**From:** ABC Corporate\_Affairs12 <Corporate\_Affairs12.ABC@abc.net.au>
**Sent:** Tuesday, 18 September 2018 3:35 PM
**To:** Company Secretary <CompanySecretary@mla.com.au>
**Subject:** RE: ABC Catalyst program - Tuesday, 14 August 2018

Dear Mr Norton,

Thank you for your correspondence regarding the episode of *Catalyst* ‘Feeding Australia’ broadcast on 14 August 2018.

In accordance with the ABC’s complaints handling procedures, your correspondence has been referred to Audience and Consumer Affairs, a unit separate to and independent of the content making areas of the ABC. Our role is to review and, where appropriate, investigate complaints alleging that ABC content has breached the ABC’s editorial standards. These standards are explained in the ABC Code of Practice which is available here - <http://about.abc.net.au/reports-publications/code-of-practice/>.

Audience and Consumer have reviewed the episode, considered your complaint, sought information from the program team and assessed the content against the ABC’s provisions for accuracy.  Most relevant to your complaint: *2.1 Make reasonable efforts to ensure material facts are accurate and presented in context.*

The two part program explored some of the challenges faced in Australia and across the world, principally in relation to growing populations and associated pressures on food production. In his introduction, presenter Paul West said: “We Australians love our food. It’s a part of who we are. As a nation, we have a monster appetite. We enjoy some of the freshest food in the world. We’re really good farmers. But by 2050, we’re looking at feeding another 15 million hungry mouths. And our weather’s likely to get even more unpredictable. We’re at the very frontier of what we’re able to produce, so we need to look for new solutions. … Welcome to the first of two very special *Catalysts* looking at how, in decades to come, we Australians are going to feed ourselves.”  *Catalyst* have advised: “Our starting point for the program was that in Australia “we are really good farmers” – and this statement applies as much to Australian beef farmers as to any other grower or producer in the film. Over the course of the first episode we looked at a wide variety of challenges and innovations related to food production, ranging from one of Australia’s first mobile hydroponic farms to the use of stem cell research in the production of avocadoes.  Within this context we briefly looked at one aspect of beef production – the use of water – as a prompt to introduce to viewers and examine some unconventional sources of protein that are less resource intensive.”

In the program Dr Noby Leong stated “According to a UN report, it takes over 7,000 litres of water for a grazier to produce a 500g steak like this.” *Catalyst* advise that this figure was sourced from the United Nations, specifically its 2017 World Water Development Report, which states in part:

*Global water demand is predicted to increase significantly over the coming decades. In addition to demand from the agricultural sector, which is currently responsible for 70% of water abstractions worldwide, large increases are predicted for industry and energy production (WWAP, 2015). Changing consumption patterns, including shifting diets towards highly water-intensive foods such as meat (i.e. 15,000 litres of water are needed for 1 kg of beef) will worsen the situation. It is therefore unsurprising that the World Economic Forum (WEF) has consecutively assessed the water crisis as one of the major global risks over the past five years.*

Audience and Consumer Affairs understand that this figure is widely used globally and was cited in a recent (2017) report from a reputable source, the UN.  The figure was clearly attributed as being from the UN in the program. We note your concern that the program failed to recognise that there are drastically different methodologies used to calculate water use in the beef industry. The 2009 ABC program you identified as having previously addressed this issue was focused specifically on water usage and footprints in food manufacturing. *Catalyst* ‘Feeding Australia’ was instead concerned with broader issues of the growing population and various scientific and technological innovations in food production, not competing methodologies when calculating water usage in the beef industry. Given this focus, Audience and Consumer Affairs are satisfied that the program made reasonable efforts to ensure material facts were accurate and presented in context in relying on the figure as cited by the UN.

The program did not claim that the Australian livestock industry is unsustainable because of the land size it uses and emissions. The program stated that “Cows also need a lot of land, a lot of feed, and they’re big producers of greenhouse gases”. We are satisfied that this statement was not materially misleading in the context of a program concerned with the challenges of feeding millions more people in future decades, including the likely need for additional ways of producing protein sustainably.

We cannot agree that the program presented the future of beef eating as non-existent and unsustainable in the long term or that the only viable future of protein is either insects or plant-based alternatives to meat. *Catalyst* advise that the segment on meal worms was light-hearted in nature and “designed to introduce Australians to an unconventional and potentially uncomfortable new food source.” Dr Leong pointed out some of the benefits of insects as a protein source, both in terms of nutrition and environmental impact but at no point did the program claim that red meat should not play a role as a food source in the future. Rather the program explored some of the other possible future food sources that may be developed.

On review, Audience and Consumer Affairs are satisfied that the segment was in keeping with the ABC’s editorial standards for accuracy. However, *Catalyst* have advised that these are subjects they intend to return to in future programs and projects which may afford an opportunity to explore some of the research and development in the meat and livestock industry. To this end, Aidan Laverty, Manager Science & Executive Producer, *Catalyst,* has said that he is more than happy to hear from you about innovations in the industry. You may contact him directly: laverty.aidan@abc.net.au.

Thank you for bringing your concerns to the attention of the ABC.  Should you be dissatisfied with this response, you may be able to pursue your complaint with the Australian Communications and Media Authority ([www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au)).

Yours sincerely,

Denise Musto

Investigations Manager

Audience and Consumer Affairs