ABC online business and economics-specific coverage**



Source: TAI analysis of ABC media content

This imbalance is also reflected in “The Business”, where big business was covered five times more often than small business topics. “The Business” gives voice to inside industry commentators, such as analysts from research firms and banks, along with representatives of the predominantly large businesses being covered:

### Voices on “The Business”



Source: TAI analysis of ABC media content

By contrast, no company staff members, shareholder representatives or staff peak bodies such as unions appeared in the sample of “The Business” analysed by The Australia Institute.

So is enough coverage given to business and economics? Clearly they are important topics that affect all of our lives. All of us are variously customers, employees, business owners and superannuation account holders. We live in environments that are improved or degraded by business activity, and vote for governments that set economic policy and make business regulations.

So while the ABC’s level of attention paid to business and economics may be appropriate, this sample’s disproportionate focus on big business appears out of line with the ABC’s charter responsibilities to provide broadcasting services that reflect the Australian community.

By any measure the ABC’s coverage of big business was disproportionate. Big business was covered five times more often in “The Business” than small to medium-sized businesses, yet businesses employing less than 100 people employ 36% of Australia’s workforce, pay 37% of private sector wages and account for 33% of private sector GDP. Beyond the private sector, the ABC’s business and economics coverage gives minimal attention to the public and not-for-profit sectors, despite these areas also making a significant contribution to employment and the economy.

The ABC also examined the perspectives of only a small section of business stakeholders. The sampled content included voices of politicians, big business

representatives and inside industry commentators much more often than staff, customers or stakeholders with relatively less power.

The Australian economy relies on small, medium and big businesses, the public and not-for-profit sector, each in significant measure. Furthermore, every single Australian is a stakeholder in the government's work, and community life is intertwined with small to medium sized businesses.

Australians need good journalism applied to all the important parts of the economy, from small business to big businesses, private economies and public, in proportion to their impacts on Australian life. Instead, we appear to have a skew towards coverage of, and for, big business. We need to hear perspectives from a diversity of stakeholders, and have journalists interrogate their statements. This paper raises the question of whether the ABC's business and economics coverage delivers this to the degree required by the ABC Charter.

# Introduction

The ABC faces regular accusations that the organisation has a left-wing or anti-business bias:

The ABC, in the main, tends to have a jaundiced view of business and development. Sure, it will give a plug to an eco-lodge here, or focus on a renewable energy start-up there (leaving out the reliance on subsidies) but its usual stance on any major development is to give voice to the opponents and it tends to portray big business as an enemy of the people.<sup>1</sup>

In response to such criticism, the ABC Board commissioned an editorial review of business and economics coverage which found the ABC did not have:

a pro or anti-business bias but [did fail] on occasion to adequately reflect the range of perspectives.<sup>2</sup>

What were these inadequately covered perspectives? The review did not explore this in depth. This raises further questions not considered by the editorial review that merit quantitative analysis: Who is being well-served by the ABC's business and economics coverage? Who might be being left out?

The Australia Institute has conducted a quantitative review of the ABC's programming, which supplements the editorial review and answers these questions. Our review analyses a sample of the ABC's radio, television and online content, including coverage of business and economics within general news and current affairs programs and in business- and economics-specific content settings.

## PROCESS

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The Australia Institute reviewed ABC business and economics content from online, television and radio. That included general interest news and current affairs broadcast programs as well as specialist business content on TV and online.

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<sup>1</sup> Kenny (2016) *ABC's anti-business bias probed*: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/columnists/chris-kenny/abcs-antibusiness-bias-probed/news-story/c355e07587dd48ab4903280f5ca9e4>.

<sup>2</sup> Blackburn (2016) *ABC Editorial Review No.8 Impartiality of business coverage*, p 12.

The online content was an April week's-worth of stories from the ABC News business feed; 129 items.

The television content was "The Business", 7pm "ABC News (NSW)" and "7:30" over five consecutive March weeknights.

The radio content was a 7:30–9am period, roughly equivalent to a morning commute on ABC Sydney Local Radio, comprising some of "Breakfast with Robbie Buck", the 7:45 fifteen-minute news bulletin, "AM", and the first half hour of "Mornings with Wendy Harmer", for five consecutive April weekday mornings.

In total 438 radio and TV items were included in the review.

The full methodology, including a discussion of the sample size and its implications, is included as an appendix.



# Economic and business coverage in mainstream news and current affairs programs

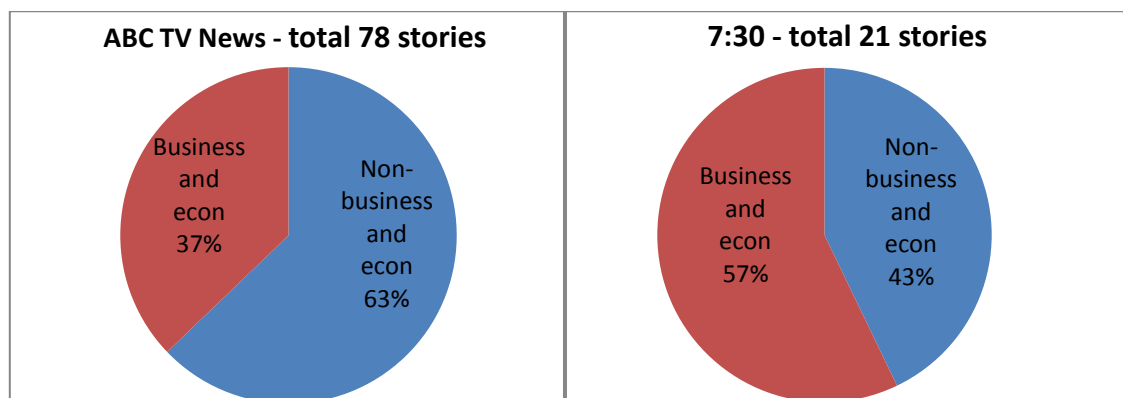
On mainstream radio and on television, in the general news and current affairs programs, ABC broadcasting included high proportions of business and economics coverage; in some programs more than half of the sample. The sub-topics skewed towards big business, and public policy. The journalists more frequently included voices of business representatives and politicians than those of staff, customers and other stakeholders.

