

EDITORIAL REVIEW NO. 4—BUDGET 2014

Colleen Ryan, February 2015

Coverage on ABC1 news and current affairs from Tuesday 13 May 2014 (immediately after delivery of budget) to Monday 19 May 2014.

INTRODUCTION

The 2014 Federal Budget was arguably the political highlight of the year. It was the first Budget to be presented by the Abbott Government following its election in September 2013. And it has been assessed by some observers as representing a turning point in the electoral popularity of the Liberal National Party Coalition during its first year in government.

Every Federal Budget affects each and every Australian – but in some years more so than in others. In 2014, the Federal Budget touched students, the unemployed, every person who attends a doctor, and every person who drives a car or watches the ABC. This was a year in which there was an intense level of interest in the detail of the Budget measures. There was also a high level of interest in the impact of the Budget on the overall economy. Australians had been treated, quite recently, to a highly charged election campaign that had stressed economic mismanagement and a damaging blowout in the Federal Budget deficit.

The ABC is well-placed, in terms of both its journalistic standards and resources, to provide comprehensive, unbiased coverage of such a key event in the Australian political and economic calendar. And it is particularly well placed to set an example to commercial media of how to present rational discussion of complex economic matters.

This review is intended to assess the Federal Budget coverage, as presented on ABC1, for its quality, its thoroughness and its impartiality.

The intention of the review was not to exhaustively ‘fact check’ every statement for accuracy, nor to consider technical or stylistic issues associated with production. Instead, I approached each program from the perspective of the first time viewer and attempted to assess it as would an average ABC viewer in terms of its impartiality.

On the particular issue of impartiality, I took note of both the Corporation's editorial policy on impartiality as stated in Section 4 of the document 'ABC Editorial Policies, Principles and Standards', and of the Guidance Note on Impartiality 2013 (amended 2014). The ABC guidelines essentially require that in dealing with any controversy or debate its news and current affairs coverage will provide an adequate amount of air time to all significant views as indicated in the phrase 'breadth of coverage'. The coverage, in specific terms, will also be 'accurate, impartial and objective and therefore avoid bias.' To ensure impartiality, editorial judgements are to be 'based on news values, not for example, on political, commercial or sectional interests or personal views. Do not unduly favour one perspective over others.'

I also considered the comments of ABC Chair, James Spigelman, in his speech to the National Press Club in 2013 when he addressed the frequency of allegations of a lack of impartiality at the ABC.

The chairman said:

"I do not accept that it (lack of impartiality) is systematic, but I do accept that it sometimes occurs. Every news and current affairs program endeavours to ensure balance, whilst avoiding the pitfall of irrelevant dullness. That this endeavour is not always successful manifests the imperfection of human endeavour, rather than systematic bias. We are not always as good as our most ardent supporters suggest, nor as bad as our most vocal critics assert."

In this respect, while this review considers each program (and each program segment) individually, it accepts that there will be lapses but notes that the key assessment is whether these lapses represent a sustained pattern of impartial reporting and analysis.

In assessing the 2014 Budget coverage on ABC1 for quality and thoroughness, this review focused on four key components.

Specifically, did the coverage provide sufficient and appropriate emphasis to all aspects of the Budget, including:

- Its economic and financial impact;

- Its political implications and the political responses to it;
- Its overall social and community impact; and
- The reactions to it from all relevant sections of the community.

On aspects of the quality and thoroughness of the Budget coverage, I approached these from my own perspective as a former Editor of the *Australian Financial Review* who was in charge of Budget coverage for that newspaper for three Federal Budgets and several State and Territory Budgets between 1998 and 2002. I have also attended approximately 15 Federal Budget lock-ups as a financial reporter.

FINAL CONCLUSION

The Federal Budget coverage on ABC1 news and current affairs from Tuesday 13 May 2014 (immediately after delivery of the Budget) to Monday 19 May 2014 complied with the ABC's policies and guidelines on impartiality. A diversity of perspectives was presented in the news and current affairs coverage, without any sense of misrepresenting or unduly favouring one perspective over another.

I found no hint in any of the coverage that either stated or implied that any perspective was the editorial opinion of the ABC.

There was reasonable time given to both of the major parties to present their views.

In my assessment, the overall quality of the Budget coverage was excellent. In terms of thoroughness, the best performance was in the coverage of the political implications of the Budget and its overall social and community impact. There was comprehensive coverage of reactions from all relevant sections of the community. However, I do have some reservations on the structure of the coverage of the economic and financial impact of the Budget.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This review is intended to assess the Federal Budget coverage, as presented on ABC1, for its quality, its thoroughness and its impartiality.

Impartiality

The Federal Budget coverage on ABC1 news and current affairs from Tuesday 13 May 2014 (immediately after delivery of the Budget) to Monday 19 May 2014 complied, in an overall sense, with the ABC's policies and guidelines on impartiality. A diversity of perspectives was presented in the news and current affairs coverage, without any sense of misrepresenting or unduly favouring one perspective over another.

I found no hint in any of the coverage that either stated or implied that any perspective was the editorial opinion of the ABC.

There was reasonable time given to both of the major parties to present their views. Key Government Ministers were allocated more time than their Opposition counterparts but this was appropriate given the nature of the subject. There were one-on-one interviews with the Prime Minister, the Treasurer, the Finance Minister and the Education Minister. In addition, the Treasurer was the sole panelist on the relevant edition of *Q&A*, allowing him just over an hour to answer questions and present his case. There was care taken over the entire coverage to ensure that guest commentators were evenly balanced between pro- and anti-Government views. Similarly, the perspectives of various stakeholders and community members were presented with a wide range of reports and interviews on the key aspects of the Budget.

Of the 76 news and current affairs reports that I analysed, there were just three that I felt should be singled out for extra commentary. These comments are not intended to dilute my overall conclusion on the compliance with impartiality guidelines. Instead, they are intended to provide a cautionary comment on how perceptions of bias can be inflamed unnecessarily. I stress that these are potential perceptions.

The first is the *7.30* interview by Sarah Ferguson with Treasurer Joe Hockey on Budget night.

This interview provided compelling television and was selected as a finalist in the 2014 Walkley awards. Ferguson is an intelligent and incisive interviewer. However, I felt that the 'tone' of the questioning in this particular interview could have been interpreted by some viewers to be a potential breach of the ABC's impartiality guidelines.

The second report I have singled out for extra commentary is the 7.30 TAS of May 16 2014.

This report, including four interviews, focused on the impact of Budget measures on charities aimed at the poor in Tasmania.

In my view, this was the least balanced of the State-based 7.30 programs in Budget week. The focus of the entire program was solely on cuts to welfare and the response of charities and university students. There was a lack of balance in the reports – they were overwhelmingly negative. The three reports were each well researched and presented. But the program as a whole was not comprehensive.

The third program I have selected for mention is *The Drum* on May 15 2014.

The presenter Steve Cannane was very balanced in his questioning and repartee with the panelists. It was a robust discussion. But the balance of panelists could be improved – that is, in this program there were two obviously pro-Labor panelists against one with more conservative views. It is important in terms of impartiality obligations that the goal be to seek balance whenever feasible.

Quality and thoroughness

In my assessment, the overall quality of the Budget coverage was excellent. In terms of thoroughness, the best performance was in the coverage of the political implications of the Budget and its overall social and community impact. There was comprehensive coverage of reactions from all relevant sections of the community. However, I do have some reservations on the structure of the coverage of the economic and financial impact of the Budget. I have addressed these concerns in detail in my comments on individual program segments.

In summary, there were two aspects of the coverage that concerned me.

Firstly, there is a lack of balance in the coverage of the mainstream current affairs programs (*7.30* and *Lateline*) between the political implications of the Budget as opposed to the economic and financial implications. These implications were covered, and covered quite thoroughly, but the average viewer would have needed to watch *The*

Business program each night to get the full benefit of the ABC's coverage of the economic and financial implications. In my view, it would be beneficial if the mainstream current affairs programs incorporated the economic and financial coverage as well as the political and social elements of the Budget.

Secondly, there was an over-reliance on political reporters, as opposed to business reporters, in the Budget coverage. On Budget night, for example, there was not a single ABC business reporter featured in 7.30 and on *Lateline* there was one brief (three and a half minute) report by a business reporter. Quarantining the bulk of the business coverage to a late night program, such as *The Business*, shortchanges the viewers and skews the coverage towards the political elements. This should be the one day (and week) of the year when business reporters and economic correspondents share centre stage with political reporters. Instead, both *Lateline* and 7.30 appear to rely on outsiders for business and economic analysis.

For example, in the 7.30 coverage on Budget night, Chris Richardson of Deloitte Access Economics provided much of the business and economic analysis, but he is an external, expert interviewee. And he was interviewed by a political reporter. Richardson's contribution could have been supplemented by a senior ABC business or economics editor providing a wrap up of the impact of the Budget measures on the economy overall, the stock market, interest rates and the foreign exchange rate.

In the *Lateline* program on Budget night, Emma Alberici interviewed two newspaper journalists on their take on the Budget—Laura Tingle political editor of the *Australian Financial Review* and Peter Martin, economics editor of *The Age*.

