I ALREADY knew our media had trouble telling the truth about Iraq.

After last week's shameful headlines, David Kay now sadly agrees. Kay leads the 1200 American, Australian and British experts searching for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, and last week gave an interim report on what they'd found.


ABC's PM program was even surer of another US "setback": "No evidence of weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq," it trumpeted.

David Kay saw the same kind of headlines in the United States, and says he's "amazed" the media thinks his search has failed.

Did journalists actually read his report, which lists startling new evidence of Saddam's weapons?

Says Kay: "This is information (that), if it had been available last year, would have been headline news." He's now certain "we're going to find remarkable things" in the future, too.

So let me go through his report, which you can read in full on the www.cia.gov website.

Right off, Kay kills the myth that Iraq never had many WMD.

The proof is in: "Iraq's WMD programs spanned more than two decades, involved thousands of people, billions of dollars, and were elaborately shielded by security and deception operations that continued even beyond the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom." (the recent war)

THAT cover-up continues. As recently as July, inspectors searching an Iraqi jail found the still-warm ashes of documents burned in what seems to have been part of an organised effort to destroy evidence of WMD.

Four of Kay's team were also hurt in a bombing, and an Iraqi witness assassinated. Other witnesses have been threatened.

True, no actual WMD have yet been found, but Kay argues they may have been smuggled across the borders, stolen or hidden.

And there's still so much to check. Kay's ISG has searched just 10 of Saddam's 130 weapons dumps, many of which are more than 130 sq km and help store an "almost unbelievable" arsenal of conventional weapons.

What's more, "it is important to keep in mind that even the bulkiest materials we are searching for, in the quantities we would expect to find, can be concealed in spaces not much larger than a two-car garage."

THEY'RE the excuses, but what did the ISG actually find?

Answer: Plenty, including "significant information" that the Iraqi Intelligence Service after 1996 worked on biological and chemical weapons, and set up "a clandestine network of laboratories and facilities within the security service apparatus". These could be "activated quickly to surge the production of BW (biological weapons) agents".
Says Kay: "This network was never declared to the (United Nations) and was previously unknown." His report even shows a picture of lab equipment found hidden in a mosque.

Iraqi scientists also told Kay's team they'd worked on non-lethal organisms to find better ways to make weapons using anthrax and other lethal agents.

Kay reveals for the first time that Iraq was also doing "new research on BW-applicable agents, brucella and Congo Crimean haemorrhagic fever", and "continuing work on ricin and aflatoxin". Iraq declared none of this to the UN. Instead, it told scientists to hide toxic agents in their fridges at home, says Kay.

"One noteworthy example is a collection of reference strains that ought to have been declared to the UN. Among them was a vial of live C. botulinum Okra B. from which a biological agent can be produced."

It alarms Kay that the scientist who'd hidden this deadly toxin from UN weapons inspectors had also been asked to hide a "large cache" of other agents, including anthrax, and refused only because of the risk to his own children.

"ISG is actively searching for this second cache," Kay says grimly. Wish it luck.

More horrifying is the discovery by Kay's team of a "prison laboratory complex, possibly used in human testing of BW agents, that Iraqi officials working to prepare for UN inspections were explicitly ordered not to declare to the UN".

Kay adds: "Additional information is beginning to corroborate reporting since 1996 about human testing activities using chemical and biological substances, but progress in this area is slow given the concern of knowledgeable Iraqi personnel about their being prosecuted for crimes against humanity."

IRAQI witnesses agreed Saddam had wanted to make many more biological, chemical and even nuclear weapons the second the UN took its eye off him.

"When Saddam had asked a senior military official in either 2001 or 2002 how long it would take to produce new chemical agent and weapons . . . he responded it would take six months for mustard," Kay says.

"Iraqi scientists and senior government officials (also said) Saddam Hussein remained firmly committed to acquiring nuclear weapons . . . Some indicated a resumption after Iraq was free of sanctions." And a tip for Labor: an African country did offer Saddam uranium.

Saddam was just as keen to get rockets secretly that flew further than the 150km limit demanded by the UN.

"Detainees and co-operative sources indicate that beginning in 2000 Saddam ordered the development of ballistic missiles with ranges of at least 400km and up to 1000km," Kay says.

"Documents found by ISG describe a high-level dialogue between Iraq and North Korea that began in December 1999 and . . . indicate Iraqi interest in the transfer of technology for surface-to-surface missiles with a range of 1300km."

THE pattern of Saddam's deception and evil intent is absolutely clear.

But UN inspectors, Kay suggests, would have battled to find anything in Iraq, and once they'd given up, Saddam was free to spread a new technology of death beyond his borders.

"We have found people, technical information and illicit procurement networks that if allowed to flow to other countries and regions could accelerate global proliferation."

Which is precisely the reason the Coalition leaders gave for going to war.

Read the full report, and you'll see why the headlines last week should have read "Iraq war justified". So why were you told the opposite?