

NSW/ACT Bulletin

Back to the Future?

Rory Sutton

The ABC's inaugural broadcast was on 1 July 1932, and, in a show of unity, Australia's three main political parties individually broadcast messages of support for the newly created independent broadcaster.

Indeed, Prime Minister Joseph Lyons said his Government's aim was to not only provide impartial information and entertainment but, importantly, to **'serve all sections and to satisfy the diversified tastes of the public'**.

This year there is much for ABC Friends to contemplate. The immediate concern must be the outcome of the 2025 Federal Election and whether some form of a unified approach to the ABC's future is achievable. In this context, it is imperative that ABC Friends, wherever they are located, campaign energetically in support of the ABC. While there is a need to embrace the National campaign strategy, local criteria carry significant weight.

Currently, the world is essentially a tumultuous political landscape. The ABC, as an organisation, has not escaped entirely from its recent upheavals. However, it is in a unique position to encourage social cohesion and show the diversity of our country to all Australians and beyond. This may only be achieved if governments, of whatever persuasion, have the courage

to give support to an independent watchdog that is crucial for any democracy.

A major feature in this Bulletin is provided by the ABC Board's Chair, Kim Williams, who gives an impelling dissertation on the future of the ABC. Undoubtedly, the incoming Managing Director, Hugh Marks, in collaboration with Williams, will play a major role in the transformation of the ABC's operations and how it is accepted within the community. Presently, some vestiges of the ABC's most recent troubles remain, which require skilled management to overcome. However, with the election only a short time away, perceived angst about the ABC within the community is predicted to be a major campaign issue by opponents of the ABC, adding to campaign difficulties.

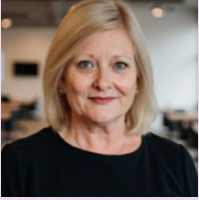
It is said that the best things in life are free. The platitude has become something of a 'war cry' in promoting the ABC. The reality is that Australian taxpayers contribute around one billion dollars plus per year to the ABC, with the expectation they will receive value for their money and the ABC continues as an impartial pillar of democracy.

If you have any queries, please contact your editing team: Rory Sutton (rcesutton@gmail.com) or Sue Zeckendorf (sue_zeck@hotmail.com).



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Message from the President

Welcome to 2025. This year's highlight may well be the outcome of the upcoming Federal Election and how the ABC Friends network conducts its electoral campaign. Undoubtedly, the campaign will need to deal with constant attacks on the ABC and the levels of mis- and disinformation promulgated by News Corp publications. The latter claims that 40% of Australians do not use ABC services. In response, ABC Board Chair, Kim Williams, asserts this is yet another 'inaccurate, unbalanced and agenda-driven attack on the ABC'.

It will also be difficult for us to advocate successfully for the ABC if it continues to make errors of judgement and unpopular programming and staffing decisions. Two frequently-voiced criticisms categorically state that the ABC is 'biased' and pursuing a 'woke' (a meaningless, disrespectful putdown) agenda. However, mud sticks and as a friend recently stated, 'I have heard from a range of sources that the ABC is biased, so it must be true'.

How should we respond? With the truth.

The ABC has a major responsibility to produce Australian content that informs, educates and entertains Australians. Its programs include a focus on the arts, children's programs (e.g. BTN and ABC Kids), youth radio (e.g., Triple J) and providing access to Australian culture around the world (e.g., Bluey).

An important campaign strategy includes citing recent polling that found 64% of Australians trust the ABC and 84% value the organisation. Notably, the ABC's Emergency Services around the country are valued highly. In that context, it is fair to say that you can't put a value on saving Australian lives and protecting our communities.

Over the past decade the ABC has endured some \$800 million in funding cuts, but it continues to deliver a wide range of content that reflects Australia's diversity. Equally, its messages do not serve 'the establishment' nor demonstrate 'left-wing bias'. Accusations of bias or 'wokeness' (whatever 'wokeness' means) ignores the complexity and diversity of perspectives advanced by ABC and its function

as a counterbalance to 'the establishment'.