This was a good interview, a worthwhile discussion. However, I think it emphasised the lack of ABC 'in-house' experts – the ABC does have well qualified business editors and reporters who were not evident in this Budget coverage on ABC1, at least not in the mainstream current affairs programs. In my view, not enough emphasis is placed on economic coverage by ABC television. I have in mind the BBC's economics editor Robert Peston who is such an important asset to the BBC news team. He was previously the BBC's Business Editor and broke a number of key stories during the 2008 financial crisis. It is hard to imagine BBC television covering the British Budget without

significant input from both Robert Peston and the BBC's current business editor Kamal Ahmed. ABC1 does not place the same priority on economics and business correspondents in their mainstream current affairs programs such as *Lateline* and particularly *7.30*.

PARAMETERS OF THE REVIEW

This review focuses on the Federal Budget coverage by ABC1 television news and current affairs from Tuesday May 13 2014 (immediately after delivery of the Budget) to Monday May 19 2014. It includes the *7pm News Sydney* (18 segments); *7.30* (23 segments); *Lateline* (17 segments); *The Business* (9 segments); *The Drum* (4 segments); *Insiders* (4 segments); and *Q&A* (a single 1 hour program).

NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

The Budget papers that journalists are presented with in the Budget lock-up include the text of the Treasurer's speech to be delivered later that day plus literally hundreds of pages of information including the Treasury papers and documents from every affected government department. From my personal experience of covering Budgets over two decades, I know that some of the most revealing pieces of information can be found in the fine print of appendices or buried in an almost impenetrable graph. It is not humanly possible to digest all of this information in the three to four hours of a Budget lock-up. I took this into account in assessing the Budget night coverage of ABC1.

I also took into account that it is valid to have 'reaction loaded' reporting in the days following the Treasurer's Budget speech. Once adequate exposure has been given to the views of the Government on its Budget policy (airing of the Treasurer's speech to Parliament and interviews with the Treasurer and other key Government Ministers), it is important to present the views of affected parties across the community. In other words, balance in reporting should be assessed over the whole week not just on one particular evening's viewing.

On the issue of bias, each viewer brings his or her own political perspective to the program. He or she may consider that aggressive questioning by the interviewer constitutes bias. While this may be a valid assessment at times, it is also important to consider the role of the ABC in catering to citizens as opposed to consumers – citizens

who wish to assess, indeed scrutinize, the performance of their government. In this context, is it reasonable to grill the Treasurer on his policies immediately after airing his Budget speech? And if an interviewee performs poorly in answering tough questions, should this be considered the fault of the interviewer and assessed as biased questioning?

In terms of my initial evaluations, I framed my findings within two classifications of performance. Segments that raised no concerns about impartiality or breadth of opinion are described as being of acceptable professional standard (APS). By definition they complied with all ABC requirements for fair and accurate reporting.

Any segment that, in my opinion, could conceivably be seen as having fallen short of ABC standards is referred to as raising concerns. (RC)

Overall, my intention was to assess how well and how thoroughly ABC1 covered the Budget, and to form a view on the following questions:-

- was the coverage thorough, with appropriate attention given to the Budget as a statement of economic policy, as a political statement and in terms of its impact on the community.
- Was there balance and impartiality on the various perspectives included, and the time and weight attached to them.
- Overall, was the coverage fair and balanced.

PROGRAMS

7.30 May 13, 2014

Segment 1: The dot points of Joe Hockey's Budget 2014. (4.59 duration); date to air 13/05/14, Presenter Sarah Ferguson; Reporter Mark Simkin; Speaker Joe Hockey, Treasurer.

Summary of content: Sarah Ferguson introduces the program, alerts the viewers to the upcoming interview with Joe Hockey and headlines Simkin's report as 'what the Budget means for individuals'. Simkin's report lists the main elements of the Budget focusing on the hip pocket hit for individuals.

Evaluation: Ferguson's introduction included a broad summary of the Government's objectives in the Budget. It was brief but balanced. Simkin's report, as Ferguson flagged, was pitched to 'what it means for individuals'. Within this context the report was tough but balanced. His opening words ("In a word ouch. The Government is calling it pain with purpose and there's pain a plenty") were tough but a fair assessment in terms of the impact on the individual. The report was interspersed with comments from Treasurer Hockey and touched on positives in the Budget such as the reduction in the deficit over time; the big infrastructure spend and the new medical research fund. It was a reasonable summary – particularly considering the amount of time available to prepare the report. The 7.30 program began as the Treasurer completed the Budget speech and shortly after the end of the Budget lockup. Nevertheless, the report could have included issues such as the deregulation of education and more macro economic data—likely impact on the dollar, stock market, interest rates. But the report was pitched at what it means for the individual and it gave reasonable exposure to Hockey's comments. **APS**

Segment 2: Budget 2014 represents 'genuinely solid start'. (7.08 duration); date to air 13/05/14. Presenter and interviewer Sarah Ferguson; Reporter Sabra Lane; Speaker Chris Richardson, Deloitte Access Economics.

Summary of content: Sarah Ferguson interviews economist Chris Richardson on the impact of the Budget on the economy, and specifically business, and questions reporter Sabra Lane on the political implications for the Government and the likely reaction of the Senate.

Evaluation: This was a very well conducted interview by Ferguson. Richardson was an articulate interviewee who gave a very positive assessment of the Budget for the economy and for business and stressed that it was not as tough as Budgets presented in the past by Paul Keating and Peter Costello. Sabra Lane presented the political implications of the Budget very clearly and also highlighted positive elements such as infrastructure funding and the medical research fund. Richardson went on to address the equity issues, pointing out that the impact was intended to fall on middle and lower income families and also raised the potential for a GST increase and the impact on the States. He stressed that given the tenor of the election campaign and the state of the

economy pre- election no government could have delivered without breaking promises and he was happy that promises had been broken. An excellent comprehensive interview with the proviso that it did not mention two of the major impacts on the Budget bottom line – the heavy cut in foreign aid and the contribution of ‘bracket creep’ including the freezing of indexation on certain welfare payments. **APS**

Segment 3: Joe Hockey says Budget will ‘deliver on promises in full’. (11.58 duration); date to air 13/05/14, Presenter and interviewer Sarah Ferguson; Speaker Joe Hockey, Treasurer.

Summary of content: Sarah Ferguson interviews the Treasurer, Joe Hockey, covering principally the issue of broken promises by the Government; the fairness of the Budget in its impact on big business and high income earners versus families and the unemployed; the Medicare co-payment; the Medical Research Fund; the cuts of \$80 billion in funding for the States on schools and hospitals; the likely reaction of the Senate and the prospect of a double dissolution.

Evaluation: This interview provided gripping television. But was it fair and impartial? Did it grant due respect to the interviewee? Would the average viewer consider its tone (on the part of Ferguson) as so aggressive that it exhibited bias?

I considered these questions within the context of the ABC’s Impartiality Guidance Notes (issued 22 July 2013, revised 21 May 2014). In particular, I considered the following comments/advisories in the guidelines:

“Choose language that is clear and not emotive, hyperbolic, inflammatory or derogatory.”

“Treat interviewees and other participants with civility and respect unless there is a compelling reason not to do so.”

“Ask well-informed, relevant questions. It is legitimate to be provocative or for the questioner to adopt the role of ‘devil’s advocate’ to introduce opposing viewpoints for discussion or response.”

“Provide sufficient opportunity for interviewees to answer questions or state their views, notwithstanding there will be situations where interruptions will be appropriate—for example, to elicit or clarify a response to a question which the interviewee is not answering clearly, relevantly and within a reasonable time.”

Ferguson began her interview by congratulating the Treasurer on the delivery of his first Budget. Then she launched into her first question and, in my view, that first question set the tone for the entire interview. The Treasurer appeared surprised and in my view was from that point on quite ‘rattled’ during the interview. That first question was important. It was as follows:

SARAH FERGUSON: Now, you've just delivered that Budget. It's a Budget with a new tax, with levies, with co-payments. Is it liberating for a politician to decide election promises don't matter?

The factual basis of the question was correct—some Federal Budget measures did mean that promises made prior to the 2013 election were broken.

The positioning of the question was reasonable—broken promises (on the part of the Labor Party) had been a key part of the electioneering platform of Mr Hockey’s Liberal Party in the months and years leading up to the 2013 election.

It was the tone of the question, however, that resulted in the Treasurer appearing to be under attack.

How does the tone of the question stand up under the ABC’s impartiality guidelines? Specifically, was the language used emotive, hyperbolic, inflammatory or derogatory?

And was the interviewee treated with civility and respect?

In my view, the language in Ferguson’s first question was emotive. I also believe that the average viewer would consider that the Treasurer was not treated with sufficient respect by the interviewer.

Before considering whether this meant that the interview itself was biased, I want to point to two other exchanges during the interview that concerned me.

The first exchange:

SARAH FERGUSON: Just going forward, we'll come to those initiatives in just one moment. But are you saying that individual promises made by an Opposition Leader no longer matter?

JOE HOCKEY: Well, we can spend the whole conversation talking about the process of promises...

SARAH FERGUSON: That's a yes or no question.

The second exchange:

SARAH FERGUSON: Now, two of the more controversial tax hikes in this picture, that's the deficit levy and the Medicare co-payment...

JOE HOCKEY: More controversial? There are only two tax adjustments of any substance...

SARAH FERGUSON: Adjustments? Is that what we're going to call them now?

JOE HOCKEY: Well, of any substance, so any tax changes if you like, or whatever you'd like to call it.

SARAH FERGUSON: New taxes?

JOE HOCKEY: But whatever you'd like to call it, there's two. You know, there's actually fewer than any of the previous Budgets from the previous government. So that's a good sign.