## TELEVISION

Business, finance and economics made up a large part of this sample of news, current affairs and general interest broadcasts; both in the form of stories exclusively about business and economics, and as part of stories primarily about other topics (a political story, for example).

The ABC's "7:30" program covered business and economics in more than half their stories, as shown in Figure 1 below. More than a third of the "ABC News" program stories were on business and economics.

**Figure 1: Business and Non Business coverage in ABC News and 7:30**



Source: TAI analysis of ABC media content

Some of the main business and economics stories in Figure 1 included:

- Timing of the federal budget

- The Commonwealth Bank’s insurance scandal
- Regular finance and market updates

The breakdown of content in Figure 1 includes sport and weather coverage in the count of “ABC News” non-business and economics stories.

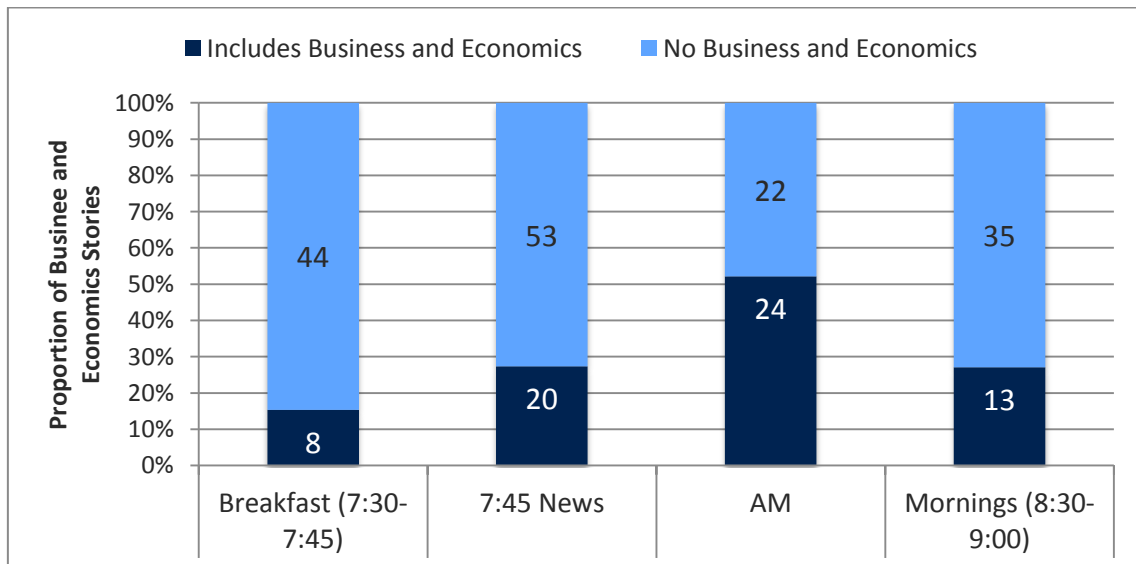
Other non-business stories focused on:

- Crime – several shooting, stabbing and drug stories as well as coverage of the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse
- Defence – Collins Class submarines
- Science and health – a solar eclipse and Aurora Borealis, a Legionnaires disease outbreak
- International affairs – refugees in Europe, Australia’s refugee deal with Cambodia, the death of Nancy Reagan

## RADIO

Similarly, ABC radio gave substantial coverage to business and economics in this sample of general news, current affairs and wider discussion programs. The late section of “Breakfast” gave less emphasis to business and economics, while the news bulletins, and the initial section of “Mornings” had more. “AM” had the highest proportion, as shown in the following chart.

**Figure 2: Current Affairs Radio coverage of business vs non business coverage.**



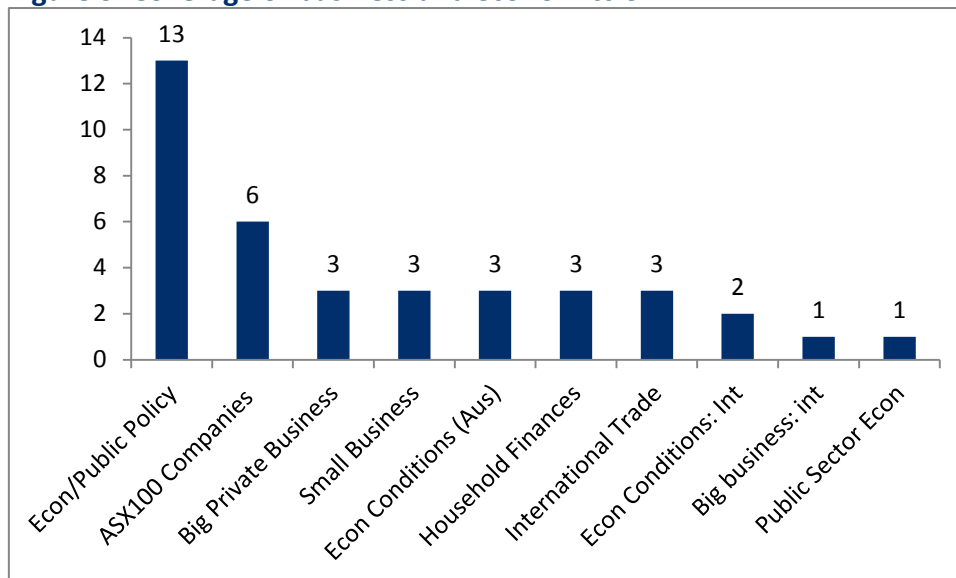
Source: TAI analysis of ABC media content

