

Why did it take the ABC 25 days to say 'sorry' for torture fantasy?



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For nearly a month, the ABC's leadership sat in silence while the video remained live on their platforms. They moved only when the lawyers moved.

Imagine a major television network airing a segment in which a contestant fantasises, in graphic detail, about sexually torturing a woman until she dies.

Imagine that network leaving it up on every one of its platforms for weeks while the woman's family, her company, and millions of horrified viewers beg them to take it down.

Imagine that network's own 'watchdog' then declaring the whole thing perfectly consistent with its 'editorial standards'.

You don't have to imagine it.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, known Down Under as the ABC, just did it.

Let me be crystal clear for readers here in the United States: this is not the liberal American ABC network owned by Disney. It is an entirely separate organisation, Australia's government-owned, taxpayer-funded national broadcaster. And the target of this vile segment was my friend and Australia's most successful businessperson, Gina Rinehart.

On July 12, the ABC's revived Race Around the World program aired a four-minute film called 'A Very Relaxing Video'. It ended with contestant Kate McGuinness describing a violent revolutionary fantasy in which Mrs. Rinehart is sexually violated with a stick and killed, her body turned into food.

The video even displayed an image of Mrs. Rinehart's head on a stick. This was not innuendo. It was a detailed, gleeful description of the sexual torture and murder of a real, living woman, broadcast by a national outlet funded by the very taxpayers, such as Mrs. Rinehart, who keep it on the air!

What did the ABC do when the outrage poured in? Nothing. Worse than nothing.

Hancock Prospecting, the company Mrs. Rinehart leads as Executive Chairman, wrote to the ABC's board on July 23 demanding the material be removed, a public apology issued, and a full investigation launched into who commissioned and approved it.

A week passed with no substantive response. The ABC's media team initially defended the segment as 'editorially justifiable'. The ABC's own Ombudsman then concluded the film did not breach the broadcaster's

editorial policies, even claiming there were no visual depictions of violence, a claim flatly contradicted by the imagery in the video itself.

Only when Hancock Prospecting served legal notice on ABC Chair Kim Williams, Deputy Chair Lisa Caffery, and Managing Director Hugh Marks, alleging breaches of multiple Australian criminal and civil laws, did the broadcaster suddenly discover its conscience. Twenty-five days after the segment aired, Marks finally issued an apology, conceding the content had 'fallen short of community expectations' and promising to amend the ABC's guidance on violence.

Let's be honest about what that apology was. It was not remorse. It was risk management. For nearly a month, the ABC's leadership sat in silence while a video celebrating the sexual torture and death of an Australian woman remained live on their platforms.

They moved only when the lawyers moved. That is not an institution that suddenly grasped the gravity of what it had done. That is an institution that grasped the size of its legal exposure. An apology extracted under threat of litigation, delivered 25 days late, alongside an internal review that cleared everyone involved, is not an apology at all. It is a settlement offer dressed up as contrition.

And here is the part that should make every fair-minded person's blood boil: this same media class lectures the rest of us, every single day, about 'harmful rhetoric' and 'dangerous speech'. These are the people who tell us words are violence. Yet when one of their own broadcasts an actual, explicit fantasy of sexualised violence against a conservative businesswoman, it's suddenly 'satire'. It's 'art'. It's 'editorially justifiable'. Every American should pay attention, because the double standard on display in Sydney is the same one we fight in our own press every day. If a segment like this had targeted a woman the media favoured, careers would have ended within the hour.

As the owner of the 1776 Project, which owns the largest police news outlet in the world, including Law Enforcement Today and Blue Lives Matter, I want to be unmistakably clear:

'On behalf of the largest law enforcement news outlet in the world, we unequivocally condemn the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's broadcast of this depraved content and the cowardly, calculated silence that followed it'.

Our reporters cover the aftermath of violence against women every single day. We see the crime scenes. We interview the detectives. We attend the funerals. There is nothing satirical about a woman being tortured to death. The hypocrisy of a media establishment that polices everyone else's words while airing this filth is staggering, and the men and women of law enforcement see it for exactly what it is!

The cruelty of this segment is made even more grotesque by the character of the woman it targeted. I know Gina Rinehart.

The woman the ABC allowed to be dehumanised on national television is one of the kindest, warmest and most generous people I have ever met, and the record backs that up in overwhelming fashion.

Through Hancock Prospecting and the Georgina Hope Foundation, Mrs. Rinehart has poured her wealth into causes most billionaires never touch. She has funded a \$200 million accommodation program for homeless veterans, personally pushing to get men and women who served their country off the streets and into refurbished housing.

She has supported medical and health causes for decades. She has backed Australian swimming since the early 1990s and donates roughly \$50 million every year to rowing, swimming, and artistic swimming, with her contributions to Australia's Olympic athletes reportedly totalling some \$100 million since 2012.

She serves as patron of Rowing Australia, the Australian Dolphins swim team, and multiple state swimming bodies, and she personally funds medal bonuses and living stipends that allow athletes to pay their rent and chase their dreams.