SARAH FERGUSON: They're still taxes. I don't need to teach you, Treasurer, what a tax is. You know that a co-payment, a levy and a tax are all taxes by any other name. Am I correct?

JOE HOCKEY: Of course they are. Yes.

SARAH FERGUSON: So there are new taxes in your Budget?

JOE HOCKEY: There are increases in taxes.

SARAH FERGUSON: New taxes in your Budget.

In the first exchange, it was this comment that stood out:

SARAH FERGUSON: That's a yes or no question.

In the second exchange, the relevant comment was:

SARAH FERGUSON: They're still taxes. I don't need to teach you, Treasurer, what a tax is. You know that a co-payment, a levy and a tax are all taxes by any other name. Am I correct?

In my view, these two exchanges do not meet the impartiality guidelines to treat the interviewee 'with civility and respect unless there is a compelling reason not to do so.'

There are two key factors to consider in deciding whether my reservations on the tone of Ferguson's interview affect the overall conclusion that ABC1's Budget coverage complied with impartiality guidelines. First, Ferguson is an aggressive interviewer who treats both sides of politics in the same manner and gives no sense of where her own political views may lay. Scrutiny is an important element of quality current affairs television and Ferguson performs this admirably. Secondly, the performance of the interviewee can have a big impact on the perception of whether the tone of the questions breached impartiality guidelines. The Treasurer Joe Hockey, performed very poorly in this interview compared to, for example, his Q&A performance. **RC**

Segment 4: Opposition focuses on Medicare, pensions and petrol in Budget 2014. (6.11 duration); date to air 13/05/14, Presenter and interviewer Sarah Ferguson; Speaker Chris Bowen Shadow Treasurer.

Summary of content: Sarah Ferguson interviews Shadow Treasurer Chris Bowen covering principally the issues of whether the Opposition would oppose in the Senate the deficit levy, the fuel excise increase and the changes to the family tax benefits.

Evaluation: This was a tough interview. Ferguson interrupted Bowen on several occasions (more often than she interrupted the Treasurer in the previous interview) and raised the prospect that the Labor Party in opposition would mirror the former Opposition Leader Tony Abbott presenting a party that only opposes.

The Bowen interview does not in my view breach impartiality guidelines – the language was not unduly emotive and despite the number of interruptions the overall tone was respectful. On the other hand, the tenor of the Bowen interview is important for viewer perceptions of bias in the context of the Hockey interview immediately preceding it.

Two points are relevant. The first is that Ferguson was also tough in her questioning of Bowen. The second point is that Bowen performed extremely well in the interview – as opposed to Hockey who appeared tired and rattled. The composure of the interviewee can affect perceptions of bias. If Hockey had performed as well as Bowen, Ferguson's tough questioning may have been less of an issue for the average viewer. **APS**

Segment 5: Business Council welcomes budget's start while Social Services describe 'divisive' decisions. (2.39 duration); date to air 13/05/14, Presenter and interviewer Sarah Ferguson; Speakers Jennifer Westacott, Business Council of Australia; Dr Cassandra Goldie, Australian Council of Social Service.

Summary of content: Sarah Ferguson queries Jennifer Westacott on whether the Budget poses a risk to business confidence, and Cassandra Goldie on who the biggest losers are likely to be from the Budget.

Evaluation: This was less an interview than an opportunity for two leading players in the economy – the Business Council and the Australian Council of Social Service to present their views on the Budget. It was well done by all participants and provided important input from key stakeholders. **APS**

Overall assessment of the program (7.30)

The program provided excellent television and Sarah Ferguson did an admirable job under particularly difficult circumstances. As mentioned, the program began straight after the end of the Budget speech.

I have attended about 15 Budget lock-ups in my career and for three of those lock-ups was Editor of the *Financial Review* with ultimate responsibility for the *AFR*'s coverage. The amount of documentation that has to be read and analysed within just a few hours makes any lock-up a gruelling experience. But to have the additional task of presenting a comprehensive live television broadcast within minutes of leaving the lock-up would be particularly challenging. Given those limitations the quality of the 7.30 coverage was extraordinary.

But there were gaps. I address this issue at greater length elsewhere in the report, but I believe that there could have been more focus on the macroeconomic aspects of the Budget. Chris Richardson provided much of this analysis but he is an expert interviewee. His contribution could have been supplemented by a senior ABC business or economics editor providing a wrap up of the impact of the Budget measures on the economy overall, the stock market, interest rates and the foreign exchange rate.

The Joe Hockey interview was also a jarring aspect of the coverage. I appreciate that this assessment is subjective and I highlight it only as part of my role to assess the Budget coverage as an average viewer. I note that this interview was a finalist for the Walkley Awards of 2014. Personally, I thought Sarah Ferguson's opening question was a great television moment – but there was an element of disrespect during the interview that could potentially impinge on the question of impartiality.

Lateline May 13 2014

Segment 1: Joe Hockey's first budget. (4.11 duration); date to air 13/05/14, Presenter Emma Alberici; Reporter Tom Iggulden; Speakers Joe Hockey, Treasurer, Chris Bowen, Shadow Treasurer.

Summary of content: Emma Alberici's introduction – "This budget will define the direction of the Abbott Government" set the scene for a big picture view of the Budget. Reporter Tom Iggulden gave a reasonably comprehensive summary of the Budget, focusing on the impact on the individual as well as the political implications for the Abbott Government.

Evaluation: This was a strong report. Very well presented. But I have some reservations. In terms of thoroughness – it did not mention the two biggest impacts on the Budget’s bottom line – the cuts in foreign aid and the impact of bracket creep. It made no reference to business impact. And the graphics were pedestrian. There was really only one graphic – explaining the impact on the deficit over coming years. Generally, I think that the ABC Budget coverage could have made much greater use of graphical representations of the Budget’s impact. And, as mentioned elsewhere, it could make greater use of its business correspondents on Budget night. The political impact of the Budget is important but the ABC coverage is very skewed towards the political reporters. This should be the one day of the year when business reporters and economic correspondents share centre stage with political reporters. Instead, both *Lateline* and *7.30* appear to rely on outsiders for business and economic analysis.

Segment 2: No major effect on the economy. (3.38 duration); date to air 13/05/14, Presenter Emma Alberici; Reporter Neil Woolrich; Speakers Joe Hockey, Treasurer; John Daley, CEO Grattan Institute; Paul Drum, Head of Policy, CPA Australia; Andrew Conway, CEO Institute of Public Accountants; Jeremy Thorpe, Partner, PWC; Innes Willox, CEO Australian Industry Group.

Content: Neil Woolrich looks at the economic implications of the Budget drawing on comments from experts.

Evaluation: This was an excellent report and the first time on Budget night on ABC 1 that there was a focus on the outlook for GDP growth, unemployment levels and inflation. I would still like to have seen an ABC ‘economics editor’ present an assessment. While the interviewees chosen by Woolrich were good, most, understandably, have a point of view to push. They need to be heard, but they also need to be assessed. Only a specialist ABC reporter could do that.

That said, this was a strong line-up of business experts compared to that provided by *7.30*. *Lateline* had more time than *7.30* to polish its coverage—but each of those expert interviews appear to have been done IN the lockup. It is feasible that *7.30* could have had more emphasis on the business impact of the Budget.

Segment 3: Budget Asks Everyone to Contribute. (7.30 duration), Presenter and interviewer Emma Alberici; Speaker Mathias Cormann, Finance Minister.

Content: Emma Alberici questions Cormann on the Budget focusing on broken promises in relation to cuts in health, education and funding for the ABC; comparisons with Labor in terms of spending as a percentage of GDP and the deficit levy.

Evaluation: Emma Alberici was a tough interviewer but she was polite and respectful. Her line of questioning was limited, with a particular focus on broken promises, but time was short – just seven and a half minutes and she gave Cormann plenty of opportunity to present the Government point of view. With the benefit of hindsight, the significance of the ideological shift in government policy represented by Abbott's first Budget versus those of Labor's Wayne Swan in previous years, could have presented the viewer with a broader picture of the Budget's significance rather than so much focus on the political impact of broken promises. However, broken promises was the story of the day and certainly a reasonable peg for an interview. **APS**

Segment 4: Tony Burke interview. (6.55 duration), Presenter and interviewer Emma Alberici, Speaker Tony Burke.

Content: Emma Alberici questions Burke on his take on the Budget's approach to welfare; the \$80 billion in cuts to the states for health and education; the deficit levy and whether Labor is responsible for the tough budget due to its own economic performance in government.

Evaluation: it was an excellent interview, probing, tough, but allowed Burke to put his point of view. **APS**

Segment 5: What the papers say. (1.45 duration), Presenter Emma Alberici.

Content: A look at the next day's front pages focusing on the Budget coverage

Evaluation: Straightforward but a worthwhile and informative aspect of the Budget coverage. **APS**

Segment 6: Laura Tingle and Peter Martin interviews. (9.15 duration), Presenter and interviewer Emma Alberici; Speakers Laura Tingle, Political editor *Australian Financial Review*; Peter Martin, economics editor *The Age*.