The ABC also must be courageous and undertake rigorous investigative journalism, that holds governments and large commercial entities to account. This does not always endear the ABC to powerful, vested interests.

These unfounded accusations represent what is known as a logical fallacy – *ad hominem* – a fallacious argument, which is directed towards the entire ABC, rather than critiquing specific news items. Such arguments should identify documentary and/or program errors supported by rational data (facts) rather than personal opinion or political objections.

Of course, ideological objectors will only ever see their own perspective. They are locked in an echo chamber shutting out views that do not agree with their own. It is reassuring to know that this is a very small, although vocal, percentage of our population.

So, what do we do? Follow the advice of Kim Williams, who recently acknowledged at our Parliamentary Friends event in Canberra that the ABC must play a role in mitigating mis- and disinformation, concluding "the best antidote is the truth".

Dr Tess Howes
President, ABC Friends (NSW & ACT)

Rally for a fearless independent ABC



Senator Sarah Hanson-Young



Thomas Mayo



The Honourable Michelle Rowland



Jonathan Holmes



Geoffrey Watson SC

NSW Teachers Federation Conference Centre
11am, 13 April

Tickets \$5 www.abcfriends.net.au/rally_for_fearless_independent_abc



It is the Future that Matters:

Kim Williams



I gave a compact address to the Parliamentary Friends of the ABC at the home of our democracy - Australia's Parliament - in early February during the first sitting week of 2025. Inevitably in writing for you in the present settings, the focus on public policy and accountability rises high.

The ABC Act and its Charter is a creature of the Parliament. We are accountable to that vitally important institution and through it to the people of Australia. And we take the obligations enunciated in the Act extremely seriously. It provides the roadmap and reference point for everything the ABC does. The Act is a timeless document and is, in many ways, rich with foresight.

The ABC has a statutory duty to ensure that the gathering and presentation of news and information is impartial according to the recognised standards of objective journalism. We are reminded of this core obligation every time we approach issues of consequence like the forthcoming Federal election.

We do not serve causes at the ABC, we serve the truth. This is non-negotiable.

Playing party politics simply isn't our business. The ABC should be reliably politically non-partisan. I don't say "politically neutral" - because I believe it should be "politically positive" in the sense that it always backs democracy, and always backs Australia's national interests in ways consistent with telling the full truth. In the long term, the truth is always in the national interest.

The ABC does not claim to be perfect by any means. Like any media organisation we will sometimes make mistakes. But when we do, we will acknowledge them, correct them, and redouble our efforts to avoid them in the future, as we have done recently. Our processes are and will remain robust and under vigilant editorial review.

And while we have our own internal accountability processes, I would also say that I am a great believer

in accountability and the role of the Parliament. The Committee system plays an incredibly important role in holding organisations to account, including the ABC.

I would argue that the ABC is one of the most scrutinised and accountable organisations in the country, as it should be. We don't shy away from that responsibility to spend scarce resources wisely and abide by our legislative obligations. We welcome it.

At the National Press Club last November, I referred to what I called a tsunami of information from external shores washing over us, surging through our streets to potentially reshape our mental landscape, especially the minds of our young.

I said that like all Tsunamis, it drags ashore sharp, dangerous objects.

Misinformation - false information spread due to ignorance, error or mistake, sometimes without intention to deceive.

And disinformation - the deliberate spreading of false information and narratives to achieve malicious intent. The products of Vladimir Putin's bot farms. Andrew Tate's poisonous misogynistic videos. AI tools in the hands of enemies and criminals. Lies intended to spread confusion, exploit vulnerability, sow division, destroy resolve.

Australia and similar countries have recently started to realise the profound damage this can cause - especially in an era of increasing global tension and military conflict.

Information has now become an issue of national sovereignty.

Let's be clear... if we do not provide our people with trusted information, we will increasingly tell ourselves stories that are not really about us, but part of an extended global imaginary story - our own story disappearing under the waves.

