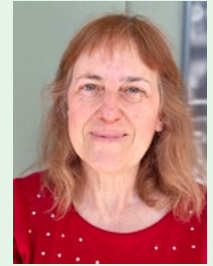


NSW/ACT Bulletin

Fifty... Not out!



Welcome to our first Bulletin for 2026. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of ABC Friends (ABCF), a feature article by one of the ABCF co-founders, Corin Fairburn Bass, is included. In addition, this Bulletin places significant emphasis on the challenges facing the ABC as it attempts to spread its presence across a surging media environment.

Traditional broadcasting is no longer the organising force of Australian media. Audiences now operate across platforms, picking what they want, when they want it. This leaves public broadcasters with a stark choice. Either chase audiences reactively and risk becoming just another voice in the digital miasma or use multimedia deliberately to deepen public-interest journalism.

Multimedia offers clear advantages. Examples include podcasts that amplify information, data journalism that garners the accumulation of evidence, short videos that make complex stories accessible, and live broadcasting which preserves immediacy and accountability. Effectively, a single story can serve multiple formats, without loss of integrity. Therefore, the ABC should treat multimedia not as a race for attention, but as an editorial opportunity. It can strengthen journalism rather than dilute it.

The ability to tell a story across a range of formats should enable depth, context and accessibility in equal measure. As a public broadcaster, the ABC should not emulate commercial practices simply to maximise attention. Rather, the ABC's role should be to give people more of what keeps them scrolling and provide information that challenges assumptions, complicates narratives and demands attention beyond comfort.

The ABC's greatest strength is trust, and trust is not built by telling audiences what they want to hear. It is built by demonstrating independence from political pressure, commercial incentive and digital fashion. Multimedia should serve that independence, not compromise it.

The decline of linear broadcasting does not signal the end of shared national conversation. It signals the need to rebuild it differently. If the ABC uses multimedia to spread understanding rather than outrage, and context rather than noise, it can transform a fragmented media landscape into something approaching a public square again.

The question is not whether the ABC can survive the digital age. It is whether it has the editorial courage to shape it.

Note: Please send any comments to the editorial team of Rory Sutton (rcesutton@gmail.com) or Sue Zeckendorf (sue_zeck@hotmail.com).

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President's Message

Building bridges: reclaiming bipartisan support for the ABC

The ABC is more than a media organisation. It is a shared national public asset—a place where Australians of different views, backgrounds and beliefs can benefit from the ABC's mission to inform, educate and entertain. At its best, the ABC should not divide us; it should connect us. That is why rebuilding bipartisan support for the ABC in 2026 should be a priority for us all.

Over the years there have been periods in which the ABC was under sustained attack—such as during the Abbott Government, when significant cuts were forced on the ABC despite specific election promises to the contrary. Also, during the Fraser Government, which resulted in the establishment of ABC Friends in NSW in 1976.

Historically, support for the ABC frequently crossed party lines. I was reminded of this recently at an ABCF Central Coast event, when Rob Carlton read an excerpt from one of his father's speeches in Parliament House to demonstrate long-standing bipartisan support for the ABC. In this speech, former Liberal Minister the late James (Jim) Carlton argued against allowing the ABC to accept "corporate underwriting under strict guidelines" (advertising) suggesting that this "provides the means for the government to evade their responsibility to finance a national broadcasting organisation on an adequate basis ... It would have corrupting influence on the ABC ... danger of progressive encroachment on the independence of program producers" (23 March 1982). Several Coalition MPs have acknowledged the ABC's role in regional Australia, emergency broadcasting and in sustaining critical communication connections. Privately, many of them,



Tess Howes presenting Antony Green with his Excellence in Broadcasting award ABCF NSW/ACT AGM Nov 2025.

as Australian citizens rather than as members of a political party, watch, listen to and rely on ABC programs, as millions of Australians do.

The tradition of bipartisan ABC stewardship appears to have weakened. Recent criticism of the ABC frequently appears more reactive than constructive. Attacks on ABC journalists and commentators are amplified by anti-ABC voices who make no attempt to moderate their own political preferences. Decrying bias when your own bias is obvious is hypocritical. What concerns me is that these claims are repeated so often that they risk being accepted through familiarity rather than rational logic.

Partisan attacks on the ABC carry consequences. Persistent, unsubstantiated allegations erode public trust not only in the ABC, but in other public institutions that sustain and strengthen our democracy. When national institutions are treated as political opponents rather than public assets, social cohesion will suffer. Yes, accountability matters, but it is strongest when it is grounded in good faith and supported by constructive criticism, objectivity and

reliable evidence. Not by repeating misleading slogans or engaging in political opportunism.