Content: Alberici quizzes two newspaper journalists on their take on the Budget

Evaluation: This was a good interview, a worthwhile discussion. However, I think it emphasises the lack of ABC ‘in-house’ experts—the ABC does have well qualified business editors and reporters who were not evident in this Budget coverage on ABC1, at least not in the mainstream current affairs programs. In my view, not enough emphasis is placed on economic coverage by ABC television. I have in mind the BBC’s economics editor Robert Peston who is such an important asset to the BBC news team. He was previously the BBC’s Business Editor and broke a number of key stories during the 2008 financial crisis. It is hard to imagine BBC television covering the British budget without significant input from both Robert Peston and the BBC’s current business editor Kamal Ahmed. ABC1 does not place the same priority on economics and business correspondents in their mainstream current affairs programs such as *Lateline* and the particularly 7.30. **APS**

The Business May 13 2014

Segment 1: Sorting gain from the pain. (3.43 duration). Presenter Ticky Fullerton; Reporter Phillip Lasker; Speakers Joe Hockey, Treasurer; Stephen Anthony Macroeconomics; Chris Richardson Access Economics.

Content: General introduction from Ticky Fullerton focusing on the uneven spread of the ‘pain’ from the Budget with business and baby boomers largely escaping the pain and those hit hardest unable to vote—that is, foreign aid recipients. This was followed by Business Reporter Phil Lasker’s wrap up of the Budget measures.

Evaluation: Fullerton gave prominence to the cuts in foreign aid on the Budget bottom line (responsible for one quarter of savings) —the first time that this was highlighted in ABC1 coverage on Budget night. Lasker provided an excellent roundup of the implications for the economy, the outlook for the deficit, economic growth, employment etc. While this report sits very well in a program like *The Business*, a version of this

report in the more mainstream current affairs programs would have been a powerful addition to the ABC1 coverage. Most viewers would not watch *The Business* – so it doesn't seem to be a particularly thorough approach to leave the business analysis of ABC reporters until the end of the evening. It is not giving the average viewer comprehensive coverage and points back to my earlier point that there is a disproportionate amount of reporting on the Budget by political reporters versus business and economics reporters. **APS**

Segment 2: State governments are encouraged to spend more on infrastructure. (2.51 duration). Reporter Andrew Robertson. Speakers Joe Hockey Treasurer; Lee White, CEO Institute of Chartered Accountants; Innes Willox, CEO Australian Industry Group; Kate Carnell, CEO Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Content: Straight report on infrastructure spending and medical research initiatives in the Budget.

Evaluation: The first extensive coverage on ABC1 of the infrastructure funding that the Government claims as a key feature of the Budget. A straight report, a positive slant for the Government. It also covered the Medicare co-payment and medical research initiative from a business rather a political perspective. **APS**

Segment 3: Three experts in the studio. (15.53 duration), Presenter and interviewer Ticky Fullerton; Speakers; Chris Caton, chief economist BT; Adriene Tansy, director of Primary Health Care, Adelaide Brighton Cement and Lend Lease Investment Management; Graham Bradley, Chairman of Infrastructure NSW, HSBC Australia, former president BCA.

Content: Business experts discuss the Budget

Evaluation: A lengthy discussion of the Budget from a business and economic perspective. Chris Caton was a particularly valuable panelist for his economic analysis – but overall the panel was well chosen, articulate, covered most of the bases and Fullerton conducted a very professional discussion. **APS**

***The Drum* May 13 2014**

Segment 1. The Panel give their verdict on the Budget. (29.48 duration); Presenter Steve Cannane; Panellists David Hetherington, Per Capita; John Hewson, former Liberal leader; Jessica Irvine, national economics editor NewsCorp; Annabel Crabb, ABC Online.

Content: Introduction by Steve Cannane followed by Panel discussion on the Budget

Evaluation: The introduction was a comprehensive and straightforward assessment of the Budget with clips from Joe Hockey and Chris Bowen. This was a relatively balanced and thoughtful panel with strong economics expertise for three of the four panellists. That said, Hewson, although a former Liberal leader, was very critical of the Budget particularly on the basis of equity and sharing the load for welfare cuts versus tax hikes for the wealthy. But it was a robust discussion, with equal focus on the economics and politics of the Budget, expertly chaired by Steve Cannane. **APS**

MAY 14 BUDGET COVERAGE ABC1

***7pm News* ABC1 May 14 2014**

5 Segments; Newsreader Juanita Phillips; Reporters Mark Simkin, Greg Jennett, Ben Worsley, Sophie Scott, Rebecca Barrett. (Budget reports duration 14.4)

Content: Reaction to the Budget, one day on, with the focus on hits on pensioners, the GP co-payment, criticisms of inequality, the negative reaction of the State Premiers to funding cuts, the expected changes to university fees, the impact of increased HECs payments, the changes to the dole for those under 30; funding cuts to the ABC and the likely reaction of minor parties and independents in the Senate.

Evaluation: the reports were overwhelmingly negative with very brief mentions of just two more positive aspects of the Budget—increased infrastructure spending and the new medical research fund. The coverage overall was very much directed to the impact on individuals – the hip pocket nerve. My assessment is that the coverage was fair, given the overwhelmingly negative reaction to the Budget in the community. However, it was not comprehensive. There was no reference at all to the response of the business community – and this would have been valuable given that all stakeholders had had the

benefit of a full day to assess impact. There was no reference to how the stock market or the dollar had reacted. This is useful information for everyone. It does not have to be too technical for a general audience. For example, the coverage could have benefited from a brief summing up by an ABC economics editor or business editor. This could have replaced one of the three items from political correspondents.

7.30 May 14 2014

Segment 1: ‘Historic reforms’ or ‘kick in the guts’? Budget 2014 appraised. (7.09 duration). Presenter Sarah Ferguson, Reporter Sabra Lane. Speakers Tony Abbott, Prime Minister; Joe Hockey, Treasurer; Bill Shorten, Opposition Leader; John Falzon, St Vincent de Paul Society; Jennifer Westacott, Business Council of Australia; Chris Bowen, Shadow Treasurer; Mike Baird, NSW Premier; Colin Barnett, WA Premier.

Content: Reporter Sabra Lane summed up the Government’s first day of selling the Budget; the reaction to the Budget—principally in Canberra but also including responses from the Business Council and the St Vincent de Paul Society; parliamentary question time; and the reaction of the State Premiers to funding cuts.

Evaluation: This was a good, balanced report on the political reaction to the Budget. It was fair and presented the arguments of both sides of politics in an impartial manner.

APS

Segment 2: Christopher Pyne says budget concerns ‘entirely a matter for the States’. (8.41 duration); Presenter and interviewer Sarah Ferguson. Speaker Christopher Pyne, Education Minister.

Content: Interview with education minister Christopher Pyne.

Evaluation: This was a feisty interview. Ferguson gave Pyne plenty of time to put across his point of view. As noted earlier, Ferguson is an aggressive interviewer (E.g., in this particular interview she interrupted Pyne with the comment; “We have rules about repeating lines—that is just not on”.) However, Pyne performed well (as opposed to Joe Hockey on the previous evening) and both sides gave as good as they got, providing informative and entertaining television. Pyne did claim that he was there in the studio

under false pretences because he thought the discussion was to be about higher education. Ferguson spent the last few minutes on this topic. **APS**

Segment 3: ‘Just not on’—Premiers react to State impact of budget. (7.20 duration), Presenter and interviewer Sarah Ferguson, Speakers Campbell Newman, Qld Premier; Jay Weatherill, SA Premier.

Content: An interview with two State Premiers, from opposing parties, on the cuts to State funding in the Budget in relation to health and education

Evaluation: Both Premiers were highly critical of the Budget’s impact on the states—although one was a Labor Premier and one Liberal. Two points: if Colin Barnett, the WA Premier, had been interviewed it may have provided a more balanced perspective on the changes, or alternatively if a Government Minister had been included to counter the criticism of the State Premiers. But, on balance, I don’t think that was necessary. This is an important aspect of the Budget which has the potential to have a massive impact on federalism in the future and potentially lead to inevitable increases in the GST. It was a fair coverage. **APS**

Segment 4: Does the Budget spell the end of Medicare? (6.01 duration). Presenter Sarah Ferguson, Reporter Tracy Bowden. Speakers Gabriella Zabala and Rebecca Wanganeen, vox pops at medical centre in Sydney; Stephen Duckett, Health Program Director, Grattan Institute; Terry Barnes, former Howard Government Health Advisor, Stephen Leeder, Public Health, University of Sydney; Simon Judkins, Australasian College for Emergency Medicine; Wagdy Latif, General Practitioner.

Content: A report on the impact of the Medicare co-payment canvassing the views of patients, doctors and health policy experts. It also covers equity aspects of the payment and the allocation of funds from the co-payment to medical research

Evaluation: This was a very well balanced informative report. There was no input from Government spokesmen but this was well covered with commentary from a former Howard Government health policy adviser. **APS**

Overall assessment of the program (7.30 May 14 2014)

As a Budget reaction program it was excellent and I believe met the ABC guidelines on impartiality. The graphics in the program were a big improvement on those utilized in the Budget night coverage.

However, on the issue of thoroughness, and in the interests of suggesting ways in which the Budget reaction coverage could be improved in future years, I make the following comments:

There was very little reference to the reaction of the business community or economists. Jennifer Westacott from the BCA was interviewed by Sabra Lane but her comments were restricted to policy on programs for the long term unemployed. Echoing the comments I made above on the *7pm News* coverage, there was no input from the ABC's business or economics reporters or editors. I think that the coverage would have benefited from their participation—there is too much focus on political reporters and too little on business reporters.

There could have been more emphasis also on the big picture view underlying the Budget measures—specifically the ideological shift in economic management and federalism policy that this Budget represented.

