



The Sydney Institute

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4 July 2017

Michelle Guthrie
Managing Director + Editor-in-Chief
Australian Broadcasting Corporation
GPO Box 9994
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Ms Guthrie

I am writing to you in your official capacity as the ABC's editor-in-chief. This is not a formal complaint and I do not want the matter referred to the ABC's Audience & Consumer Affairs department in Canberra.

On Thursday 29 June 2017, the *Daily Telegraph* ran a report by Richard Noone titled "Ex-ABC TV producer assaulted child star". I referred to this matter in my *Media Watch Dog* blog last Friday – without comment or attempted correction from the ABC.

A more complete report by Richard Noone, titled "Former ABC producer Jon Stephens jailed for abusing child presenter", appeared in the *Central Coast Gosford Express Advocate* on Wednesday 28 June 2017. It read as follows:

Former ABC producer Jon Stephens jailed for abusing child presenter

A former ABC producer who created the show that would go on to become *Totally Wild* has been sentenced to at least six months jail for indecently assaulting a child presenter. Jon Stephens was a producer working out of the ABC's Artarmon studios when he took a 14-year-old boy to Old Sydney Town in 1981 to scout for locations.

They stayed the night at a nearby motel where Stephens, who was 34 at the time, reached under the boy's pyjama shorts as he lay on a bed watching TV and abused him. The now 70-year-old pleaded guilty to one count of indecent assault and was sentenced in Gosford Local Court to 12 months jail with a non-parole period of six months.

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In September 2015 the victim, Simon Major, who turns 50 this year, contacted the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and made a complaint. His complaint triggered an investigation by the Sex Crimes Squad. "Prior to any police investigation Major had email and text correspondence with Stephens where the offence is acknowledged and apologies made to Simon Major," a police statement of facts read. In May last year police obtained a warrant to tap the victim speaking to Stephens over the phone in which he again admitted the offence.

Mr Major successfully auditioned for the show Stephens created called *Earth Watch* in 1979 as a 12-year-old. He remained on the show for two years but after he told his stepmum about what happened in the motel room and she contacted his agent, Joan Gibson, "other work Major had been obtaining almost instantly dried up" police facts said. He continued on the show for a short while but was terminated at the end of the year with the studio "claiming they were streamlining the show"

The program ran for another eight months or so with a reduced cast before it was sold to a commercial network and renamed *Totally Wild*. "Simon Major has struggled with the emotions relating to this abuse his whole life," police facts read. Mr Major tracked Stephens down on Facebook and threatened to report him to the Royal Commission.

In an email to his victim Stephens, of Docklands, Victoria, said the thought of appearing before the commission was "frightening". "The implications of the possibility are horrendous," he said. "We do many things when we are younger which we deeply regret and make every effort as we got older to change and make amends. "Since those younger times, I have made it my life principle never to knowingly do anything that might hurt anyone in any way."

On November 3 Stephens offered to help Mr Major to "have the whole thing go away" and two days later deposited \$4,200 into his bank account. Mr Major, who consented to being identified, told the *Express Advocate* he was now destitute and living out of a van. "This whole Royal Commission process through to Jon being charged and sentenced has done absolutely nothing for me regarding my closure and/or been respectful of my mental health along the way," he said

Mr Major said he was hoping to find a no-win-no-fee lawyer to lodge a civil claim for damages against the disgraced television producer.

It appears that an ABC reporter did not attend Gosford Local Court last week when Jon Stephens was sentenced for historical sexual abuse which occurred in 1981. This is understandable. However, according to my research, Mr Stephens'

conviction was not reported on ABC TV or ABC Radio news nationally or even in Sydney on Thursday or Friday – or since then. This in spite of the prominent coverage in the print edition of the *Daily Telegraph* last Thursday morning.

As the newspaper report indicates, the crime took place when Jon Stephens was a producer on an ABC TV program and his victim was a 14 year old child star who was taken by Stephens to scout for suitable locations for filming by the ABC.

My questions are as follows:

- Why has the ABC not reported that a former ABC TV presenter has been convicted of historic sexual abuse (to which he pleaded guilty) committed in 1981 while on official ABC duties?
- Does the ABC intend to report the matter any time in the future? This is important since, as you are aware, the ABC has given extensive coverage to instances of proven and alleged historical sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and other Christian churches along with some secular institutions
- Does the decision not to report the Stephens 1981 crime relate to the recent statement by the ABC “that there is nothing to be gained” by the contemporary ABC “revisiting the matter” in 1975 when (then) ABC chairman Richard Downing called on all Australians to “understand” the urges of pederasts and commented that “in general, men will sleep with young boys”?

As you will be aware, Professor Downing’s statements were made in his official capacity as ABC chairman. It’s possible that the (now) convicted criminal Stephens was influenced to undertake his crime in 1981 because of Professor Downing’s statement of a mere six years earlier that “in general, men will sleep with young boys”.

- In the light of the Stephens’ conviction for a 1981 crime, does the ABC still intend to maintain that it has no duty of care with respect to the victims of pederasts who were interviewed on the ABC *Pederasty* program in 1975? The victims (some of whom were also interviewed by the ABC in 1975) would be aged around 50 years today. Note that Stephens’ victim is currently 49 years of age.
- In view of the evidence presented to Gosford Local Court that Stephens’ victim was assaulted while on official ABC duties – does the ABC regard itself as having a duty of care to Mr Major, including the payment of compensation? If not, why not?
- Moreover, does the ABC intend to investigate whether Mr Major’s casual employment at the ABC was terminated due to the complaint which his step-mother made concerning the sexual assault? If not, why not?

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These are very straight forward questions. I would be grateful if I could receive a reply by close of business on Thursday 6 July 2017.

Yours sincerely

Gerard Henderson

PS: The comment that the ABC is not interested in “revisiting” the matter of 1975 was communicated to me on 17 May 2017 – following my email to ABC chairman Justin Milne on 10 May 2017.

PPS: Note when I raised this matter on *Insiders* last Sunday, fellow panelist David Marr agreed that Stephens’ crime should have been reported on the ABC.

cc: Senator The Hon. Mitch Fifield
Minister for Arts, Minister for Communications

Alan Sunderland
Editorial Director, ABC

Gaven Morris
Director of News, ABC

Michael Millett
Director of Communications