Building bridges means acknowledging that disagreement with ABC coverage will always exist in our complex plural democracy. A strong public broadcaster should be held to account. But it must also be defended against attempts to delegitimise it for short-term political gain. Criticism should aim to improve the institution, not weaken it.

The ABC does not belong to one political party, one ideology or one generation. It belongs to us all. Rebuilding bipartisan respect for the ABC will not signal political weakness, but rather national leadership. The ABC must be protected so that it can remain outside the daily political contest and election cycles.

At a time of deep division, recommitting to the ABC as a shared national asset could be viewed as an act of democratic confidence and ideological neutrality—one that Australia urgently needs.

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

Fifty years on the battle continues

It is fitting that Corin Fairburn Bass be featured in this Bulletin. Fifty years ago, in the Sydney suburb of Turramurra, Corin co-founded ABC Friends with her husband Walter Bass and their friends Hans and Faith Bandler. Since then, she has remained steadfast in advocating for a properly funded public broadcaster.

All ABC Friends understand the ABC's essential role in Australian life and its constant need for public and financial support. That was the motivation behind forming ABC Friends (ABCF) half a century ago—to rally Australians in every corner of the country behind their national broadcaster.

In 1986, my husband Walter and I spent six months in Europe. One morning in Cambridge, UK, I walked to the top of a nearby hill where I met another Australian. She told me she had been listening to the ABC on shortwave, and it had reported snow falling in Sydney for the first time in 100 years, around the late 1800s. No catastrophe this time, but snow was seen in Turramurra where our home is and the very place where the idea of ABC Friends was first discussed in 1976. An extraordinary coincidence—two Australians, a 100-year event, Turramurra and the ABC News all brought together on a hill 17,000 kilometres from my home.

When we returned home, our campaign work resumed in earnest. Those early years were filled with urgency—lobbying for funding, organising public meetings, writing submissions, publishing News and Views, recruiting members, and stuffing endless envelopes. Every task was shared among volunteers eager to help. Walter, as president for twenty years, often travelled across New South Wales to launch new branches. These visits revealed how deeply regional Australians relied on the ABC for connection and representation, though not all country branches survived despite determined local efforts.

My own involvement has been with ABCF committees in Sydney, most recently the Northern Suburbs branch, now in its sixth year. With 700 members, an energetic convenor in Janine Kitson, and a lively committee, we run an active program. Meetings are held the second Thursday of each month (Feb-Dec). Open to the public they feature guest speakers who attract 50 to 100 attendees. After each talk, members enjoy a catered lunch—an important social moment that fosters ideas, friendships, and new memberships.



Each gathering concludes with our spirited ABCF song, written for us by Jonathan Biggins. It is sung with the hope that Canberra hears our message: the ABC must be supported, protected and provided with proper funding to fulfill its Charter obligations.

We've also built a valuable partnership with Macquarie University. As part of their media course, small groups of students attend our meetings, assist with organisation, filming and recording events, and gain confidence in public speaking and community engagement. This exchange benefits both generations—young journalists learning from seasoned advocates, and ABC Friends gaining fresh energy and perspective.

Today, ABC Friends boasts 85,000 members and supporters and 40 branches nationwide. Yet the struggle continues. The ABC faces relentless pressure—from political interference, funding cuts, and digital disruption—and it needs its friends more than ever.

So, what can be done? To echo JFK: *Ask not what the ABC can do for you, but what you can do for the ABC.* Join ABC Friends, speak out, attend meetings, and support campaigns that ensure our national broadcaster remains strong, independent, and truly representative of all Australians.

Corin Fairburn Bass

The Python defence of the ABC



The Bulletin is grateful to Peter Greste, Professor of Journalism at Macquarie University for this contribution and presented here in two parts.

Part 1: The cultural necessity of the ABC

It is one of the most enduring lines in British comedy. In the Monty Python movie, *Life of Brian*, a band of would-be revolutionaries angrily catalogue their hatred of Roman rule. Their leader Reg (played by John Cleese) poses a rhetorical question: what, exactly, have the Romans ever done for us?

Awkwardly, his followers respond: Roads? Sanitation? Education? Peace? One by one, the benefits pile up, until the original certainty looks faintly ridiculous.

The question is worth borrowing when debates flare—as they always do—about the value of the ABC. What does Aunty actually do for us? Why should it exist at all in an age of endless content, commercial competition and social media abundance?

Like the Romans in Monty Python's sketch, the ABC's contribution is often so embedded in national life that it becomes invisible, noticed only when it is threatened, diminished, or politicised.

Start with the most obvious function: news. The ABC remains one of the few institutions in Australia whose core business is producing journalism independent of both commercial and political interests. That independence is not an affectation. It is the product of a statutory charter, editorial standards, and a funding model that—at least in theory—exists precisely so that journalism does not have to chase advertisers, sponsors, clicks, or partisan approval.

