

Open letter to the Radio National/ABC Radio Management Team

From the AWG Playwrights Committee

CC: The Honorable Simon Crean, Minister for the Arts

The Australian Writers' Guild is the peak advocacy organisation for professional performance writers in Australia. We represent writers of television, theatre, film, radio and new media.

Understandably, our reaction to the axing of Airplay and other ABC radio drama programs has been one of concern for our organisation and members, many of whom have been employed by these programmes over many fruitful and productive years, in the creation of radio drama. To hear of the loss of these opportunities for writers is always a concern.

As commissioned playwrights, we may stand outside the employment structures of the ABC, but we are very concerned about the fate of Radio National producers and all staff that have brought our words to life on radio. Because the sudden announcement of cuts came on the heels of the Radio Beyond Radio Conference, exploring new digital forms, we know that producers at Radio National are not averse to new forms and changes to traditional play formats. We urge you to negotiate in good faith with our colleagues and their representatives and take advantage of this opportunity to improve Radio National by incorporating their ideas.

We understand that Radio National is under budget pressure, but cutting drama production will leave the door open to a barrage of imported programs and content. While this content is of interest and can be licensed more cheaply than producing original Australian content, we believe that to ignore Australian stories – and gut the infrastructure that produces these stories – is short-sighted and culturally damaging.

While the Guild continues to advocate for the re-instatement of Airplay's drama-length programs, we also enthusiastically support the creation – and extension – of new opportunities to run alongside it. As an organisation representing peak-practice artists, we are aware of the changing realities of media and broadcasting in a digital-dominated environment, and embrace the creation of new forms to suit the new paradigm.

Our position on future drama multi-platform content is proactive, professional and optimistic: we would like to join a conversation with the ABC about how radio drama can complement programming across diverse ABC programmes. Many of our members have been employed by the BBC as writers for radio drama in short and long formats that have supported BBC comedy, news and current affairs, community-specific programming, serialisation, and language learning and education.

What we'd like to see is a reconceptualisation of radio drama that can accommodate the challenges of new media and extend the involvement of creative writers into work that engages a new audience through other forms of programming. We are inspired by the platform that BBC radio drama has given to the development of artists of the stature of Chris Morris, Charlie Brooker and the creative team of *The Mighty Boosh*, as well as the historical richness of programming that supported the creation of *Dr. Who* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

We have a talented membership whose skills can engage comedy, serialisation, drama and experimental radio practice and be part of the creation of export-quality content, as well as diverse delivery through rich content on the Internet and podcasting.

We have many members who are passionate about talking to the ABC about different forms of radio drama and content production. We suggest a meeting be co-ordinated to talk through exciting ideas and ways forward.

We look forward to hearing from you – The AWG Playwrights Committee

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Lachlan Philpott Vanessa Bates Tommy Murphy

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You may contact the Playwrights Committee at AWG: industrial@awg.com.au (<mailto:industrial@awg.com.au?subject=Re%3A%20Open%20Letter%20to%20Radio%20National>)

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