

# NewsCorp, Stan Grant and the ABC: Sliding door moments

By *Martin Hirst*

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***The ABC and NewsCorp are locked in a co-dependent abusive relationship. As Dr [Martin Hirst](#) writes, part of the problem is the revolving door between their respective newsrooms.***

THE TALENT POOL of journalists in Australia only has a shallow end. It is a tight-knit group of mediocrities who play musical chairs in a shrinking job market. This is a key reason why almost nobody in the current media pack is willing to speak up and name the big stinking elephant in the room that is serving up hate, racism, misogyny and transphobia as its main media offering.

Yes, I'm talking about NewsCorp. There's a staggering number of ex-Murdoch journalists now working inside the ABC. Hell, even the [chair](#) of the ABC board has a Murdoch pedigree.

Perhaps it's no wonder, then, that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation seems to be stuck in a Stockholm Syndrome co-dependency with the Murdoch garbage barge. I've noticed this unhealthy but apparently unbreakable relationship over a long period of time, but it is particularly noticeable when the ABC [has to appear](#) before the annual Senate Estimates circus.

The hand-wringing over [Stan Grant's](#) resignation from a frontline on-air position at the ABC has shone a harsh light on this long-running hostage situation, but nothing will change. History shows that the ABC is incapable of breaking away from the Murdoch embrace.

Over the last several years, conservative senators have come to these gladiatorial hearings armed with a cache of "evidence" of wokeness and lefty bias at the ABC that are usually just recycled clippings from News Corp publications or clips from the permanently-aggrieved Sky After Dark Ritalin-addled anger-chimps. Nothing has changed in 2023.

At this year's [Senate Estimates](#), the brutal slanging match between the ABC and News Corp was front and centre. ABC News Director, [Justin Stevens](#), was quick to accuse Murdoch scribes and editors of leading a campaign of racial vilification of former Q&A host Stan Grant over ABC's coverage of King Charles' coronation. News Corp executive chairman [Michael Miller](#) was quick to hit back,

[pushing](#) the blame back onto the ABC’s “*internal problems*”.

Here’s Senator Mehreen Faruqi slamming the ABC for having an “overwhelmingly white” Board which she suggests contributed to a lack of support for Stan Grant. ABC’s Justin Stevens says they can’t do much about it & blames social media.

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One of the ABC’s “internal problems” is that it continues to provide a platform for the same Murdoch journalists who routinely kick the national broadcaster in the teeth. Another internal problem is that the ABC has a habit of employing former News Corp staff in senior editorial and corporate roles. Perhaps the ABC should also consider doing more within its own ranks to support staff who are subject to abuse.

It is also interesting to see how senior ABC executives are quick to blame social media, but Twitter in particular, for the racism to which Stan Grant was subjected. Justin Stevens [described](#) Twitter as a “cesspool” in his testimony before Senate Estimates. However, this is really only half of the story, or less. The Twitter trolls who deal in racist abuse are fuelled by the vitriol generated through Sky News, the Murdoch papers and belligerent talkback hosts. In front of Senate Estimates last week, ABC Managing Director, [David Anderson](#), publicly acknowledged there is a correlation between abuse on social media and unfavourable coverage in

News Corp mastheads: ‘It fans the flames of abuse that comes towards our individuals,’ Anderson said.

Senator Sarah Hanson-Young grills ABC executives for not speaking up sooner even though “NewsCorp have been attacking the ABC for years” & asks why they give a platform to NewsCorp Journos when they have “such disdain for the public broadcaster

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Justin Stevens went further – at least until he walked it back the next day – pointing to headlines and coverage that showered vitriol on Stan Grant: On Sky News where he said Grant was described as “whiner in chief”. A *Herald Sun* headline, [‘Heads should roll at the ABC over coronation coverage’](#), was aimed at Grant and others.

Unfortunately, the ABC is so deeply invested in its fraught relationship with News Corp that all Stevens could offer by way of solution, was to call for media companies to get together in a kumbaya moment to ‘*figure out how we foster a kinder, fairer, discourse*’.

Yeah, like that’ll really help. The sight of David Speers briefly returning to Twitter to [hold up](#) an #StandWithStan

placard is also not going to change anything. Speers is one of the many ex-Murdoch hacks now drawing a fat paycheque from the ABC. His "protest" is meaningless, particularly when he then brought *The Australian's* [Cameron Stewart](#) onto the *Insiders* couch and didn't even mention the Grant stuff.

As many of us have pointed out on social media, the ABC's continued platforming of Murdoch hacks throughout all the drama with Stan Grant is disgraceful, but it is a disgrace with a very long pedigree.