The business and economics content in “Breakfast” included mentions of public finance relating to the Bondi Pavilion upgrade and other business stories such as the liquidation of Queensland Nickel. More airtime was given to entertainment, social, and sport. Promos were also prevalent, but not included in these counts.

The 7:45 news bulletin had less of an economics and business focus than the sampled TV news. Instead it covered a lot of crime, traffic and road issues. International stories and political stories on radio were less likely to include a business and economics angle. For example both Radio and TV news ran stories on Japan’s earthquake and Fukushima nuclear disaster anniversary, but where TV news included a focus on affected small businesses, the radio bulletin did not.

“AM” had a substantial focus on business and economics, with slightly more than half the stories including a focus on some aspect of business and economics. “AM”’s coverage of business and economics stories focused on economic implications of public policy, but also included ten stories on ASX 100 companies or other big private businesses, 12 percent of all stories. These included stories on Arrium, banks and Volkswagen.

**Figure 3: Coverage of business and economics on “AM”**



Source: TAI analysis of ABC media content

By contrast, only three stories related to small business. The first was a comment by independent senator Nick Xenophon on the implications of public policy. The second was a brief reference in a story on private sector cyber security threats in an interview with Jennifer Westacott, CEO of the Business Council of Australia, which primarily represents big business. The only story relevant to small business that featured a

speaker other than a politician or representative of big business was a story on unethical door-to-door sales in indigenous communities in Far North Queensland.

(Note also that as this analysis was based on the online archived version of “AM”, we have not included its daily financial market wrap, marginally understating the number of business and finance stories.)

“Mornings” included stories on the NSW budget, rental stress and education that related to business and economics, but generally focuses on opinion, talkback and culture including, in this sampled week, the death of Prince.

Assessing whether a story is “business-related” is a difficult and imprecise task. And how much of news should cover business and economics is another inherently subjective issue, and should vary according to what happens in the world. However, it is clear that among the content analysed, drawn from the ABC’s prime times on the most popular services, the producers gave considerable weight to business and economics.

# Business and economics-specific programs and spaces

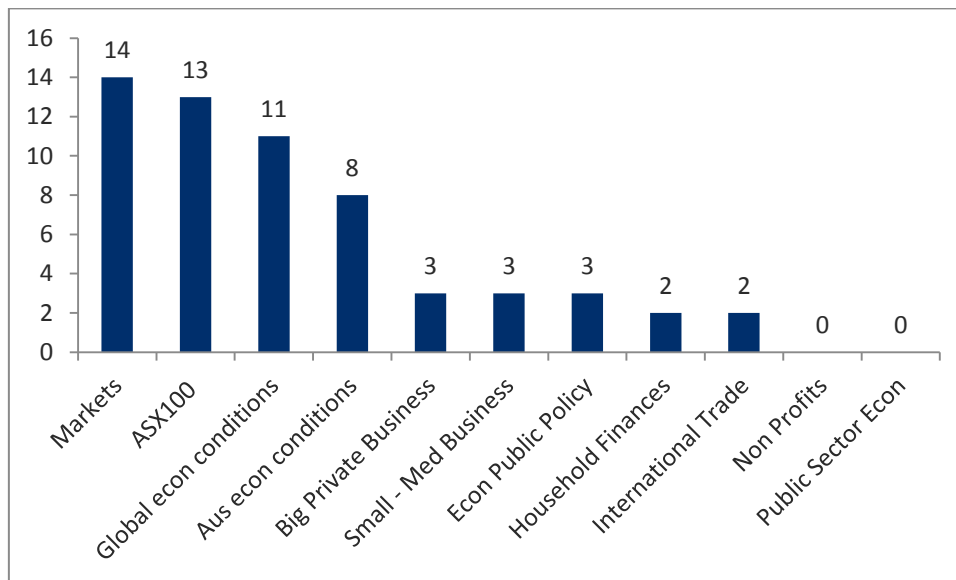
## TELEVISION - THE BUSINESS

“The Business” is described by the ABC as “the day’s business and finance news”. It is the corporation’s specialist daily business and economics program, broadcast on ABC News 24 at 4:30pm and 8:30pm and repeated on ABC1 at 11pm. It is also available on demand online.

As might be expected, all of the 21 stories that ran on “The Business” in our sample related to business and economic topics. Several stories focused on mining and resources, including coal, iron ore and silver. Banking and real estate were also covered as well as daily market updates.