***Lateline* May 14 2014**

Segment 1: PUP concerned about pensioners, public servants and ABC. (15.46 duration), Presenter and interviewer Tony Jones, Speaker Clive Palmer.

Content: Interview with Clive Palmer of the Palmer United Party

Evaluation: This was a good 'scoop' given the Palmer United Party's importance in passing the Budget through the Senate. Palmer was very negative on the Budget but it was completely valid to devote time to his point of view. Jones conducted a probing interview on the PUP stance. **APS**

Segment 2: Older Australians required to do the heavy lifting. (3.35 duration), Presenter Tony Jones; Reporter Hamish Fitzsimmons, Speakers Tony Abbott, Prime Minister; Vilma Ward, self-funded retiree & former Rudd campaigner;

Ian Yates, CEO, Council on the Ageing; Michael O'Neill, National Seniors Australia; Bruce Matheson, Retiree.

Content: Hamish Fitzsimmons canvasses the impact of the Budget on retirees.

Evaluation: Good report but focused on the negative aspects. No government input. However, a valid treatment given that it is a reaction piece. **APS**

Segment 3: Many will lose under 'earn or learn'. (4.12 duration), Presenter Tony Jones, Reporter Jason Om, Speakers Tom Tilley, triple j Radio Compere; Paul Keating, former Prime Minister; Tony Abbott, Prime Minister; Danielle Goudge, Tafe student; Tony Nicholson, Brotherhood of St Laurence;

Larissa Daniel, Youth Worker; Sophie Trigger, university student.

Content: Report on the impact of the Budget on the young unemployed and students.

Evaluation: Balanced introduction by Jones and news report by Om. There was a lengthy segment from the Prime Minister presenting his point of view, as well as interviews with young students and the unemployed, and an input from the Brotherhood of St Laurence. A more comprehensive report could have included the point of view of business/employers. There was also no reference to the section of the new policy on the dole for the under 30s that stipulates while they must wait six months for the dole, that time will be reduced by one month for every year already spent in the workforce. **APS**

Segment 4: State Premiers revolt over budget cuts. (4.17 duration), Presenter Tony Jones, Reporter Tom Iggulden. Speakers Tony Abbott, Prime Minister;

Bill Shorten, Opposition Leader; Joe Hockey, Treasurer; Denis Naphine, Victorian Premier; Mike Baird, New South Wales Premier; Campbell Newman, Queensland Premier; Christopher Pyne, Education Minister; Colin Barnett, West Australian Premier.

Content: A straight news report combining the political reaction to the Budget from the Opposition and the State Premiers with the Government's media campaign to sell the Budget.

Evaluation: A very comprehensive and balanced report on the Budget from a political perspective with, if anything, disproportionate time given to the Prime Minister's sales pitch. **APS**

Overall assessment of the program (*Lateline* May 14)

More than half the program was devoted to the Clive Palmer interview. The rest was Budget reaction – the political reaction was covered very well by Tom Iggulden and two items that focused on the impact on older Australians, students and the young unemployed. Each of the segments were balanced and well executed. However, a more comprehensive program assessing Budget reaction 24 hours after the Treasurer's speech would have included reports on the reaction from the business community and economists. There was virtually no reference to the impact on the macroeconomy.

***The Business* May 14 2014**

Segment 1: Small business and the Budget. (4.10 duration), Presenter and interviewer Ticky Fullerton, Speaker Peter Strong, Chief executive COSBOA.

Content: Interview with the head of the peak small business association on the impact of the Budget on his constituency.

Evaluation: This was an excellent discussion of the Budget's impact on small to medium businesses canvassing the 1.5 per cent company tax cut (including the uncertainty of its delivery); the fuel tax levy; the impact on consumer sentiment. Balanced with an overall positive tone. **APS**

Segment 2: Extended interview with Brendan Lyon. (9.20 duration), Presenter and interviewer Ticky Fullerton, Speaker Brendan Lyon, CEO of Infrastructure Partnerships Australia.

Content: The interview canvasses the big infrastructure package in the Budget drilling down to an analysis of new versus existing expenditure promises.

Evaluation: A very long, but well conducted interview canvassing one of the most positive aspects of the Budget and what it means for industry. **APS**

Segment 3: The focus for small business. (3.42 duration), Presenter Ticky Fullerton, Reporter Amy Bainbridge, Speakers Giancarlo Masini, Bistro owner; Chris O’Loughlin, fruit & vegetable delivery business; Richard Clancy, Vic Employers Chamber of Commerce; Jo Demarte, pharmacist; Andrew Simson, industrial designer.

Content: A report on the Budget’s impact on small business operators in Carlton, Victoria.

Evaluation: A straight report canvassing the personal opinions of small business operators. **APS**

Segment 4: Worries over a grab at the hip pocket. (2.21 duration), Presenter Ticky Fullerton, Reporter Andrew Robertson, Speakers Joe Hockey, Treasurer;

Innes Willox, CEO, Aust. Industry Group; Russell Zimmerman, Australian Retailers Association.

Content: A straight report covering big business reaction to the Budget.

Evaluation: Comprehensive treatment of business concerns but overall a positive reaction to the Government’s Budget. The range of speakers was impressive. **APS**

Overall assessment of the program (*The Business* May 14).

An excellent package canvassing business reaction to the Budget – from the smallest to the largest businesses and with a particular focus on the big infrastructure package. The Business serves to provide the balance for ABC1’s Budget reaction—political reaction versus economic and business reaction. My reservation is that this program is in a very late timeslot and it could not be considered part of the mainstream coverage. In my opinion, the ABC1 Budget reaction coverage would have benefited from greater input from business and economic reporters in the mainstream programs—ABC1 *News*, 7.30 and *Lateline*. To leave it all to *The Business* means that the great bulk of viewers miss out on this perspective.

***The Drum* May 14 2014**

Segment 1: The panel discuss the Government's budget selling techniques and the States' fiery response to cuts to health and education. (27.57 duration), Presenter Steve Cannane, Panellists Judith Sloane, *The Australian*; Richard Denniss, The Australia Institute; Shane Wright, *The West Australian*

Content: Panel discussion on the key elements of the Budget—the macroeconomic impact; the structural changes to health and education; the implications of federalism; and the question of a trust deficit in the Government.

Evaluation: This was a very well balanced panel and it provided an excellent discussion of the big themes of the Budget with a particularly strong input on the impacts on federalism, health policy, welfare policy, foreign aid and education. It made up for the lack of economic analysis in the more mainstream programs. **APS**

MAY 15 BUDGET COVERAGE ABC1

***7pm News* ABC1 (Sydney) May 15 2014**

Segment 1: Newsreader Juanita Phillips; Reporter Mark Simkin, Political Correspondent. Speakers Tony Abbott, Prime Minister; Bill Shorten, Opposition Leader; Joe Hockey, Treasurer; Denis Napthine, Victorian Premier; John Howard, former Prime Minister. (2.36 duration).

Segment 2: Newsreader Juanita Phillips, Reporter Jake Sturmer, environment reporter, Speakers Claude Dagescy, General Manager IXL Solar; Greg Bourne, ARENA Chairman; Miles George, Infigen Energy. (2.08 duration).

Segment 3: Newsreader Juanita Phillips, Reporter Laetitia Lemke. Speakers Vox pops – students; Prof Ian Young, The Group of Eight Chairman; Prof Andrew Van, Charles Sturt University; Prof Bruce Chapman, ANU; Christopher Pyne, Education Minister. (2.06 duration).

Content: Three news reports, the first ahead of Bill Shorten's Budget speech in reply, canvassing leaked details of the speech plus assessment of the likelihood of certain

Budget measures passing through the Senate and the building reaction from State Premiers to funding cuts in health and education; the second report highlights reduced funding to the renewable energy sector; the third report examines expected increases in university fees.

Evaluation: For day two after the Budget, and ahead of the Shorten speech in reply, it was a balanced news report on reaction plus drilling further into the Budget measures to assess effects on renewable energy and education. There was adequate time given to Government responses and mention was made in the renewable energy report that the Environment Minister had declined an interview. **APS**

7.30 May 15 2014

Segment 1: Bill Shorten promises to defend pensioners, low-income earners, Medicare. (9.53 duration). Presenter and interviewer Sarah Ferguson. Speaker Bill Shorten.

Content: Interview with Bill Shorten immediately after he delivered his Budget Reply speech to Parliament.

Evaluation: In terms of balance, this interview balances the Joe Hockey interview on Budget night. Ferguson was vigorous in her questioning, as she was with Hockey, and Shorten performed very well, as opposed to Hockey's performance. It was a balanced interview in which Ferguson held Shorten to account on issues such as his plans to fill the hole in the Budget revenues left by his opposition to \$10 billion in policies. Shorten was interrupted on a few occasions but was treated with respect and given ample time to present his point of view. **APS**

Segment 2: Will 'earn or learn' see young fall through the cracks? (6.53 duration). Presenter Sarah Ferguson, Reporter Matt Peacock, Speakers Rebekah Sharkie, Youth Connections; Jessie Slager, unemployed youth; Matthew Ellick, unemployed youth; David Thompson, Job Services Australia; Kevin Andrews, Minister for Social Services; Casey O'Brien, Salvation Army; Chris Riley, Youth Off The Streets.

Content: A report assessing the reaction to, and likely impact of, the Government's crackdown on welfare payments to the under 30s under the 'earn or learn' policy.

