

yesterday

Bob Hawke sick:

Former prime minister Bob Hawke is reportedly in hospital with a severe case of pneumonia. Mr Hawke, 81, was admitted to St Vincent's Private Hospital in Sydney last week, senior Health Department sources have said. He is reported to be suffering from a severe case of pneumonia. However, the sources said they did not believe his condition was serious.

Drug subsidies:

The price of crucial drugs for bowel cancer and MS sufferers is set to fall, but health groups fear the system for deciding medicine subsidies remains riddled with problems. Health Minister Nicola Roxon yesterday announced that a new batch of 13 drugs would receive \$200 million worth of subsidies under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme from September.

Social isolation:

A University of Adelaide study will examine ways of reducing social isolation among the elderly, which has been identified as a serious mental and physical health risk. Chief investigator Andrew Beer and a team of researchers will study the most effective programs to combat social isolation caused by divorce, lower marriage rates and reduced fertility. "Social isolation is equivalent to the health effects of smoking 15 cigarettes a day," Professor Beer said.

ABC admits breach of standards

By ANGUS LIVINGSTON

TWO Australian Story episodes about atrazine in the St Helens water supply breached editorial standards, ABC managing director Mark Scott has confirmed.

The admission led to calls from parliamentarians for the national broadcaster to compensate the town after its reputation was damaged in front of a national audience.

Mr Scott said in a letter that the story placed "insufficient emphasis" on the responses from authorities about the concerns raised by Dr Marcus Scammell and Dr Alison Bleaney.

"The ABC regrets these breaches of our editorial standards," Mr Scott said.

The correction came about 15 months after the program originally ran.

The episodes that breached the guidelines are still available online.

Apsley MLC Tania Rattray said the ABC should do "the decent thing" and send a cheque to the St Helens Chamber of Commerce.

She also said the episodes had damaged the credibility of Australian Story.

"People would have to question whether the Australian stories are all as faithful as they would appear to be," she said.

An independent expert national panel tested the methodology used by Dr Scammell and Dr Bleaney and found their sample collection methods had significantly concentrated the amount of atrazine in the water.

Australian Story 'disgrace':

The Australian Story episodes about the St Helens water supply were a "disgrace", Break O'Day Mayor Robert Legge said yesterday. "It is an absolute bloody disgrace that the ABC put it (the story) on," he said. "The person who created the problem should be thoroughly reprimanded from somewhere." Cr Legge said the GP who raised the issue should apologise. "I think Dr (Alison) Bleaney really went overboard on this one and caused a colossal amount of harm to her municipality and should get up and publicly apologise to the people," he said.

Last year Dr Bleaney said the panel had missed the point.

She said that despite the findings, persistent toxins had been found in the water.

Lyons MHA Rebecca White said the ABC needed to apologise to St Helens.

"This program caused significant fear and concern in St Helens after it aired last year, with reports that tourists cancelled holidays and people turned to bottled water because they were too frightened to continue drinking the town's water supply," she said.

Former state politician Dr Andrew Lohrey said the ABC had been intimidated into the admission.

"In future, all that needs to happen to stop a program going to air is for a government department to refuse to speak to a journalist," he said.

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