In the period analysed, stories on “The Business” related to financial markets 14 times, ASX 100 businesses 13 times, international economic conditions were addressed 11 times and Australian economic conditions 8 times, as shown in Figure 4 below:

**Figure 4: Topics covered in The Business sample**



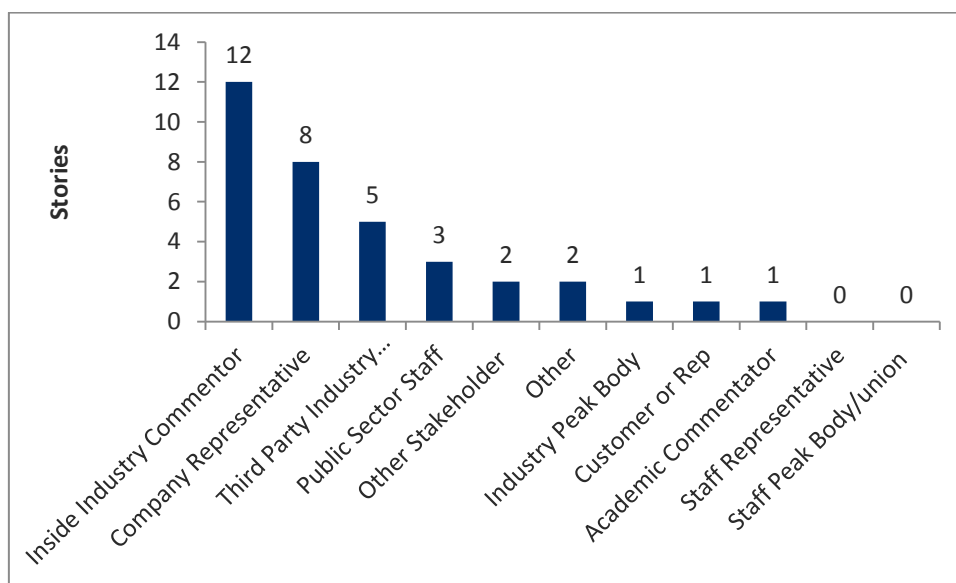
Source: TAI analysis of ABC media content

Big private companies, those not listed on the ASX, were also covered three times, while there were only three small and medium business-related stories. Between ASX 100 companies and large private businesses, 16 stories related to big business, more

than five times as many as related to small business. Market and economic condition-related stories also tend to focus on equity and commodity markets more relevant to big business than small.

This imbalance is also reflected in who gets to speak on “The Business”. The voices of inside industry commentators, such as analysts from research firms and banks, are heard most, along with representatives of the predominantly large businesses being covered, as shown in Figure 5 below:

**Figure 5: Voices on “The Business”**



Source: TAI analysis of ABC media content

The company representatives were entirely drawn from senior management ranks, rather than staff or shareholders. No company staff members, staff representatives or staff peak bodies such as unions appeared in our sample.

This imbalance is also reflected in the feature interviews in each episode. These were with Business Council of Australia President, Catherine Livingstone, former CEO of News Limited, Kim Williams, the Chief Economist of Rabobank, Wim Boonstra, China macroeconomy expert Anne Stevenson-Yang and Eddie Sheehy, founder of cyber security start-up Nuix. Only the last interview could be interpreted as having any substantial focus on small or medium sized business.

## ONLINE BUSINESS NEWS

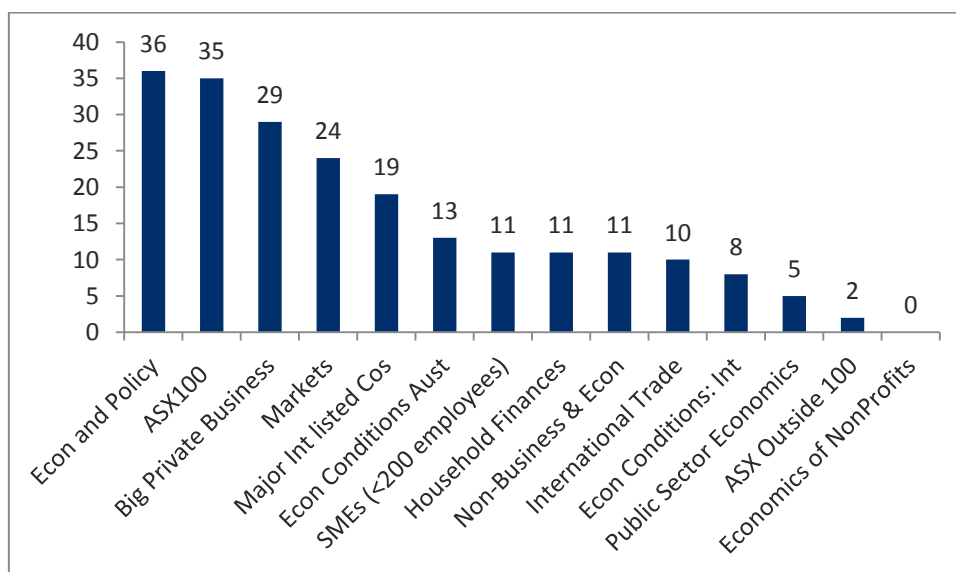
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The ABC news website has a business section, which was the basis for this analysis of business-specific online news. In the week from 15-22nd April 2016 there were 129 items posted in this online content channel.

Major stories in that week’s business and economics news agenda included the liquidation of Clive Palmer’s Queensland Nickel refinery, Chinese investment and macroeconomy (following Malcom Turnbull’s visit), the bankruptcy proceedings of the Arrium steelworks, market coverage, particularly of a surge in commodity prices.