Evaluation: This was a very moving report on arguably the most controversial policy (or set of policies) announced in the Budget. The Business Council of Australia, among other business commentators, had already claimed on Budget night that the ‘earn or learn’ policy was too harsh. It is valid to hold the Government accountable for the outcome of its policies and to analyse them, particularly when they have attracted such widespread criticism. However, I have two reservations about this report. The first is that the facts are not presented accurately. Peacock neglects to mention that there will be a one month credit provided for every year previously spent in the workforce – so, in fact, not all those under 30 who become unemployed will be without any government support for SIX months. But, leaving that omission to one side, the other aspect of the report is that the main interviewee, a pregnant 18 year old girl, who canvasses at length the effect of the new policies on her future, is unlikely to be affected by the policy because she is about to have a child. Peacock does mention this in his report – but not until the end. And it is true that the interviewee’s partner will be affected by the new policy. In summary—this was a very moving report that rightly holds the Government to account for the likely impact of an unpopular policy but to avoid criticisms of bias it would have been preferable to be upfront and absolutely factual. I would not judge the report to be biased however. Few commentators appeared to be aware of the finer details of the ‘earn or learn’ policy until after the date that this report was aired, and the reporter did note that the 18 year old interviewee was unlikely to be affected by the policy for her own welfare payments. **APS**

Lateline May 15 2014

Segment 1: Professor Ian Young. (15.08 duration). Presenter and interviewer Tony Jones, Speaker Ian Young, Vice Chancellor, ANU.

Content: Interview with Professor Ian Young on the changes to HECs, deregulation of university fees and a broadening of government subsidies to TAFE and private colleges.

Evaluation: A balanced interview, probing questions by Tony Jones to an interviewee who is a firm supporter of government policy on the deregulation of higher education fees. Professor Young was a strong choice for interviewee on a complex topic. As well as being Vice Chancellor of ANU he is chairman of the Group of Eight universities. **APS**

Segment 2: University fees to be deregulated. (3.19 duration). Presenter Tony Jones, Reporter Jason Om, Speakers Christopher Pyne, Education Minister;

Bruce Chapman, Australian National University; Stephen Parker, Vice Chancellor, University of Canberra; Andrew Norton, former Howard Government Advisor.

Content: Report canvassing the impact of university fee deregulation and changes to HECs.

Evaluation: A balanced introduction by Tony Jones giving equal play to the Government and to critics of the policy. A comprehensive and balanced report by Jason Om canvassing students and academics, with due time given to earlier radio interviews with Education Minister Christopher Pyne. **APS**

Segment 3: Government axes renewable energy agency. (4.22 duration). Presenter Tony Jones, Reporter Kerry Brewster, Speakers Andrew Want, Vastsolar; Mark Twidell, SMA; Ivor Frischknecht, Aust. Renewable Energy Agency; Giles Parkinson, journalist Renew Economy magazine.

Content: A report on the reaction to the Government's decision to scrap ARENA, the renewable energy agency.

Evaluation: This was a comprehensive report canvassing reaction to the closure of Arena from three stakeholders in the renewable sector and one analyst specializing in renewable energy. All interviewees were highly critical of the closure of Arena. This is valid given it was a 'reaction' report. But the report could have benefited from an opposing point of view. There was just a brief mention of Industry Minister Ian MacFarlane's statement to *Lateline* at the end of the report. **APS**

Segment 4: Shorten dares government to call a double dissolution. (4.40 duration). Presenter Tony Jones, Reporter Tom Iggulden, Speakers Bill Shorten, Opposition Leader; John Howard, former Prime Minister; Joe Hockey, Treasurer.

Content: News report on Opposition Leader Bill Shorten's Budget speech in reply.

Evaluation: A good straight report by Iggulden on the key points of Shorten's speech plus a short response from Treasurer Joe Hockey. Iggulden, in closing, referred to a brutal budget week, but that was fair comment given the public backlash to the Budget over the preceding days. **APS**

The Business May 15 2014

Segment 1: Putting the Budget bite on the watchdog. (3.28 duration). Presenter Ticky Fullerton, Reporter Neal Woolrich, Speakers Marina Nehme, UNSW; Greg Medcraft, ASIC; Alex Malley, CPA.

Content: Report on government funding cuts to ASIC

Evaluation: A straight report, balanced in terms of interviewees and a valid choice of topic for a business program. **APS**

The Drum May 15 2014

Segment 1: Clive Palmer's threats to block Tony Abbott's budget plans; Joe Hockey's comparing the Medicare co-payment to a couple of middies. (21.20 duration). Presenter Steve Cannane, Panellists Mike Secombe, journalist *The Saturday Paper*; Adam Creighton, economics correspondent *The Australian*; Michael Cooney, former Labor adviser, now with Chifley Research Centre.

Content: Panel discussion focused on the ability of the Government to have its Budget passed in the Senate, and the Medicare co-payment policy, including its defence by Joe Hockey.

Evaluation: This program was aired prior to Bill Shorten's Budget reply speech later that day. The presenter Steve Cannane was very balanced in his questioning and repartee with the panelists. It was a robust discussion. But the balance of panelists could be improved—that is, in this program there were two obviously pro-Labor panelists against one with more conservative views. It mattered little in this particular program because the conservative panelist was very articulate and strong in his views. It is admittedly difficult to always have a balanced panel—the producer has to juggle

people's availability. But it is important in terms of impartiality obligations that the goal be to seek balance whenever feasible. **APS**

MAY 16 BUDGET COVERAGE ABC1

7pm News ABC1 (Sydney) May 16 2014

Segment 1: Newsreader Scott Bevan; Reporter Greg Jennett; Speakers Bill Shorten, Opposition Leader; Joe Hockey, Treasurer; Tony Abbott, Prime Minister; Campbell Newman, Qld Premier. (2.27 duration).

Content: News report on Budget reaction including Foreign Minister Julie Bishop jostled at Sydney University; Bill Shorten's Budget speech in reply; Hockey's response to Shorten; likely voting patterns in the Senate; the fiery reaction of State Premiers to Budget cuts and two clips of Tony Abbott speaking in support of the Budget.

Evaluation: A comprehensive report of the Budget related news, balanced. **APS**

Segment 2: Newsreader Scott Bevan, Reporter Sophie Scott, Speakers John Keane, pastor, dental patient; Peter Dutton, Health Minister; Prof Newell Johnson, Griffith University; Dr Karin Alexander, Aust. Dental Assoc. (2.06 duration).

Content: A news report drilling down into the details of the Budget and its impact on spending on dental care.

Evaluation: This report includes comments from Health Minister Peter Dutton but was otherwise critical of cuts to adult dental care. A fair report although negative in tone.

APS

7.30 NSW May 16 2014

Segment 1: How will the Federal Budget affect health and education in NSW? (9.28 duration). Presenter and interviewer Quentin Dempster; Speakers Jillian Skinner, NSW Health Minister; 9:28 Adrian Piccoli, NSW Education

Minister.

Content: Joint interview with NSW Health and Education Ministers

Evaluation: This State-based report on the impact of the Budget centred on cuts in the growth of health and education funding to the states and highlighted the meeting of all Premiers called by Mike Baird for the coming weekend. Given Baird's initiative and the proposition that cuts in health and education formed the major impact on NSW from the Budget this was an appropriate focus. It was a probing interview and Dempster's questions were a key to providing balance. **ASP**

7.30 VIC May 16 2014

Segment 1: Health Minister sounds budget alarm. (6.35 duration). Presenter Josie Taylor, Speaker David Davis, Victorian Health Minister.

Content: Interview with Victorian Health Minister on the impact of the Budget measures on Victorian health services.

Evaluation: A probing interview canvassing a key budget measure for the Victorian State Government and focused on outcomes in hospital services. The interviewer also raised the Medicare co-payment and Victorian reaction. A valid choice of topic post Budget and well handled by the interviewer. **APS**

7.30 SA May 16 2014

Segment 1: Tax reform opportunity lost in budget. (5.05 duration) Reporter Leah MacLennan, Speakers Kevin Foley, former SA Treasurer; Michael O'Neill, SA Centre for Economic Studies; Tony Abbott, Prime Minister; Tom Soulsby, College for Emergency Medicine.

Content: An in-depth news report on the South Australian Government's reaction to the Federal Budget, the implications for a potential GST rate increase and an increase in State taxes and a discussion on the changed approach to federalism.

Evaluation: A balanced, in depth report canvassing the big picture implications for South Australia from the Federal Budget. **APS**

7.30 WA May 16 2014

Segment 1: Funding challenges loom large for the WA Education Minister. (5.49 duration) Presenter and interviewer Andrew O'Connor; Speaker Peter Collier, WA Education Minister.

Content: Interview with WA Education minister on school funding, teachers' wage rates and the impact of the Federal Budget.

Evaluation: This interview touched only briefly on the Federal Budget with the Minister brushing away suggestions that WA would be badly affected saying 'We haven't got much to lose'. Otherwise questions focused on state-based education funding including leave liability levies and teacher salary negotiations. **APS**

7.30 TAS May 16 2014

Segment 1: The Federal Budget's impact on job seekers (5.21 duration). Presenter and interviewer Airlie Ward; Speaker Noel Mundy, Tasmanian Director Mission Australia.

Content: Interview with Mission Australia director on the impact of welfare cuts in the Budget.

Evaluation: I will leave evaluation comments for a summary covering all three segments of 7.30 TAS on May 16.