This matters because so much of what democracy requires from journalism is not commercially attractive. Long-form investigations into government failures, forensic scrutiny of policy, coverage of courts, public administration, science, foreign affairs and social policy—these are expensive, slow, and often unpopular. They do not lend themselves to virality or profit. Yet they are the raw material of informed citizenship.

Commercial media, facing the collapse of advertising revenue and relentless cost pressures, has retreated from many of these areas. Newsrooms have shrunk. Specialist beats have disappeared. Regional bureaus have closed. This is not a moral failure so much as a structural one. Markets are good at producing content that people already want; they are far less reliable at producing information citizens need.

The ABC exists to fill that gap. Programs like *Four Corners*, *7.30*, *Insiders*, *Background Briefing* and *Foreign Correspondent* are not just television or radio shows. They are civic forums. They create shared reference points for national debate. They put power under sustained scrutiny. They ask questions that would be difficult to justify on a commercial balance sheet, but are indispensable to democratic accountability.

The same is true beyond metropolitan Australia. In regional and remote communities, the ABC is often not one news outlet among many, but the only one left standing. Local radio stations provide reporting that no commercial network can replicate at scale: council meetings, local courts, regional industries, community crises. And as anybody stuck in north Queensland's floods or Victoria's bushfires knows, during times of crisis, the ABC's emergency broadcasting is not a nice extra—it is a crucial public safety service.

Culturally, too, the ABC performs a function that cannot be reduced to ratings. It supports Australian storytelling, music, comedy, drama and ideas in a media environment otherwise dominated by global platforms and imported content. It gives space to minority voices, Indigenous perspectives, and regional experiences that would struggle to survive in a purely commercial ecosystem.

Part 2: Potential pitfalls facing the ABC
Continued on page 7.

The ABC presence - Casting a wide (inter)net

When, in volume one of his history of the ABC, Ken Inglis sought to convey the enormous changes that had occurred in the thirty years between Sir Charles Moses taking charge and his leaving the ABC in 1965, Inglis noted the ABC had grown from “14 radio stations... to 83 radio stations [and] twenty-four television stations”.¹ Sixty years on, Managing Director, Hugh Marks, could note that the broadcast footprint has grown to almost 500 television and over 750 radio ‘stations’.² As Marks made clear in his speech to the National Press Club in November 2025, broadcasting is now just a slice of the ABC’s output, albeit a still significant one.

Reaching Australians through broadcasting or other platforms remains the organisation’s priority. The ABC is embarked on a project to continue to deliver broadcasting and to extend its presence across all available and relevant digital outlets. This article briefly charts the current activity and the Managing Director’s recent presentation of the objectives underpinning that work.

When speaking to the ABC Alumni, Marks spoke about how important it was to cast the ABC presence across all available and relevant digital outlets. Just how important the new platforms are to the ABC can be gauged from the data in the latest ABC Annual Report.

Delivering on existing broadcasting outlets remains important. The ABC connects to around 17 million people weekly. While use of broadcasting services is declining, the average number of Australians using ABC digital services increased 10 per cent over the past year to 13.8 million people. Additionally, Australians connect with the ABC when it counts. In May 2025, ABC News Digital reached 14 million people, and on election night, over 4.5 million people in metropolitan and regional areas watched the ABC, with an average metropolitan audience rating of 46 per cent.

The ABC has built from its broadcast base in television to develop a free platform, iview, that is “the number one ranked Broadcaster Video On Demand service for on-demand viewing”. And, while radio audiences were down last year, ABC Radio still “reached an estimated 4.41 million people each week in the five capital cities”.

The growth in ABC digital continues, with News Web weekly users up 17 per cent in a year to 8.5 million weekly users, ABC Listen up 7 per cent, and ABC-managed kids’ channels on YouTube increasing in a year by 141 per cent to 2.7 million monthly viewers.

ACMA, the media regulator, reported in 2024 that 20 million Australians used social media. While ACMA hasn’t updated its report, recent data suggest the number increased to 21 million last year, around 75 per cent of all Australians. So, it is no surprise that monthly social media engagements with ABC content increased in 2025 to 53 million on Facebook, TikTok and Instagram.

These statistics are impressive (and they are just a selection). They are important to note because there is little information about how the ABC continues to build a digital presence. I write, ‘continues’, because the great work now being done builds on over thirty years of ABC digital/online/multimedia/web development work initiated in large part by the ABC Science team in 1995.

Trust and reliability in news media are critical issues in Australia and around the world. In his introduction to the 2025 edition of Oxford University’s Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism’s digital news report, Nic Newman stated that just as “evidence-based and analytical journalism should be thriving... traditional news media [is] struggling ... with declining engagement, low trust, and stagnating digital subscriptions”.