As with the business-specific television coverage, the majority of stories concerned big businesses either directly, or through discussion of markets and policy more relevant to big business, as shown in Figure 6 below:

**Figure 6: ABC online business and economics-specific coverage**

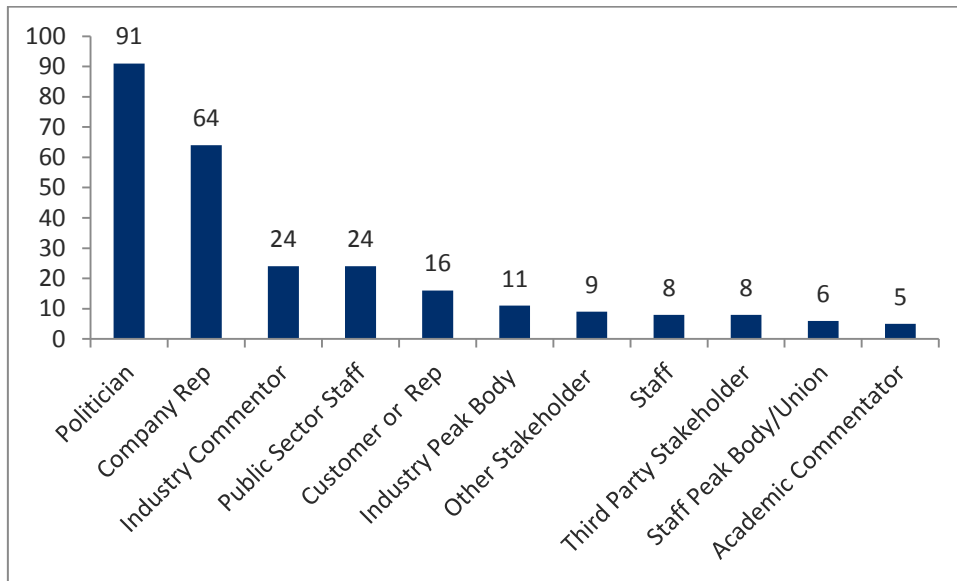


Source: TAI analysis of ABC media content

As shown in Figure 6, ASX100 companies were covered 35 times, along with a further two mentioned companies listed on the ASX but outside the top 100. Large unlisted Australian businesses were covered 29 times, along with 19 major overseas-listed companies. Altogether these large businesses were covered 85 times, compared to just 11 stories that covered to small and medium sized businesses.

Politicians and company representatives dominated this sample of online business and economics coverage. Politicians’ voices featured 91 times, with company management representatives featured 64 times, as shown in Figure 7 below:

**Figure 7: Voices in online business and economics-specific coverage**



Source: TAI analysis of ABC media content

Industry commentators, such as bank or stockbroker analysts, also featured regularly. The public sector staff counted here were mostly spokespeople for the Reserve Bank of Australia and the Australian Securities and Investment Commission, judges, coroners and law enforcement officials.

There was a noticeably small representation of staff and unions, just 5% of the voices heard. (Although they were quoted in coverage of the liquidation and bankruptcies of Queensland Nickel and Arrium.) This may suggest that staff and unions are only heard on the ABC when companies reach crisis point.



# Discussion

The ABC's journalists give a lot of coverage to business and economics. When journalists make decisions about what news to cover and who to interview, they take on a big responsibility. They are deciding what facts are circulated so that audiences can understand the world and take their actions. They are deciding who may state their case in the public sphere.

So is enough coverage given to business and economics? Clearly they are important topics that affect all of our lives. We are all customers, employees, business owners and superannuation account holders. We live in environments that are improved or degraded by business activity, and vote for governments that set economic policy and make business regulations. Every Australian plays a role in the circulation of money and, because of this, business and economics journalists have an opportunity to address a large and diverse audience.

So while the ABC's focus on business and economics may be appropriate, what is less clear is whether its bias towards coverage of big business shown in this sample is in line with the ABC's charter responsibilities to provide:

Comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard as part of the Australian broadcasting system consisting of national, commercial and community sectors... [and] reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community.<sup>3</sup>

The editorial review found that the ABC's business specialists consider this important. They generally agreed that:

Effort and resources should be directed towards ... enlarging the scope of business content to include **greater coverage of small business**, new technology and **workplace issues**.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, the editorial review did not test these claims by conducting a quantitative analysis of the ABC's current coverage of business by type. Our review shows clearly that the diversity of the business community is not represented in ABC coverage. For example, although the ABC's business coverage focuses on big business,