That Tsunami of overseas-generated content can breach our information defences competing for the affections,

hearts, minds and aspirations of our people. Most dangerously, it is targeting the next generation of Australian children, teenagers and young adults, compromising their confidence about and knowledge of Australian history, Australian stories, Australian accents and Australian values in ways that may harm our future.

This is damaging our social cohesion, weakening the links between our regions and cities, generating unnecessary cultural conflict, weakening us.

The Act sets out our obligations clearly and they all represent effective antidotes to mis- and disinformation:

- providing innovative, comprehensive and niche broadcasting services of a high standard
- contributing to a sense of national identity
- educating, informing and entertaining
- reflecting Australia's multicultural plurality
- offering digital proficiency
- including coverage of the performing and other arts
- offering international services that encourage an awareness of Australia and
- committing to accurate, independent, objective journalism of integrity.

The case for an appropriately resourced ABC remains strong. The ABC continues as a pillar to our democracy in offering the reliable mirror, camera and microphone to the nation celebrating and interrogating what it is to be an Australian. It matters more than ever before.

Kim Williams
Chair ABC Board

ABC Board Members

It is no secret that in recent months the ABC has been the centre of considerable negative media commentary. The onus to combat this negativity and its associated inaccuracies has fallen on the ABC Board and, most prominently, on its Chair, Kim Williams. The Board's main responsibility is to ensure the provisions of the ABC Charter are fulfilled and to formulate policies as a guide for ABC Management.

Generally, Board members are appointed for five-year terms, with the fee structure determined by the independent Remuneration Tribunal. Most members are Government appointees, the remainder being the ABC's Managing Director and a staff elected member.

The new Managing Director, Hugh Marks, takes up his post on March 10 and then becomes a member of the ABC Board.

A significant feature of the current Board is its comprehensive expertise and knowledge of digital technology, including the qualifications of the Board's newest (since October 2024) appointee, Katrina Sedgwick.

Rory Sutton
Editor, NSW/ACT Bulletin



Kim Williams AM

Chair



Louise McElvogue



Nicolette Maury



Katrina Sedgwick



Georgie Somerset

Deputy Chair



Mario D'Orazio



Laura Tingle

Staff Elected Director

NB: Profiles and qualifications of the members are set out on the ABC Board's website www.abc.net.au/about/abc-board.

Spotlight Katrina Sedgwick

Born in Sydney, Sedgwick grew up in Adelaide during a time when Don Dunstan was Premier of South Australia. She began her career as a nine-year-old performer in Peter Weir's film *The Last Wave* (1977) and then as an 11-year-old soprano with the State Opera South Australia's Youth Company. Thereafter, Sedgwick performed in an impressive array of productions, including as a member of a travelling clown company.

Previous senior roles include Director and CEO of the national museum of screen culture ACMI, Head of Arts for ABC TV and founding Director / CEO of the biennial Adelaide Film Festival and its Investment Fund. Today, Sedgwick is the Director and CEO of



Melbourne Arts Precinct Corporation (MAP Co), established to deliver the \$1.7b Melbourne Arts Precinct Transformation, that will expand Melbourne's art precinct considerably.

In 2020, Sedgwick was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for her 'service to performing, screen and visual arts administration'.

Strategic Plan update – Classic Choir



The ABC Friends NSW/ACT Strategic Plan 2024-26 outlines the planned direction forward for the NSW/ACT Friends, so that it can best support and advocate for the ABC. The last issue of the Bulletin outlined key parts of the Plan. In this issue, we discuss the progress made towards goal SP02 of the Plan, to increase membership numbers and diversity. The Central Coast branch has developed an initiative to recruit and engage new ABC Friends via the ABC Classic FM Classic Choir.