Segment 2: Earn or learn. (3.12 duration) Presenter and interviewer Airlie Ward; Speakers Molly Coburn, university student; 3:12 Emma Tanchik, university graduate and job seeker.

Content: Interview with two female university students on the impact of Budget measures, specifically welfare payments.

Evaluation: See above

Segment 3: Federal Budget fallout. (5.35 duration) Presenter and interviewer Airlie Ward, Speakers Danny Reardon, SVP Volunteer 5:35 Hobart;

Ed Gauden, Foodbank; Lee Wolfe, Kingborough Helping Hands; Lindy O'Neill, Uniting Care.

Content: A report, including four interviews, on the impact of Budget measures on charities aimed at the poor in Tasmania.

Evaluation: This was the least balanced of the State-based 7.30 programs in Budget week. The focus of the entire program was solely on cuts to welfare and the response of charities and university students. There was no policy input from Federal or State Government spokesmen (not even clips from earlier interviews or doorstops). There was no reference to other Budget measures such as an increase in infrastructure spending. Tasmania is arguably the Australian state most dependent on welfare payments—one third of Tasmanians receive a welfare payment and the state has the highest unemployment rate in the country. Given those facts, a focus on the cuts in welfare payments flagged in the Budget is a valid choice. But there was a lack of balance in the reports—they were overwhelmingly negative. The three reports were each well researched and presented. But the program as a whole was not comprehensive. **RC**

7.30 ACT May 16 2014

Segment 1: Clouds over Canberra. (9.00 duration) Presenter Chris Kimball; Reporter Adrienne Francis; Speakers Katy Gallagher, ACT Chief Minister; vox pops; Paul Flint, Cota ACT; Sue Jordan, St John's Care; Jenny Kitchen, Anglicare ACT; Chris Faulks, Canberra Business Council.

Content: Report on Budget reaction in the ACT including a broad range of stakeholders—the ACT Chief Minister, charities, medical practitioners, students.

Evaluation: It was a comprehensive reaction report including some positive feedback. It was mostly negative comment but this reflected general budget reaction. In summary it was a balanced reflection of community sentiment at that point in time. **APS**

Segment 2: Leigh weighs in (6.58 duration) Presenter and interviewer Chris Kimball; Speaker Andrew Leigh, ALP member for Fraser.

Content: Interview with local ACT Federal member and shadow assistant Treasurer.

Evaluation: This was a tough interview that placed the emphasis on Labor's responsibility for the state of the economy ahead of the Budget. **APS**

Segment 3: Abetz regrets. (9.53 duration) Presenter and interviewer Chris Kimball; Speaker Eric Abetz, Leader of Government in the Senate.

Content: Interview with Eric Abetz, Government Leader in the Senate

Evaluation: Once again a tough, but well conducted interview but it gave Abetz plenty of time to present his point of view and, in terms of balance, it was countered by the tough interview of Leigh. **APS**

7.30 NT May 16 2014

Segment 1: The Budget debate: Securing our children's future vs damaging their prospects. (29.07 duration. Presenter and interviewer Alyssa Betts; Reporter Jane Bardon; Speakers Dave Tollner, NT Treasurer; Delia Lawrie, NT Opposition Leader; vox pops.

Content: A panel discussion with the NT Treasurer and the Leader of the Opposition in the Territory.

Evaluations: This was a tough, but respectful and balanced, interview. It focused primarily on the NT Budget, which was released in the same week as the Federal Budget. It did however canvas the impact on the Territory of the Federal Government cuts in health and education spending. Very comprehensive and informative. **APS**

Lateline May 16 2014

Segment 1: Budget battle looms. (3.21 duration) Presenter Emma Alberici; Reporter Tom Iggulden; Speakers Bill Shorten, Opposition Leader; Mike Baird, NSW Premier; Tony Abbott, Prime Minister; Peter Dutton, Health Minister; Joe Hockey, Treasurer; Campbell Newman, Qld Premier.

Content: A Budget reaction report highlighting the conflict with the State Premiers.

Evaluation: A straight news report that gave Tony Abbott and Joe Hockey's points of view as well as that of the State Premiers. **APS**

Segment 2: Friday forum. (15.48 duration). Presenter Emma Alberici; Speakers: Steve Ciobo, Parliamentary secretary to Treasurer; Jason Clare, Opposition Communications spokesman.

Content: A panel discussion with Steve Ciobo and Jason Clare on the outcome of the Budget, the issue of broken promises and the likelihood of the Budget's successful passage through the Senate.

Evaluation: This was a feisty debate with equal opportunity given to both participants. The Friday forum is meant to be combative, so the tone, for the most part, was appropriate and Alberici's questions respectful. But there was one comment by Alberici that I think worth highlighting in terms of the perception of impartiality. It was a question to Steve Ciobo "Do you think voters are really stupid and can't recognize a lie when they see one." As in the Sarah Ferguson interview with Joe Hockey, tone can be as important as the choice of question in displaying any hint of bias and I thought this question crossed the line. However, Ciobo handled it superbly well (as opposed to Hockey) and this would have tempered viewers' perception overall. Alberici was tough on Clare as well and Ciobo was given plenty of time to present his point of view, as was Clare. **APS**

The Drum May 16 2014

Segment 1: The panel discusses Bill Shorten's vow to block at least \$12 billion worth of government cuts. (6.15 duration). Presenter Steve Cannane; Panellists Rowan Dean, Associate Editor *The Spectator*; Jennifer Byrne, *The Book Club*; Julian Morrow, *The Chaser*.

Content: Short news clips and panel discussion focused on Bill Shorten's Budget speech in reply; student protests against Julie Bishop on education cuts; and incentives to hire older workers.

Evaluation: The news clips were well balanced and very straight reports. The panel was also well balanced—an entertaining discussion with adequate time for both pro- and anti-government policy points of view. The emphasis was on comedy but it was a thoughtful panel. **APS**

MAY 17 BUDGET COVERAGE ABC1

7pm News ABC1 (Sydney) May 17 2014

Segment 1: Newsreader Jeremy Fernandez; Reporter Andrew Greene. (2.34 duration)
Speakers Christopher Pyne, Education Minister; Ridah Hassan, university student; Scott Ryan, Senator, Parliamentary Secretary; Chris Bowen, Shadow Treasurer; Professor Geoff Dobb, Australian Medical Association; Jay Weatherill, South Australian Premier; Campbell Newman, Queensland Premier.

Content: News report covering university students jostling Julie Bishop; doctors concerns on the Medicare co-payment; and the stance of the State Premiers as they prepare to meet the next day on their reaction to the Budget.

Evaluation: This was a straight news report on Budget related issues with quotes or clips from stakeholders on both sides of the debate—with the exception of the short mention of doctors' concerns about the dangers of female blood collectors working alone and managing large amounts of cash. Balanced and a reasonable choice of topics for news of the day. **APS**

Segment 2: Newsreader Jeremy Fernandez; Reporter David Spicer (1.56 duration).
Speakers Jillian Skinner, NSW Health Minister; 1:56 Andrew McDonald, NSW Opposition Health spokesman; Dr Saxon Smith, President NSW AMA.

Content: News report on Jillian Skinner's proposal to allow GPs to operate in emergency departments to help handle the expected patient load if the Medicare co-payment is successfully introduced.

Evaluation: This was largely a follow up to Skinner's pronouncements on *7.30 NSW* the previous evening and it included responses from the AMA and the Government. A balanced report. **APS**

MAY 18 BUDGET COVERAGE ABC1

Insiders May 18 2014

Segment 1: Budget proves tough to sell. (4.01 duration)

Content: Montage of Budget coverage in the electronic media across the week.

Evaluation: This montage reflected a very negative reaction to the Budget over the five days since Joe Hockey delivered his Budget speech to Parliament. The factual basis was correct – as reflected in the polls and the tone of the coverage on commercial television and the ABC over the preceding week. That said, the images chosen for the montage of Abbott and Hockey as they embarked on selling the Budget were overwhelmingly negative. I don't believe that this segment breached impartiality guidelines for the ABC, due to its factual basis, but I do believe that it could feed accusations of bias from staunch Coalition supporters, particularly in regard to images that portrayed both Abbott and Hockey on the back foot in defending their Budget. **APS**

Segment 2: One big wedgie for the States? (3.04 duration)

Content: Montage of Premiers' reaction to the Budget

Evaluation: This montage of images and comments by the key stakeholders – the State and Territory Premiers, Joe Hockey and Tony Abbott – was factually based. It effectively presented the anger of the Premiers and the forceful arguments of the Federal Government on the future of State funding. The title was negative in tone but it was a reference to Campbell Newman's comment on the GST 'wedge'. The clips of Hockey and Abbott were effective in presenting the Government's argument of the need to change for funding arrangements. **APS**

Segment 3: Tony Abbott joins Insiders. (19.15 duration). Fran Kelly Presenter and interviewer. Speaker Prime Minister Tony Abbott.

Content: Fran Kelly interviews the Prime Minister.