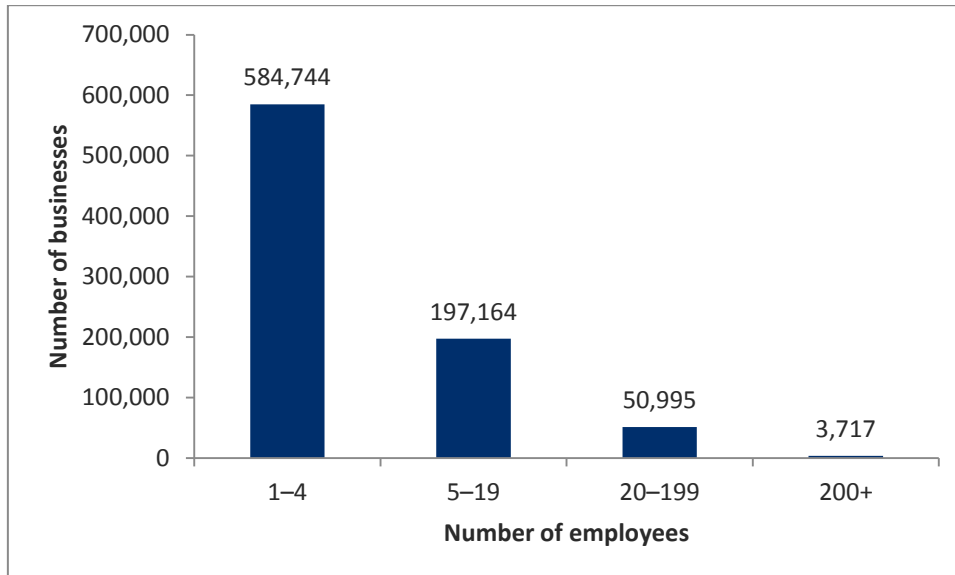
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<sup>3</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (1983) *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act, Section 6 Charter of the corporation*, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2013C00136>

<sup>4</sup> Blackburn (2016) *ABC Editorial Review No.8 Impartiality of business coverage*, p 48 (emphasis added).

businesses employing more than 200 people make up less than one percent of the number of employing businesses in Australia, as shown in Figure 8 below:

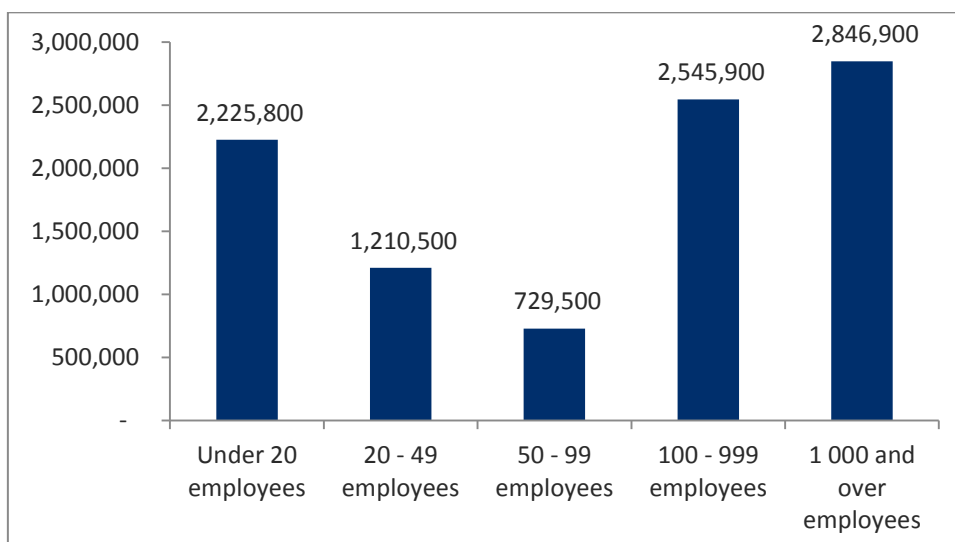
**Figure 8: Number of businesses by Employment Size Range**



Source: ABS (2016) 81650 Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits

Other measures reinforce that, in contrast with the subjects of this sample of the ABC’s coverage, Australia’s economy has a balance of small, medium and large businesses. Small and medium sized businesses (those of less than 100 people), employed 4.2 million people in 2014, 36% of the total 11.5 million person workforce, as shown in Figure 9 below:

**Figure 9: Number of employees by business size**



Source: ABS (2015) 6306.0 - Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2014

Similarly, businesses of less than 100 employees paid 37 percent of the private sector wages in Australia in 2014.<sup>5</sup> Small businesses alone accounted for 33% of private business' GDP contribution.<sup>6</sup> So, on key economic measures: jobs, wages, GDP contribution, small businesses account for about a third of the economy.

Beyond the private sector, the public sector is also a large part of the Australian economy. It employs 1.9 million people<sup>7</sup>, more than 15% of working Australians. A further 742,000 Australians work in the not-for-profit sector, not including volunteers.<sup>8</sup> Total governments' revenue for FY2015 was \$553 billion<sup>9</sup>, (by way of comparison, Australia's GDP was \$1,620 billion).

Audiences of this ABC online and TV content sample would have been given the impression that the most important topics in the Australian economy were big business, markets, economic policy and business regulation. This is significant, as business and economics coverage filled a large part of the news and current affairs output. It appeared that the coverage of big business and markets was out of balance with their proportion of the Australian economy (using the baselines established earlier). Online, the ABC covered big business eight times more than small business; a severe imbalance regardless of whether one uses GDP contribution or employee numbers. On the smaller number of times when small business was discussed, it was often in the context of fraudulent or other criminal activity; for example a small security training provider providing its customers test answers, and sexual abuse in a small dance studio business. Big business was discussed in a range of contexts; sometimes with regard to financial performance and business innovations, but also business failures (including the liquidation of Queensland Nickel), and wrongdoing (the CommInsure scandal).