ABC Friends' support for the ABC is partly based on our belief that a public broadcaster is best placed to create innovative and thought-provoking programs: ones that are designed to enhance our cultural life and report on new artistic developments, rather than simply follow popular trends identified by marketing. Naturally this involves undertaking some risk in trialling new ideas and sometimes using inexperienced staff. In this sense the ABC is at an advantage, being unconstrained by commercial imperatives such as the need to satisfy advertisers. The ABC initiative, Classic Choir, has been conducted since 2020, commissioning some of our most esteemed musicians and

composers. It has not only provided these artists with the opportunity to produce and perform new work, but has also enabled the public to participate.

A proposal has been devised to promote the ABC's role in the arts. It is intended to draw upon the experiences of all those involved with Classic Choir to promote the ABC's arts programming and forge long-lasting connections with communities who have been involved in the project. A prime objective is to enable ABC Friends to build our support base in communities through local organisations such as choirs, orchestras and their audiences. Certainly, the Classic Choir showcases the ABC as an organisation that is integral to our national culture and allows ABC audiences to experience unique programs that are engaging and informative.

The Classic Choir proposal has several components and is envisaged to be implemented over the course of this year.

- **Engaging choirs.** Several choirs listed in the Classic Choir event calendar have already been approached to have their profiles posted on our ABC Friends website.

- **Webpage.** A page on our website has now been developed by ABCF NSW/ACT Membership Secretary, Susan Scott, titled ABC Classic Choirs. This enables choirs to post profiles together with links to their own website and Facebook page - www.abcfriends.net.au/classic_choir
- **Film of a choir.** Preliminary discussions have begun with a filmmaker and graduate of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. He is currently developing a proposal to produce a film of a choir engaged in the Classic Choir program. Invitations have been extended to commissioned composers and ABC Classic staff to appear at future ABC Friends events.
- **Branch promotions.** I encourage our branches to promote the Classic Choir at events and to engage with choirs, groups and individuals within their communities, particularly with those organisations who have participated or shown an interest in the Classic Choir.

We trust that this Classic Choir initiative promotes the ABC Friends to a wider audience.

Ross McGowen
Convenor ABC Friends Central Coast



Branch Political Profiles

Northern Suburbs of Sydney

Since the last Federal election in 2022, the Northern Suburbs of Sydney Branch (NSoS) has continued to advocate strongly for the ABC through holding monthly meetings with high profile guest speakers.

The NSoS Branch covers five federal seats: Bennelong, Berowra, Bradfield, Mackellar, Mitchell and Warringah.

Paul Fletcher, the current Federal Member for Bradfield and former Minister for Communications (2019-2022) has announced he will not recontest the seat. He faced a significant challenge in 2022 when his margin was reduced to just 4.2% by Independent Nicolette Boele. With the abolition of the North Sydney electorate and redistribution, his margin has been further reduced to 2.5%. Nicolette Boele has announced she will recontest Bradfield in 2025. Gisele Kapterian will stand as the Liberal candidate for Bradfield.

Jerome Laxale (Labor) narrowly won the seat of Bennelong in 2022. With the abolition of the North Sydney electorate, Bennelong's boundaries now include Hunters Hill and Lane Cove, making Bennelong a marginal seat.

Following the defeat of Tony Abbott (Liberal) at the 2019 election by Zali Steggall (Independent) OAM, Ms Steggall was reelected in 2022.

In 2022, Independent Dr Sophie Scamps won the blue-ribbon Liberal electorate of Mackellar.

Liberal Alex Hawke retained his seat of Mitchell in 2022.

Julian Leaser retained Berowra in 2022 but this year will face Independent Tina Brown, the publisher of the Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Post.



Kylea Tink, MP for North Sydney, meeting with NSoS committee members Oct 2024
Photograph courtesy of Conor McCammon

Since the 2022 Federal election, NSoS has:

- emailed NSoS MPs requesting that they display our monthly meeting posters in their electorate offices for visiting constituents to see. NSoS hoped that the MPs would embrace this simple request. Some MPs found it challenging possibly because of time constraints and the lack of a community noticeboard in their electorate offices. To assist, ABC Friends volunteers have hand-delivered the posters to their offices. Zali Steggall enthusiastically displays our posters.
- encouraged members to write to their NSoS MPs calling for more funding for the ABC.
- written to all NSoS MPs asking for their support to call for more funding for the ABC, including that the ABC has sufficient funds so that they might return the broadcasting of the NSW Schools Spectacular to ABC TV.

