

**RESPONSE FROM PROFESSOR FRANK CARRICK TO ABC RADIO NATIONAL EXEC. PRODUCER
SHERYLE BAGWELL RE MISLEADING INTERVIEW RELATING TO KOALA POPULATIONS. 04.12.2017**

In response to RN Breakfast concerning their broadcast last week of the very misleading Vic Jurskis interview with Fran Kelly, I had an email yesterday from Sheryle Bagwell, Executive Producer, ABC Radio National Breakfast. In this she refused to rectify the damage done. I responded to her yesterday and affirmed that I consider her position to be entirely unsatisfactory. I have not had a reply from her since. Below is a summary of my response to Ms Bagwell.

I understand that many people (especially those battling to save the NSW Southern Forests and their fauna - especially Koalas) have been even more outraged than me by the misrepresentation in that broadcast of the status of Koalas and have contacted you seeking an objective assessment of the plight of the national Koala population. There is substantial consensus amongst Ecologists with significant knowledge as to the dire severity and underlying causes, though some aspects of the detail will vary from place to place. Please feel free to share my assessment.

1. Ms Bagwell stated that at this stage she has no plans to air a rebuttal to the recent Vic Jurskis interview on RN Breakfast. To which I responded that I consider that position to be completely unacceptable in the circumstances.
2. She acknowledged that she recognised his thesis is controversial. I responded along the lines of that statement being a candidate for 'understatement of the year'; and added that this recognition by RN Breakfast should have triggered due caution, so that she did not allow basically unchallenged sweeping statements go to air without an opportunity for RN Breakfast listeners to hear the widely accepted consensus to the contrary apropos the Koalas' status.
3. She fell back on a justification that CSIRO had seen fit to publish the Jurskis ideology as a peer reviewed article. However, from what I understand of the content of that article I don't believe it really contains a basis for the more egregious sweeping generalisations promulgated in the interview – which RN Breakfast had a responsibility to question effectively. This led me to query Ms Bagwell as to whether RN Breakfast (she and / or Fran Kelly and / or Hélène Hofman) had actually read the article in question before putting the interview to air and satisfied themselves that Mr Jurskis' assertions matched what was actually presented in the paper referred to? She has not responded to my question as to whether RN Breakfast had actually read the CSIRO article Ms Bagwell said she relied upon prior to the interview with Mr Jurskis.
4. Ms Bagwell stated that she had made the decision that it was at least worth an airing on RN Breakfast. I responded that this may well have been 'fair enough' (as per my comments in my original email to Fran Kelly, I am certainly not an advocate of scientific censorship) had it been done in a manner consistent with ABC Editorial Policy; but NOT in such an unbalanced and uncritical way.
5. She then asserted that she had lost count of the number of interviews they had done over the years that have discussed the declining numbers of Koalas and the threat to their habitat. Since I cannot personally recall any recent RN Breakfast interviews (or other RN reporting for that matter) about the plight of Koalas, I queried when exactly the most recent report on the Koala's dire situation was put to air on RN Breakfast? I have yet to receive a response to this query.

6. She then sought to justify the broadcast of the Vic Jurskis interview on the basis that it was a single exemplar of a different perspective. Furthermore, she contended that she thought the RN Breakfast audience is intelligent enough to be able to hear alternative views from time to time and draw their own conclusions.

A. The unconventional / quirky pronouncements in the interview should have triggered more editorial care, not less; and "perspective" is not a term that comes to mind when considering the broadcast. As I said in my original email to Fran Kelly, it is sometimes the case that a contentious viewpoint results from a ground-breaking, novel insight that challenges orthodoxy and is, therefore, subject to attempts at suppression by closed-minded advocates of the *status quo* - BUT much more often, the disputation arises because the challenge to conventional wisdom is not based on objective reality! This is akin to ex-senator Roberts 'choosing to believe' there is no objective evidence for climate change nor that he was not other than an Australian citizen.

B. My complaint cannot be simply shrugged off by Ms Bagwell's appeal to the intelligence of the RN audience – that has nothing to do with the issue, since when 'Fake News' like the recent interview is presented in the absence of appropriate context (an essential feature of my complaint is that RN Breakfast failed to provide in an effective way "alternative views" that contradict those of their interviewee). Thus RN Breakfast deprived their listeners of the opportunity to "draw their own conclusions".

7. Ms Bagwell concluded her email with the placatory testimonial that the broadcast of the Vic Jurskis interview doesn't wipe out all the good work done by people (including yours truly) to protect the Koala.

A. My response to her was that, on the contrary, it has the potential to do just that!

B. By propagating, essentially unchallenged, an eccentric view that Koala populations are not at risk from loss of habitat (which is just ludicrous - at least 80% of Koala habitat in existence at the time of European occupation has been destroyed - unless Koala habitat has the dominant attribute of 'The Magic Pudding', there has to have been a commensurate loss in Koalas).

C. By propagating the completely fallacious denial that cumulative and ongoing destruction of their habitat is the ultimate cause of the devastation of Koala populations, RN Breakfast has, in effect, orchestrated music to the ears of the vested interests who wish to continue the unfettered, ongoing destruction of Australia's residual forests and woodlands.

In my view, the current response from Ms Bagwell constitutes poor and irresponsible journalism, which I believe is in conflict with ABC Editorial Policies. I have strongly urged Ms Bagwell to reconsider her stance, but I have received no response yet to my email to her yesterday.

Professor Frank N Carrick AM | Professorial Research Fellow & Koala Study Program Chief Investigator

Centre for Mined Land Rehabilitation

Sustainable Minerals Institute | The University of Queensland | Brisbane, QLD, 4072 AUSTRALIA

Email: f.carrick@uq.edu.au

Web: <http://www.cmlr.uq.edu.au> <http://www.smi.uq.edu.au>