Household and personal finance topics were only lightly covered, as were public sector and non-profits' economic activity. The impact of electricity prices and the entry of the Aldi supermarket chain were typical examples of household finance stories, although the online business and economic coverage also included a story on women's low level

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<sup>5</sup> ABS (2015) 6306.0 - Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2014

<sup>6</sup> Australian Treasury (2014) *Small Business Data Card*

<http://www.treasury.gov.au/PublicationsAndMedia/Publications/2012/sml-bus-data>

<sup>7</sup> "Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2014." Australian Bureau of Statistics, January 22, 2015. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6306.0May%202014?OpenDocument>.

<sup>8</sup> ABS (2015) 5256.0 - *Australian National Accounts: Non-Profit Institutions Satellite Account, 2012-13*, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/5256.02012-13?OpenDocument>

<sup>9</sup> "Government Finance Statistics, Australia, December Quarter 2015." Australian Bureau of Statistics, March 1, 2016. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/5519.0.55.001>.

of superannuation. The economic side of the public service came up so infrequently it defied meaningful characterisation, but examples were infrastructure spending, and a Chinese investment in a University of NSW technology center.

In contrast to television and online, radio's business and economics coverage was vastly dominated by public policy and regulation. It included more discussion of public sector economics, household and personal economics and small business activity. However, big business was still discussed more than three times as frequently as small business. The small business discussion included matters like the impact of traffic congestion, and a planned redevelopment of the pavilion at Bondi Beach. (It's notable that this sample was taken from ABC local radio in Sydney, a service aimed at a specific region, which can therefore rely on its audiences being familiar with smaller operations.)

In terms of voices, existing power holders were those most represented on television and online. The journalists vastly more often included politicians and big business representatives than they included staff, staff representatives or customers. Applying a common categorisation model of business stakeholders - comprising managers, owners, staff and customers – (discussed in more detail in the “baselines” section above) reveals a stark imbalance in the voices heard.

There are some important caveats in this analysis. A count of topics and voices cannot indicate whether the audience will be left with a positive or negative impression of the subject matter. For example, coverage of Commonwealth Bank's insurance operation, CommInsure, would have left many people with a strongly negative impression of that operation. Likewise, a politician or union leader may come away from an interview with a worse reputation than when they started. This paper is therefore not conclusive about whether the ABC's coverage is beneficial to one particular sector of Australia's economy or another, or any particular set of stakeholders.

Also, journalistic bias or unfairness can only be shown by re-reporting the story. An assessment of fairness must be made with reference to “on the ground” facts and evidence, and how those are presented to the audience. Therefore, anyone who makes accusations of bias must independently obtain the relevant facts, and compare the original presentation with their own understanding of the facts. For reliability, this would need to be done by a panel of people. Accusations of bias made without a basis in that methodology should be greeted with scepticism. Put simply, a slew of negative stories about a bank might be because their insurance division defrauded its customers.

This paper does, however, start to indicate what the ABC's business and economics coverage is about, and whose perspectives it examines. It has compared this to

baselines of Australian economic activity, and a widely accepted model of identifying economic stakeholders.

## Editorial review

Certain findings of the editorial review should be reconsidered with this quantitative evidence that ABC reporting skews towards big business and upper management.

Mike Smith, the CEO of ANZ until late last year, was the adviser to the editorial review. Given the over-representation of big business and upper management in the ABC's reporting, it would have been better to have an adviser from a different area of business.

The review praised *The Business* for rolling out "a red carpet of senior business leaders" not found on other ABC shows. One reason for this is that senior business leaders were "reluctant to face questioning", which they expected from other ABC programs.<sup>10</sup> The review recommended their appearances on *The Business* be repurposed for other ABC shows, which would exacerbate the over-representation of big business and management positions. Senior business leaders should expect critical and difficult questioning on any ABC show, especially given the disproportionate coverage they enjoy.

The editorial reviews' recommendations that journalists invite business leaders to lunch and that the ABC hold "short staff swaps with industry" also risk skewing business coverage further in favour of big business.<sup>11</sup> As ABC Radio noted in its response to the review, "There are ... many issues around 'embedding' journalists within any enterprise on which they are then expected to report with full impartiality".<sup>12</sup> It is big business that would typically have the personnel and resources for staff swaps, not small- and medium-sized businesses and not-for-profits.

One area of concern for the editorial review was businesses being "spruiked" during interviews, either by the interviewee or the journalist interviewer.<sup>13</sup> If ABC journalists spoke more often to staff, customers and staff representatives instead of business owners and managers, the temptation to spruik would diminish.

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<sup>10</sup> Blackburn (2016) *ABC Editorial Review No.8 Impartiality of business coverage*, pp 33-34.

<sup>11</sup> Blackburn (2016) *ABC Editorial Review No.8 Impartiality of business coverage*, p 15.

<sup>12</sup> ABC (2016) *ABC response to editorial review No. 8*, pp 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> Blackburn (2016) *ABC Editorial Review No.8 Impartiality of business coverage*, pp 40-41.

# Conclusion

It is clear that the Australian economy relies on small, medium and big businesses, the public and not-for-profit sector, each in significant measure. Furthermore, every single Australian is a stakeholder in the government's work, and community life is intertwined with small to medium sized businesses. The ABC's coverage of business and economics should cover those topics in proportion, rather than the current skew towards big business.

Australians need good journalism applied to all the important parts of the economy, from small business to big businesses, private economies and public, in proportion to their impacts on Australian life. We need to hear perspectives from a diversity of stakeholders, and have journalists interrogate their statements. This paper raises the question of whether the ABC's business and economics coverage delivers this to the degree required by the ABC Charter.