- met with Kylea Tink, Federal Member for North Sydney, on 29.10.24.
- arranged a meeting with Jerome Laxale MP (Labor member for Bennelong) in early 2025.

NSoS will be writing to as many NSoS candidates as possible, asking them to support a strong, independent and well-funded ABC.

NSoS will also be writing to all Liberal NSoS candidates, calling on them to rescind the Liberal Party national conference motion to privatise the ABC.

The subject of NSoS's first 2025 meeting will be about the need to restore adequate and comprehensive funding to the ABC.

Quentin Dempster will speak on 13 February, Alan Sunderland ABC Alumni on 13 March, and ABC Friends National President Cassandra Parkinson on 10 April.

Janine Kitson
Convenor ABC Friends NSoS

Central Coast



Bouddi National Park

The Central Coast is one of the largest urban centres in NSW with a population of some 347,000. Although the level of cultural diversity is increasing as the area develops, ABS data reveals that 79% of its population was born in Australia, well above the NSW figure of 65.4% and the national figure of 66.9%. The Bureau's employment data shows the percentage of Central Coast residents over the age of 15 who are employed in full-time positions as 50.1%, lower than the percentage for the state (55.2%) and the nation (55.9%). Likewise, the percentage of full-time professionals stands at 20.4%, compared to 25.8% of all NSW full-time employees and 24% nationally.

Despite the lower levels of cultural diversity on the Central Coast, the number of people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is higher than the state or national figure: 4.9% of the region's population identify as First Nations people. The median income for families is lower than both the state and Federal average.

Although the Central Coast covers three Federal electorates (Robertson, Dobell and the southern end of Shortland), our election campaigning has been largely centred around the seat of Robertson, where local industries comprise tourism, light manufacturing and processing,

citrus, vegetable, flower and poultry farms.

The seat is currently held by Dr Gordon Reid for the ALP. Dr Reid won the seat in 2022 with 52.3% of the vote compared to the Coalition's 47.7% after the distribution of preferences. Previously the seat had been held by the Liberal Party by Lucy Wicks. She has been endorsed as the Liberal's candidate for 2025.

Eight television stations service the Central Coast and radio coverage comprises three large commercial stations. The ABC has an outreach station of 92.5 FM that operates a locally produced breakfast program from 6.00 am to 9.00 am weekdays. Outside these times, ABC broadcasting is produced from Sydney through 702 AM. There are difficulties in certain areas receiving the transmission signal and some residents are deprived access to ABC stations.

In local print media, the Central Coast Community News services the region. This paper is published by a local independent publishing house, Central Coast Newspapers. The Peninsula News, run by a community organisation, services an area centred around Woy Woy. Previously the major print publication was the weekly Central Coast Express Advocate, published by News Limited, but it ceased

printing in 2019 and is now an online subscription.

We expect that the issue of most relevance to Central Coast residents will be the cost of living. Relevant to this is the financial debt that the Central Coast Council incurred, which resulted in subsequent rate increases. In addition, there is a high proportion of employees who commute from the Central Coast to Sydney, their place of work. These things imply that funding for the ABC is not likely to feature prominently in Central Coast residents' considerations at the next Federal election. Given the Central Coast's relative lack of cultural diversity, issues related to the challenges confronting migrants may not resonate with constituents. The region managed to maintain some of its local print and broadcast media; however, the ABC remains an important source of local reporting and of course is not constrained by commercial demands.

This state of local reporting raises the point that emergency services broadcasts will always feature in areas such as the Central Coast which are surrounded by reserves, state forests and national parks, particularly during the summer months.

