

This morning The Australian has published salary information about some members of our staff, from what the newspaper suggests is leaked payroll data.

My advice is that some of the information is clearly wrong and other parts out-of-date. We are not precisely sure at this point what information has been accessed and is in the possession of the paper.

First and foremost, I want to apologise that information like this has not been securely managed. Staff are entitled to be concerned and upset. I have asked for a full and complete investigation about how this highly confidential material was accessed.

The matter of whether ABC staff salaries should be publicly disclosed was subject to debate and a special 'in-camera' hearing by a Senate Committee some years ago.

Of course, there is an argument that because we are paid by the taxpayers, the taxpayers are entitled to know what everyone is paid. The ABC currently meets all its legal requirements on remuneration reporting through the Annual Report.

We argued successfully in the Senate, however, that the issue was more complicated than that. Our arguments went beyond the privacy of our staff. Whilst the public might be curious about what particularly on-air talent earn, the ABC operates in a highly competitive media environment. For the ABC to be the only media organisation where salaries are revealed puts us at a significant disadvantage to our competitors.

Aside from staffing matters, the ABC has many contractual matters around the provision of goods and services that are confidential, because public disclosure would be damaging to the ABC and put us at a disadvantage to everyone else. It would hurt our ability to manage the ABC efficiently and effectively. This seems uncontroversial.

At the Senate we discussed how ABC remuneration was set and reviewed. Senators were assured, as the figures released today testify, that high profile ABC talent are not overpaid compared to their commercial counterparts.

The story will doubtlessly be the topic of numerous internal conversations today! I expect that if any organisation's payroll was revealed, it would raise queries and questions. In some roles, particularly those with competitive market pressures, there are many reasons that go into setting a particular remuneration level.

As far as is possible, we look to reward our staff in ways that are fair and equitable within our budgetary constraints and these matters will continue to be reviewed at an Executive level.

Kind regards

Mark Scott