Ask the athletes themselves. Olympic rowers have said publicly that their medals would not have been possible without her, and that she doesn't just write checks from a distance. She shows up. She knows their names. She stands on the pool deck and cheers. Gold medallist rower Lucy Stephan said her crew simply could not have supported themselves without Mrs. Rinehart's help. Swimmer Lani Pallister said the team is 'so incredibly grateful for everything she does' and that she 'continually goes above and beyond'. That is the woman the ABC decided it was acceptable to depict being sexually tortured to death for laughs.

On August 8, Hancock Prospecting released a statement regarding the ABC's belated response. It deserves to be read in full, and so I am including every word of it here:

'We wait to see the long overdue changes to the ABC's "editorial standards". Such editorial standards need to stop sexual violence and torture until death episodes being shown or depicted in any form against any woman on the ABC, including under the pretence of satire or art or any other cloak. Satire needs to be funny, what the ABC approved to be aired for 25 days, in its violent torture until death content, was not.

'The content shown on the ABC normalised violent torture against a woman till death, and dehumanised an Australian, such that she was worthless and okay to be sexually tortured, should not be and must not be acceptable in our country.

This concept that a woman can be regarded as worthless, (even if she has contributed hugely to a country, so it's okay to sexually torture her to death, is not a new concept. It is practised by terrorists and has been practised elsewhere in the world, and must never be regarded as art, or acceptable in our country, even by the ABC.

'The ABC and now the ABC Ombudsman, have both stated that this program "met the ABC's editorial standards"! In some ways this is not surprising, as in the last five years, the ABC Ombudsman has only found that fewer than 5 per cent of the complaints raised, resulted in their finding that the ABC had breached its standards. It should not be surprising that these standards need significant improvement, if taxpayers are expected to think it is okay to meet the ABC's lavish expenditure and ok to have dehumanising content of any Australian woman, such that it is ok to be sexually tortured until death, and other lack of reasonable editorial standards. 'Indeed the "Ombudsman" bent over backwards to endorse the ABC's conduct and even misstated that the episode was "not accompanied by any visual depictions of violence", which is not true because of the inclusion of the proposed weapon, sticks, while saying to use sticks to enter Mrs Rinehart's body in such a way as to kill her, and the video shows a picture of Mrs Rinehart's head on a stick.

The internal ABC Ombudsman's decision that the ABC did not breach ABC Editorial Standards fails all Australian women and the millions of taxpayers who fund the ABC.

"There remains ongoing silence from the ABC Chair Kim Williams, Deputy Chair Lisa Caffery and the ABC Board, and we await a detailed account in relation to who approved this unacceptable piece to be aired, and who approved the long delay in its removal, which must have been ticked off by those higher up in the ABC, given its high profile in the media and the many complaints.

The buck stops with the heads of the ABC.

'We warmly thank the many, many Australians, who have raised serious concerns against a program inciting violence, torture and murder, and who have stood up against the unacceptable actions of the ABC in putting this to air and leaving it on its multi-platforms for 25 days.'

Hancock's statement cuts to the heart of why this matters far beyond one broadcast and one boardroom.

Normalising violence against women is not a victimless creative choice. It feeds a global epidemic that is already claiming lives at a staggering rate.

Behind those statistics are rapes, beatings, torture, and murders. And researchers have long warned that culture is not a bystander to this violence. When mass media treats the sexual torture of a woman as comedy, it chips away at the taboo that protects every woman. It tells the angry and the unstable that this kind of fantasy is normal, even funny, even righteous if the target holds the wrong politics or has the wrong bank account. A society cannot spend billions fighting violence against women while its national broadcaster airs content that dresses that violence up as entertainment. Every degrading depiction lowers the threshold for the next one, and the next one may not stay on a screen.

The ABC knows this. Its journalists have reported on these very statistics. Its executives have given speeches about respect for women. And then they aired this segment, defended it, cleared it through their own ombudsman, and apologised only when the legal bills came into focus.

So no, ABC, your apology is not accepted.

Not by Gina Rinehart's friends, not by the millions of Australians who fund you, and not by anyone who understands what you did. You did not fail to meet 'community expectations'. You broadcast the fantasised sexual torture and murder of a good and generous woman, you left it up for 25 days, and you said sorry only when you got scared.

Gina Rinehart will be fine. She has spent her life building things while her critics tear things down, lifting veterans, athletes, and communities while her detractors lift nothing but their own smug sense of superiority. History will remember her generosity long after this segment is a footnote of shame in the ABC's archives.

But the rest of us should not move on so quickly. Because the question Hancock Prospecting asked is the question that should haunt every taxpayer who funds that broadcaster and every citizen who watches it: if fantasising on air about the sexual torture and death of a woman doesn't breach your standards, then what exactly are your standards protecting?

Until the people who approved this are named and held accountable, from the producers to the board, the answer is as obvious as it is damning. They are protecting themselves. And no half-hearted, lawyer-driven, 25-day-late apology will ever change that.

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