Ross McGowen

Convenor ABC Friends Central Coast

Northern Tablelands

Our branch overlaps largely with the NSW state seat of Northern Tablelands and the northern half of the New England electorate. The Federal Member for New England is Barnaby Joyce and this reflects the dominance of the National Party in the area covered by our Branch. Mr Joyce has been reasonably responsive to our requests to investigate various shortcomings in transmission, e.g., patchy Radio National coverage across the region and poor emergency radio coverage in Inverell. Despite his approaches to ABC management, to date there has been no success in influencing policy and practice.

As far as we can tell from our limited perspective of the region, largely through attendance at markets in

Armidale and Inverell, the underlying political sentiment for most people here is conservative. Regardless of political persuasion, we believe there exists a degree of goodwill towards the ABC. In particular, rural and emergency services from a trusted source are considered important for a region with half a dozen major towns (populations of 4000 or more), an array of small villages, and scattered farming properties. As a further sign of interest in the ABC, some people complain that the closest ABC office in Tamworth (New England North West local radio) does not pay enough attention to what is happening in other parts of the region.

We are not able to judge what proportion of the populace is glued

to sections of the press that are typically hostile to the ABC, such as the Murdoch papers or Sky News, but it could be expected that considerable numbers are.

Most of our activities take place in Armidale, which we believe is more “progressive” than most other places, but we appreciate the specific mix of attitudes across this region. Importantly, in Armidale we attract a reasonably-sized audience to events such as our annual speaker series.

A future strategy may be to mount similar events in other towns across the Northern Tablelands, and see how they go.

Brian Byrne and Bruce Stevenson
ABC Friends Northern Tablelands



New England National Park



Northern Rivers

Byron Bay flooding

We believe the position expressed in this document represents the views of Branch membership and of the Branch Executive.

Northern Rivers Branch focuses on the two Federal seats of Richmond and Page, which have both experienced diverse and rapid population growth over the past 30 years. Approximately 4% of the population identify as indigenous, but any cultural divide is more between urban-based and rural communities.

Richmond

The declared candidates are Justine Elliot (Labor), the sitting member, and Mandy Nolan (Greens). The Nationals candidate is not yet known, but based on 2022, there will be strong support in some northern and southern booths. Ms Elliot's margin of 8.2% should suggest that Richmond is safe for Labor, but in 2022 she benefited from strong Greens preferences. Mandy Nolan has an enthusiastic following in the Byron Shire and elsewhere through

the progressive elements of the community. The Greens national campaign has some confidence that she will take this seat (with Labor preferences). The State seat of Ballina is held by the Greens.

Ms Nolan's public profile and her strong advocacy for progressive politics should give her a real chance in 2025, but she will need to overcome generational conservative negativity within parts of the community.

These circumstances present our membership with a distinct choice given Ms Elliot's historically strong support for the ABC, including her membership of the Friends' parliamentary branch.

Page

Kevin Hogan (Nationals), with a majority of 10.7%, should safely hold Page, even though there has been strong support historically for both Labor and the Greens. In the past three elections, he has been able to increase Nationals margins in Page, since Labor's Janelle Saffin lost the seat at the time of the election of the

Abbott LNP government (she now holds the State seat of Lismore).

Mr Hogan seems to have done this by being non-controversial, while harvesting local negativity on rural-based matters. Following the Murdoch rhetoric, he has expressed doubts about fundamental issues like the Voice and climate change, in spite of the fires of 2019 and the floods of 2022 in the Northern Rivers region.

Mr Hogan has not agreed to our requests for meetings since 2017. He has not responded to our pre-election surveys on support for the ABC over the past three election cycles.

Despite strong, anti-Coalition elements in the Page electorate, it would take a very high-profile Labor or Greens candidate to cause him any concern.

Perhaps some threat could come from a Climate 200-funded Teals-style independent, but we are not aware of any such candidate.