Evaluation: A strong interview with tough probing questions and Abbott presented very well. The interview covered 'broken promises' on welfare, pensions, health and

education funding; the reaction of the State and Territory Premiers; the prospect of a GST increase; the likelihood of the Budget measures passing the Senate and the potential for a double dissolution if they don't pass. With the exception of the discussion of the GST there were no big picture economic questions raised by the interviewer but Abbott raised these issues and was given plenty of opportunity to canvas them. While many of the questions were critical of Government policies, the tone was respectful, there were few interruptions and Abbott was given ample opportunity to present his case. However, it does raise the issue of how important the interviewee's performance is—including his or her reaction to tough questions—in framing the viewers' perceptions of bias. **APS**

Segment 4: The Sunday Papers. Presenter and interviewer Fran Kelly. Panellists Laura Tingle, *AFR*, Lenore Taylor, *The Guardian*, Niki Savva, columnist, *The Australian*.

Content: Panel discussion focused on newspaper reports in the Sunday press on the post Budget polls looking at the reaction of the electorate to the Budget; the Premiers' meeting later that day on cuts to funding of health and education; and Julie Bishop jostled by university students protesting changes to higher education fees and HECs.

Evaluation: The content is determined by the Sunday press reports. The panel was quite positive about the Government's position following a tough budget. It was a balanced conversation. A straightforward report and assessment. **APS**

7pm News ABC1 (Sydney) May 18 2014

Segment 1: Newsreader Jeremy Fernandez, Reporter Ben Worsley. (2.19). Speakers Campbell Newman, Queensland Premier; Mike Baird, New South Wales Premier; Jay Weatherill, SA Premier; Tony Abbott, Prime Minister; Adam Giles, Northern Territory Chief Minister; Denis Naphine, Victorian Premier; Katy Gallagher, ACT Chief Minister; Will Hodgman, Tasmanian Premier.

Content: Seven State and Territory Premiers meet to discuss reaction to the Budget.

Evaluation: This was straight news report on a key Sydney meeting including quotes from each of the Premiers and a clip of Tony Abbott addressing the issue on the Insiders program earlier in the day. A balanced report. **APS**

Segment 2: Newsreader Jeremy Fernandez; Reporter Julie Doyle. (2.10 duration). Speakers Tony Abbott, Prime Minister; Joe Hockey, Treasurer;

Bill Shorten, Opposition Leader.

Content: Report on Bill Shorten's address to the Victorian ALP Conference earlier in the day as well as coverage of Budget related television interviews and doorstops given earlier in the day by Tony Abbott and Joe Hockey.

Evaluation: A balanced report with more air time given to the Government's budget sales pitch than Shorten's address. **APS**

Segment 3: Newsreader Jeremy Fernandez, Reporter Lis Casben. (1.39) Speaker Val Badham, social commentator.

Content: A straight news report on Budget protest marches held that day in Sydney Melbourne and Adelaide. **APS**

MAY 19 BUDGET COVERAGE ABC1

7pm News ABC1 (Sydney) May 19 2014

Segment 1: Newsreader Juanita Phillips, Reporter Mark Simkin (2.24 duration) Speakers Tony Abbott, Prime Minister; Joe Hockey, Treasurer; Bill Shorten, Opposition Leader; Mike Baird, NSW Premier.

Content: Budget reaction report covering the results of two opinion polls released that day; the attitude of the State Premiers and the uncertainty in the Senate.

Evaluation: It was pitched as a bad news story for the Government post Budget but that was a valid assessment given the plunge in popularity in the opinion polls. The report also included four separate clips of Abbott and one of Hockey defending the Budget. A fair and balanced report on the news of the day **APS**

7.30 May 19 2014

Segment 1: Budget delivers ‘mauling’ for Government. (7.36 duration) Presenter Sarah Ferguson; Reporter Sabra Lane; Speakers Tony Abbott, Prime Minister; Grahame Morris, Barton Deakin Government Relations; Bill Shorten, Opposition Leader;

Joe Hockey, Treasurer; Peter Whiteford, ANU Crawford School of Public Policy;

John Brumby, former Victorian Premier.

Content: News report on the Budget reaction covering the opinion polls released that day, reference to the weekend protests and the standoff with the State Premiers. It also includes a discussion of strategies the Government could pursue to ensure its Budget measures are introduced, as well as a discussion with former Victorian Premier John Brumby on the need for an increase in the GST.

Evaluation: The headline of this report ‘Budget delivers ‘mauling’ for government’ could conceivably be perceived as biased in tone but the word ‘mauling’ was taken from a comment in the program by former Howard Government adviser Grahame Morris. The report accurately states that the Budget is facing a strong backlash but it is a sober analysis of the Government’s options and includes several statements from the Prime Minister and the Treasurer in support of the Budget measures. The choice of interviewees – Grahame Morris, a former Liberal adviser, and John Brumby, a former Labor Premier, was also balanced. It was an excellent report covering the news of the day. **APS**

Lateline May 19 2014

Segment 1: Coalition plunges in polls. (4.29 duration) Presenter Emma Alberici; Reporter Melissa Clarke; Speakers Joe Hockey, Treasurer; Bill Shorten, Opposition Leader; Tony Abbott, Prime Minister; Stephen Mills, School of Government University of Sydney; Grahame Morris, former Liberal Advisor;

Mike Baird, NSW Premier; Campbell Newman, Queensland Premier; John Brumby, COAG Reform Council.

Content: News report covering Tony Abbott selling the Budget, the opinion polls released that morning revealing a Budget backlash and a drop for the Coalition and Abbott's personal standing; a comparison of the polls today and those that greeted John Howard's 1996 budget; a reference to student protests on higher education changes; the standoff with the State Premiers and John Brumby's call for an increase in the GST.

Evaluation: Emma Alberici's introduction and Melissa Clarke's report were even-handed and an accurate report on the news of the day. It was balanced with clips of Abbott and Hockey defending the Budget. However, viewers who had already watched the 7pm news on ABC1 would have found the report repetitive with a repeat of both Grahame Morris and John Brumby's analysis of the challenge facing the Government.

APS

The Business May 19 2014

Segment 1: Standard and Poor's takes a closer interest in the States and Territories after Hockey's proposed budget cuts. (3.00) Presenter Ticky Fullerton; Reporter Karen Percy; Speakers Mike Baird, New South Wales Premier; Denis Napthine, Victorian Premier; Jay Weatherill, South Australian Premier; Tony Abbott, Prime Minister; Brian Galligan, University of Melbourne; Anna Hughes, credit analyst Standard and Poor's;

Content: A news report focused on Standard and Poor's assessment of the Budget impact on the States warning that a lack of predictability in funding could impact credit ratings in the future but noting that changes flagged by the Abbott Government could be positive if the States are given more flexibility in revenue raising.

Evaluation: This was a very straight introduction and report that included comments from three State Premiers (two Liberal and one Labor), a response by the Prime Minister on changes to state funding and an interview with Standard and Poor's credit analyst. A balanced and straightforward report on an important news item. **APS**

Q&A May 19 2014

Segment 1: Tough questions for Joe Hockey. Presenter Tony Jones. Guest Joe Hockey. (1.07.53 duration).

Content: Joe Hockey was the sole panelist on *Q&A*. He faced an audience comprised of 40 per cent Coalition voters, 32 per Labor and 9 per cent Greens. The questions were all Budget related and covered the issue of broken promises, the Medicare co-payment; changes to pensions; youth unemployment and welfare; university fees and HECs; cuts to health and education funding for the States; the GST; and changes to the retirement age.

Evaluation: In assessing this program I have taken into account the following aspects of its nature. *Q&A* is a program designed to allow members of the public to participate in debate through questions from the audience, video questions and tweets (shown on screen during transmission). Audience members must submit questions several days ahead of the program and ABC producers choose the questions to be asked. Producers also choose video questions and decide which tweets will be displayed on screen. The presenter, Tony Jones, moderates the question and answer session and includes questions of his own. Given the format of the show the content is less able to be controlled than say the content of a news program or a current affairs program. To assess whether the program meets the ABC's guidelines for impartiality, to assess whether there is any bias inherent in the content, the main points to consider, in my view, are whether the presenter allows the panelists and questioners sufficient time to state their case, whether the presenter's interruptions have a negative or overtly positive impact on the discussion from the point of view of questioners in the audience or from the point of view of the panelist, and whether the producers have been impartial in selecting the panelists and the audience, selecting the questions to be asked and in selecting the tweets to be displayed.

The fact that the Treasurer was the sole panelist on the program meant that while it would have been a confronting task to face a barrage of questions over a one hour period, it was also an advantage for the Treasurer. Joe Hockey had ample opportunity to present his and the Government's point of view without interference from any Opposition members or Government critics who may have otherwise been on the panel under the program's normal format.

It is difficult to judge whether the choice of questions or tweets was impartial without knowing details of the full list of tweets and questions that were presented to the

producers of the program. Certainly the questions were overwhelmingly negative, although the audience was evenly-balanced in terms of political preferences. The tweets were also very negative – there were 82 tweets displayed during the program – 14 were positive, 21 were neutral in tone and 47 were negative. The producers stopped displaying tweets half way through the program (when it had roughly 30 minutes still to run). I am not aware whether this was a technical issue or an editorial decision.

In my judgement, it is very difficult to state whether the impartiality guidelines were breached in this program—but I doubt it. The questions reflected the negative reaction to the Budget in the community. Joe Hockey was given ample time to state his case. While Tony Jones interrupted on occasions, it was not objectionable and well within the normal bounds of a program of this nature. For the most part, the questioners in the audience were respectful and while some displayed anger it was not inappropriately displayed. The range of topics was adequate. The choice of location was good (in Sydney's Western Suburbs). Q&A is by its nature a vigorous program but Hockey preformed very well. **APS**

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