### **A decade of nothing changing**

Those of us with a memory for political moments will remember that 12 years and a few days ago, the then Greens Senator [Bob Brown](#) got into verbal fisticuffs with a reporter from *The Australian* during a press conference (19 May 2011). Among other things, Brown called the Murdoch press the "hate media". He was right, but Brown's comments [caused a media shitstorm](#).

The Senator was roundly attacked by the usual suspects and even some more "liberal" press hounds were baying for his blood.

What Bob Brown had dared to mention was the obvious truth that the Murdoch business model (globally, not just in

Australia) is inventing enemies and amplifying hysterical wingnuts demanding that these villains be cancelled.

Manufacturing hate and promoting toxic, undemocratic opinions that focus on attacking anything remotely progressive or that deviates from the White, phallogocentric orthodoxy has been profitable for Murdoch since the mid-1960s.

Not only was NewsCorp's hate media profitable in a financial sense for Murdoch, it was politically profitable too. Rupert made alliances of convenience with political leaders who would do him favours but then he also ruthlessly exploited them — no trick was too dirty for Murdoch.

The problem is, with one or two exceptions, nothing has been done to stop Murdoch and his gang of thugs. The *News of the World* [scandal](#) forced a minor back down. Do you remember Rupert's humble pie moment before the [Leveson Inquiry](#) in the UK?

Rupert's tits-and-punting tabloid *News of the World* had been caught hacking the phone of a dead kid (and hundreds of others). Murdoch closed the scandal-ridden paper, but all of the key players in the criminal activity were rewarded for their loyalty.

Around the same time, in November 2011, the

Australian Government set up its own inquiry into the news media chaired by retired judge, [Ray Finkelstein](#). You can still find a copy of the Finkelstein Inquiry [Report](#) in the National Library, but its findings and recommendations are buried under a decade of dust.

At the time, the Finkelstein Inquiry attracted media attention but it also demonstrated the effectiveness of the media's complicit and extensive agreement to just let inconvenient truths drop into [the memory hole](#).

Just one small example: I know it's accurate because I was there.

A couple of days before the inquiry, I got a call to ask if I would be prepared to be a witness. I had prepared a submission with my PhD student at the time, Ivo Burum. Our submission was about citizen journalism and self-shot video, but when I fronted Mr Finkelstein's inquiry, he didn't want to ask about that. Instead, I was cross-examined for half an hour about a blog post I'd written supporting Bob Brown.

That rattled a few cages at News Limited and for the next week or so I was regularly tormented by NewsCorpse journalists and columnists slagging me off for having the temerity to think their output was a pile of shit.

On a side note, it is interesting that one of *The Australian's* hit pieces on me was written by [Nick Leys](#). Yep, the very same Nick Leys who for the last little while has been Head of Communications, ABC Strategy.

Nick Leys (and surprisingly, all the other Murdoch columnists who wrote about Finkelstein) felt that I was leading a vendetta against his bosses. I don't know how any of them could write that with a straight face given everything we know about the vendettas Murdoch hacks execute on behalf of Rupert's self-interest.

I do find it sickeningly ironic that Nick Leys is now deep in the ABC bunkers as the Murdoch apparatchiks relentlessly lob grenades his way.

### **Briefly back to the present**

[My experience with the Murdoch hate media](#) has also given me insights into how cooperation between journalists and conservative politicians is weaponised against NewsCorp's enemies. There is collusion involved here and it operates on many levels to target noisy opponents of Murdoch and the Coalition. The list of victims is a long and honourable one; I don't need to single out anybody here.

For years, all the nasty questions that ABC bosses have been asked at Senate

Estimates are pre-arranged and backed up with "evidence" in the form of articles from News Corp papers, or ammunition in the form of social media posts.

NewsCorp hacks collect this "evidence" and pass it on to Coalition, One Nation or other interested senators. The senators then use it to ambush ABC managers and the whole cycle becomes fodder for the next round of attacks by Murdoch's henchmen and henchwomen.

The ABC now employs a lot of former (and current) Murdoch staff or columnists and they have become entrenched on *Radio National*, on the *Insiders'* couch and as honoured guests on air, morning, noon and night (literally).

In fact, it has now got to the point where those who are still on Rupert's payroll but who also work for the public broadcaster, can invite other Murdoch hacks onto their shows and spew their hate media filth back at us. They're laughing all the way back to NewsCorp headquarters because they are now able to use taxpayer-funded airways to launch their attacks.

This is why I say that the ABC is stuck in an abusive relationship with NewsCorp. Not only is there a revolving door between the two organisations for staff to move seamlessly from one to the

other, but of equal importance is that the ABC has been bashed and slapped so many times by Murdoch's minions that they have come to regard it as a form of affection.

The media system itself is so broken that this goes on every day under the noses of people who should know better and they just shrug it off. Journalists won't call it out in any meaningful way because next week, Rupert might be paying their wages too.

It's bullshit.

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