Peter Dickson and Tim Mulroy
ABC Friends Northern Rivers





ACT/South East NSW

I believe the ABC holds a special place in the lives of many residents of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), a region known for its diverse and reportedly progressive demographic. While actual support for the ABC in the ACT remains unquantified without a formal survey, anecdotal evidence gathered through my social interactions would seem to paint a picture of widespread support for the national broadcaster.

At social gatherings, university events, concerts, and book launches, I often casually ask people, “Do you support the ABC?”. People consistently answer yes. However, that support often comes with a litany of complaints, usually about dissatisfaction with programming and presenter attitudes. There are always concerns over repeated content and the overall direction of the broadcaster. Still, the sentiment is clear: no one has said no, they do not support them.

I believe that for many, supporting the ABC transcends simple approval of its operations. When they say yes, they are supporting

the idea of the ABC. Their yes represents an endorsement of its perceived ethos.

Most people in the ACT, I believe, identify with the broadcaster because it reflects their values, interests and vision for society. The ABC, through its programming, reinforces a shared cultural narrative for its audience — one that reflects inclusivity, education, fairness, and tolerance.

Crucially, the ABC adheres to a charter that emphasises its role in reflecting Australia’s multicultural society and providing educational and diverse programming. This does not mean its content is ideologically neutral, because it does not claim to be. ABC programming avoids promoting divisive narratives, such as opposition to equal rights or discrimination against marginalised groups. It ensures that racist, sexist or harmful views are not included, in line with its values and editorial standards.

While its ideology is not explicitly stated, it is clear in the programs the ABC chooses to produce and air. For supporters, this ideology

is characterised by a commitment to equity, inclusion, and the dissemination of factual, unbiased information. The ABC contributes to shaping a society where education, understanding and tolerance are valued over censorship, exclusion or suppression of ideas.

However, this alignment with progressive values has drawn criticism from parts of society that favour more conservative policies, including bans on books, limitations on discussions of race and gender identity, and opposition to LGBTQ+ rights. Yet, for supporters in the ACT, the ABC’s role in fostering a balanced and a fair social fabric is precisely why it remains relevant and indispensable.

Despite its imperfections, the ABC stands as a cornerstone of Australian cultural and intellectual life, and its support in the ACT underscores the importance of a public broadcaster that reflects the values and diversity of the community it serves.

Rob Kennedy
Convenor ABC Friends ACT & South East NSW

Eastern Suburbs

The ESABC Friends branch is located in the Federal Seat of Wentworth. Wentworth is the second-smallest geographical electoral division in the Parliament and covers much of Sydney's Eastern Suburbs. It has traditionally been held by the Coalition but in 2018, Dr Kerryn Phelps was the first independent candidate to win it. Liberal Dave Sharma won the seat back for the Coalition in 2019. In 2021, Allegra Spender defeated Mr Sharma with 54 percent of the two-party vote, becoming one of several community Independents to unseat Liberal incumbents.

So, we see the Wentworth electorate changing and becoming more socially progressive. Voters are more reluctant to vote for major political parties and more inclined to vote for Independents. The recent redistribution of boundaries has moved whole suburbs like Kings Cross into Wentworth, thus potentially increasing the progressive vote.

We believe that people in Wentworth generally support the ABC. In the past, when we have promoted the ABC Friends at street fairs, a number of declared Liberal voters were happy to take the material we were handing out.

Over the last few federal elections,

ESABC Friends volunteers handed out election material asking voters to put the Coalition last. The material used was based on a survey where each candidate was asked to respond to a series of questions and they were then rated according to their level of support for the ABC.

The Labor Party in Wentworth has allocated preferences to Independents at the last few federal elections, which has assisted those Independent candidates to win. However, although the Labor Government supports the ABC, we decided against ALP volunteers handing out supportive material for the ABC at polling booths, as we have to remain non-partisan. Thus there is a need to find volunteers at election time who distance themselves from political parties and only promote candidates who support the ABC.

