

Chairman and Board of the ABC
GPO Box 9994, Sydney 2001

Sirs,

Last week, after watching the final episode of ABC '*Catalyst*' for 2006, I couldn't believe my ears when I heard what was planned to take its place over the summer season - a 15-week series on 'psychic investigators'! At first I thought someone must be joking - 'psychic investigators' in the ABC time slot dedicated to TV science programmes!

Then I read Leigh Dayton's excellent article "Bad slot for mumbo jumbo" in 'The Australian' Higher Education Supplement (29/11/2006) and realised to my horror that the report was accurate, and that if it is a joke then it is a very sick joke indeed.

In the spirit of open-mindedness I decided to watch the first episode tonight and decide for myself before expressing my opinion. My conclusion - you must have taken leave of your collective senses to broadcast such a load of unmitigated codswallop as '*Psychic Investigators*' on the ABC for one week, far less a projected fifteen weeks.

There was a time when the ABC would have happily left such trash to the commercial channels, for whom public credibility is less important than it is (or has been) to the ABC. What makes this case even worse is that someone in the ABC Programming Department must have decided that it would be a good idea to present the '*Psychic Investigators*' series in exactly the same timeslot as the ABC's highly regarded '*Catalyst*' programme - presumably seeking respectability by association.

I write as a professional scientist with a long, close and mutually productive association with ABC Science units (TV and radio). My association dates from the time of the late, great Mike Daly in the 1970's, with '*Quantum*' and with its successor '*Catalyst*', and with Robyn Williams and the Science Show. One of my greatest honours, and proudest moments, came in 1996 when I received the *ABC Eureka Prize for Promotion of Science* from your Chairman, Mr Donald McDonald.

In my personal experience the Australian scientific community overwhelmingly respects and defends the ABC for the support it has given to science in Australia. I respectfully suggest that you are endangering your natural support base by presenting such uncritical, poorly researched, unscientific programmes as '*Psychic Investigators*' and, in the current political climate, you need all the friends you have got..

Is the ABC really too poorly funded to produce enough top-quality, homegrown scientific programmes to fill 'Catalyst's' summer time slot. If so then at least do us the courtesy of seeking out and presenting a wide range of well-researched science documentaries (past or present) from Australia and from overseas in its place. There is no shortage of choice.

Do you really value the ABC's reputation and credibility? If so, then I suggest that you review the unfortunate decision to broadcast this pseudo-documentary '*Psychic Investigators*' series, especially in its proposed time slot! If not, I suggest that you will do a grave disservice, not only to the general public but especially to young people throughout Australia who lack the knowledge and experience to evaluate such uncritical, but slickly presented, rubbish.

I realise that it is easy to criticise on such matters without providing alternative solutions. Given the undoubtedly public interest in such topics as 'psychics' and the 'paranormal' etc. I suggest that you reverse the situation and consider the following proposal.

Instead of presenting dubious series such as '*Psychic Investigators*' I suggest that the ABC, in collaboration with respectable international partners, commission a 10-15 part well-researched and authoritative documentary series called '***The Investigators***'.

Such a series could cover topics such as '*Investigating Psychics*', '*Investigating Homeopathy*', '*Investigating Creationism (or Intelligent Design)*', '*Investigating Alternative Medicine*', '*Investigating Telepathy*', *Investigating etc.*

As a Life Member of the Australian Skeptics I know that there is no shortage of such popular pseudo-scientific topics to examine critically and scientifically, while giving their proponents an opportunity to present or support their case. It could be a winner, sell internationally and also reflect very favourably on its producers.

So, what's it to be – 'Psychic Investigators' or 'Investigating Psychics'?

Yours sincerely

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(Palaeontologist)