# Appendix: Methodology

The Australia Institute reviewed ABC business and economics content from online, television and radio. The Australia Institute’s review was similar in many ways to the ABC editorial review, some of which is also noted below.

The editorial review considered a week of content, between 7 and 13 February 2016.<sup>14</sup> The Australia Institute review considered a week of content but, because of staffing and technical constraints, the week of television content assessed was different to the week of online and radio content assessed.

The Australia Institute review’s online content was everything in the ABC News business RSS feed from 15–22<sup>nd</sup> April 2016; 129 items. This captures everything found at the URL <http://www.abc.net.au/news/business/articles/>. By contrast, the editorial review considered only business news, from three sources: News Online, Drum Online and ABC Rural.<sup>15</sup>

The television content was the five weekdays from 7–11 March 2016, of the following programs, watched via ABC iView:

- “The Business”,
- The 7pm “ABC News” (NSW) and
- “7:30”

The editorial review’s sample was slightly larger. It considered the above, and *Landline*, *Insiders*, *Lateline*, *Q&A* and *The Drum*.<sup>16</sup>

The radio content was a 7:30–9am period on ABC Sydney local radio, roughly equivalent to the morning commute time, from 18–22<sup>nd</sup> April 2016. It comprised

- 7:30-7:45 of “Breakfast with Robbie Buck”,
- the 7:45 fifteen minute news bulletin,
- “AM”, and
- the first half hour of “Mornings with Wendy Harmer”.

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<sup>14</sup> Blackburn (2016) *ABC Editorial Review No.8 Impartiality of business coverage*, pp 9-10.

<sup>15</sup> Blackburn (2016) *ABC Editorial Review No.8 Impartiality of business coverage*, p 16.

<sup>16</sup> Blackburn (2016) *ABC Editorial Review No.8 Impartiality of business coverage*, p 16.

“Breakfast”, the news bulletin and “Mornings” were recorded off the live online audio stream, and subsequently analysed. The transcripts of “AM” were read from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/audio/>.

The method for “AM” may have omitted some intro and outro content, which sometimes includes currency and market updates. It also meant that more stories were analysed than were broadcast on ABC Sydney (“AM” is broadcast in a number of different versions across the ABC’s various radio stations).

The editorial review considered a wide variety of business content from Radio National, local, regional and state and territory radio and The World Today.<sup>17</sup>

The Australia Institute believes that our sample provides a cross-section of business and general interest news and current affairs, where a consumer might be expected to encounter business and economics content. However, this sample has some limitations, and those are discussed below.

The results were produced by asking three main questions of each story: Did this story include business and economics? What subtopic was covered? And what were the voices heard?

Stories were assessed as being either about business and economics, exclusively about business and economics, or not about business and economics. Some coverage of politics was not considered a business, economics or finance story, for example several stories covered early election speculation with no direct mention of, or link to, businesses or economic topics. Other primarily political stories are included as a business or economics story due to their links to particular businesses or parts of the economy, for example a story on potential development of very fast trains. One story covering Tony Windsor’s decision to run for the seat of New England had a focus on economic policy and was included as an economic story, while another did not and was considered non-business and economics. Every effort was made to be methodologically consistent in categorising political stories.

Concurrently, the process counted whether each story covered particular pre-defined subtopics within the broad area of business and economics. Stories could have more than one subtopic. The sub-topics were developed by a panel of Australia Institute experts, tested on a small content sample, and revised based on the test. Stories with a significant focus on non-business or economics topics were tagged as such.

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<sup>17</sup> Blackburn (2016) *ABC Editorial Review No.8 Impartiality of business coverage*, p 16.



The research also counted and classified each person quoted or paraphrased in a business and economics story. (If the story had no significant business or economics focus, its “voices” were not included in the analysis.) The researcher also noted where there was a discernible environmental and/or social focus in the story, although we have not presented analysis on this topic.

## LIMITATIONS

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Readers should note that this sample is relatively small, both in terms of the duration, and the number of programs and channels. We did not, for example, include the investigative program “4Corners” in the sample, although the other ABC programs relayed what had been covered by “4Corners”. The radio sample was only from Sydney, although “AM” is also broadcast across the ABC’s network. Researchers who examine other programs may get different results.

The analysis of online content only considered the stories themselves. It did not consider the placement or weight given to particular stories on ABC News’ business page, nor which stories were promoted or circulated on social media. No analysis was included of which online stories attracted large audiences.

The news agenda is also quite variable over time; these samples take only a week’s worth of content for each platform. The current events being reported upon may not be representative of an entire year.

The categorization process also has some subjectivity; researchers needing a higher standard of evidence would be advised to have multiple analysts working independently, and systematically combine their results. For that reason, the Australia Institute is happy to provide the results table if other researchers wish to re-produce the findings from this sample of content.

None-the-less, we believe the process yielded valuable indications of what parts of the business and economics world the ABC covers (and not), and whose voices are heard. This paper provides a model process for a more comprehensive assessment of the topics and voices in the ABC’s business and economics coverage.

This paper does not consider whether the journalists “got the story right”, were biased, whether the coverage reflected positively or negatively on the subject of the story (fairly or not), or whether the story was of high or low “quality”. (The conclusions section does discuss how one might approach the question of journalistic bias within stories, and the necessary standard of evidence. This paper does not

attempt to answer that question, but instead equips readers with ideas about how they might assess any other research about such journalistic bias.)