

THE CONVERSATION

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A very naughty parrot: ACMA sends Alan Jones back to school

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

I write freelance opinion columns for The Canberra Times, which is owned by Fairfax. I also own a handful of shares in Fairfax which are now worth not much at all. Fairfax owns 2UE which is a rival of 2GB. I am closely affiliated with facebook.com/destroythejoint and destroythejoint.org. Sign the pledge. I am also a feminist, academic and journalism educator and very much hope that when 2GB selects an organisation to provide accuracy training for its staff, it selects UTS. I am not (and never have been) a member of any political party.



2GB staff involved in producing Jones' show will have to attend training in factual accuracy. AAP Image/Dean Lewins

Alan Jones will have to go to accuracy school. Reread that sentence a few times. Still can't quite believe it?

Today the Australian Communication and Media Authority released the **terms of its agreement** with 2GB in the light of serious findings against the station over the last two years.

It's taken months for these measures to emerge as 2GB tried to negotiate its way out of what can only be described as a humiliation for the talkback station.

Now 2GB's licensee has agreed to overhaul the way it verifies facts. It has also committed to present significant

alternative views. That doesn't mean Alan Jones will now have to broadcast those who support the carbon tax without hitting the pause button – but it does mean that across the station, there will have to be what used to be called balance.

And to make that work, all 2GB staff involved in broadcast, production and news, must attend training on the concepts of factual accuracy and what ACMA calls "significant viewpoints".

This training is a direct result of breaches of ACMA's Commercial Radio Codes of Practice by the station in the last two years on climate change and the management of native forests; and those breaches related to accuracy and presentation of alternative viewpoints.

What 2GB found when it went looking, were serious shortcomings in the research practices on the Alan Jones show. From now, those who work with Mr Jones will be forced to check third-party claims which Alan Jones has broadcast without checking in the past.

In March last year, the licensee could not prove to ACMA that material presented as factual matter had been checked. Mr Jones prepared his own script and did not fact-check or verify facts. He did not provide the script to the 2GB research team.

Around the same time, Mr Jones made several claims around native vegetation. But he never presented an alternative viewpoint or gave reasonable opportunities to present more than one view.

Should the broadcaster breach today's agreement, ACMA will then impose standards. From there, the regulator imposes much more rigorous compliance processes.

As sources at ACMA say, the regulator often requires reporters to do extra training. Usually, it's the newbie on a tabloid current affairs show who might not know all the ropes.

But no-one at ACMA or elsewhere can ever recall a senior broadcaster such as Mr Jones being required to go to accuracy training. It's a blow for a radio announcer whose credibility is now in question.

Over the past month, he has been fined for comments about [Lebanese Muslims in Australia](#), mocked for his comments about women "destroying the joint", shamed by his cruel comments on the reasons why the Prime Minister's father died. His advertisers have left in droves because of a campaign to make Jones accountable.

In the meantime, and according to [Neil Chenoweth's story](#) in the Australian Financial Review on Monday, Alan Jones's options are now worth around \$2.56 million, from a value of nearly \$4 million a year ago; and Macquarie Radio Network shareholders approved "a variation that linked the options more closely to Jones's [radio] shift".

The profitability there has taken a hit too as the [Destroy the Joint](#) campaign has taken off.

It will force significant changes on the way Jones broadcasts – and of the way the host station will have to broadcast issues.

Disclaimer: I am one of 20,000 women and men involved in Destroy the Joint, a Facebook page set up after Alan Jones's comments in late August that women were "destroying the joint". This campaign matters to me for a range of reasons; and sexism and misogyny are just two of those reasons. Last week, on behalf of the campaign, I went on Chris Smith's program to talk about the Destroy the Joint campaign, which does not call for the sacking of Alan Jones. I suggested Mr Jones go to re-education. Mr Smith discounted the suggestion. Now he finds that the ACMA decision covers his program as well and the regulator has imposed these rules on behalf of all of us.

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