Due to the unaffordable housing situation/high rents, many young people in Wentworth remain at home, living with their parents. Other young people, particularly students, move out of the area, so Wentworth has a mix of established wealthier residents as well as a large transient population. However, not all suburbs would be classed as wealthy. There are suburbs where people of lower

socio-economic status reside, who would find the cost of living quite a struggle.

In summary, there are conservative voters in Wentworth, who may support the ABC but will always vote for the Coalition, so it is more constructive to focus on the suburbs where voters are prepared to vote for either the ALP, Independents or the Greens. These areas are in the local government areas of Waverley, part of Randwick and part of the City of Sydney.

The ESABC Friends held a well-attended forum on 9 February last, to reinvigorate our Branch. The forum was called "Defending the ABC". Our two guest speakers were journalist and radio presenter Geraldine Doogue and journalist Jonathan Holmes. A discussion ensued about the contribution of the ABC to Australian society, the threats it faces and how we can defend its vital role as a public broadcaster. We collected signatures from attendees who were keen to volunteer in the forthcoming federal election, to promote those candidates who supported an independent, well-funded ABC.

Nizza Siano

Secretary Eastern Suburbs ABC Friends



Geraldine Doogue, Jonathan Holmes and Ed Davis

Blue Mountains

The Blue Mountains Branch is situated in the Federal division of Macquarie which consists of the Blue Mountains City Council, Hawkesbury City Council, part of Penrith City Council and part of Wollondilly City Council. It covers an area of 4,374 sq km. The Federal Member for Macquarie is Susan Templeman (Labor), a strong and vocal supporter of a fearless and independent public broadcaster. Templeman, as Envoy for the Arts, has spoken to our group and organised a meet and greet with the Communications Minister Michelle Rowland.

Templeman increased her electoral margin in the 2022 election to a healthy 15.5%. However, boundary changes incorporating part of the Liberal seat of Lindsay may present a closer electoral outcome for Templeman.

After the Labor and Liberal Parties, the Greens have a significant presence in the Blue Mountains electorate and polled 9.6% of the 2022 primary vote. Small right-wing parties (One Nation, United Australia and the Liberal Democrats) accounted for a further 9.3%.

In general, the semi-rural Windsor/Richmond/Penrith parts of the electorate vote more conservatively than the more progressive Blue Mountains, resulting in a less favourable attitude towards the

ABC. The adjoining Lindsay electorate that takes in Penrith and parts of Greater Sydney is held by a Liberal, Melissa McIntosh (12% margin, TPP, 2022 election). McIntosh has recently been appointed Shadow Communications Minister by the Opposition leader. On appointment, McIntosh is quoted in The Australian as attacking the ABC over its Australia Day coverage and “divisiveness in reporting” (“Divisive” ABC in Sights of New Opposition Spokeswoman’, *The Australian*, 27/1/2025).

The median age of residents of the Blue Mountains is 45.4, which is older than the surrounding areas in Penrith and the Hawkesbury. The seat has one of the lowest proportions of non-English speakers in Australia.

Our contact with the public at Blue Mountains markets indicates to us that there is broad support for the ABC across age groups; however, actual viewing or listening to the ABC predominantly involves an older demographic plus families who watch ABC Kids. Teens/younger adults express enthusiasm for Triple J. Radio is still popular with the older



demographic. Many people have expressed their disquiet regarding attacks on the ABC by other news outlets such as those owned by News Corp. Specifically, we have noted that issues of adequate funding and the independence of the ABC are community concerns. Many would be upset if advertising were introduced to broadcasts.

All parts of the electorate have been significantly affected by serious floodings and bushfires in recent years. The ABC is well respected in the electorate for its vital role in emergency communications, which we emphasise in our community interactions and electoral campaigning. Given the range of views of the ABC in this huge electorate, we anticipate that we will concentrate our campaigning efforts in the eastern parts of the Blue Mountains and in the Hawkesbury centres of Windsor and Richmond.

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