While harnessing digital platforms carries great challenges, it is clear that the ABC’s long road to reaching communities on the devices and platforms they use, when they need them, is critical in continuing to “contribute to a sense of national identity... and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community”.

Dr Michael Ward
Chair ABC Alumni



Michael Ward is an experienced media analyst. He has worked for the ABC, the Australian Film Commission, the Australian Film Finance Corporation and currently is President of ABC Alumni. His contribution in this Bulletin outlines the extent of the ABC’s presence across all forms of media.

¹ Inglis, 1983, p.256

² ABC Annual Report, 2025, p. 257.

Correction

In the Spring 2025 issue of the Bulletin, an article on page 6 called to ABC Friends to write to their local MP to ask that more funding is allocated for the ABC. The article included the following statement:

Secretly many dream that the \$1 billion cuts to the ABC budget since 2023 will be magically restored by a benevolent government.

The starting year of budget cuts was incorrect, it should have read:

Secretly many dream that the \$1 billion cuts to the ABC budget since 2013 will be magically restored by a benevolent government.

Navigating the future: mid-course check on the ABC Friends NSW & ACT Strategic Plan 2024–2026

A strategic plan's strength should not be underestimated. Far from being mere "management speak", a published strategic plan aligns everyone behind shared priorities. Monitoring our progress isn't bureaucracy; it's an essential quality-control process for a values-driven volunteer organisation. This mid-course report shows that we've made solid progress, but there is much work still ahead. With your ongoing support, we will continue to advance our strategic priorities and respond effectively to the ABC's critics.

The ABC Friends NSW & ACT Strategic Plan 2024-2026 is our navigational chart. Leading a volunteer group without government funding presents constant volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. This plan keeps our focus on initiatives identified through consultation with our members. Given our limited resources, it's critical that they are directed for maximum impact.

Measuring progress against our strategic priorities enables us to steer ABC Friends effectively, no matter what challenges critics or shifting political circumstances present. At the 2025 AGM, I reported on progress against our five strategic priorities. The key takeaway: no red indicators—which is both a reason to celebrate and a reminder to stay vigilant.

SP1. Campaign momentum & advocacy

There are no areas of weak performance under this priority, but as Geoffrey Watson SC reminded

us at our Federal Election Rally in April 2025, we must guard against complacency. Responding to the ongoing barrage of ABC-directed criticism is arduous. One part of the challenge is countering the frequent untrue, irrational, and spiteful 'noise' from anti-ABC commentators: the other feels like an endurance test. What's disappointing is how 99% of the ABC's excellent work is lost behind sensationalist or ideologically-skewed headlines.

SP2. Membership growth & diversity

While our formal membership numbers have stayed steady, our wider supporter base has grown significantly. Initiatives such as the Northern Suburbs of Sydney intern program, the Classic Choir project, and the emerging Emergency Services project are helping broaden and diversify engagement. Further momentum is expected once the new Social Media Officer is in place—a reminder that strengthening our supporter base requires both clear strategy and committed volunteers. If you'd like to join us, access this link: www.abcfriends.net.au/join.

SP3. Strategic communication

Communication underpins our advocacy work. Our social media capability, aligned with the national effort, has improved markedly since 2024. For example, the introduction of the NSW/ACT Bulletin (30,000 recipients) and National e-news (86,000 recipients) in digital format significantly

increased our communication reach. The appointment of a Social Media Officer and dedicated NSW&ACT Facebook group increased our 2025 supporter base by 20%. Specifically, our Facebook reach has grown 330% since 2024 and NSW&ACT website users almost doubled in 2025 (27,000 in 2024 to 51,000 in 2025). In a media landscape where misinformation spreads rapidly while truth lags behind, our ability to communicate clearly, credibly, and promptly is essential to our success.

SP4. Strengthening the branch network

Thanks to the dedication of our Branch Coordinators, the branch network is stronger than ever, operating with renewed coordination and energy. Support from our Membership Officer ensures branch volunteers have the tools they need to amplify advocacy at the community level, where it matters most. Local group events are now published on Facebook and the ABC Friends website which helps to strengthen connections and opportunities to communicate across the membership and branch network.

SP5. Increasing political engagement

Progress under this priority has been steady and promising, involving collaboration across National, NSW & ACT and Victoria. The key has been cooperation—leveraging expertise and sharing resources. Given the dynamic and complex political landscape, this priority will demand even more attention as we move toward a 2028 election year.

The future of Australia's marvellous ABC is at stake. It is a national asset, a cornerstone of our democracy, and a critical provider of emergency communication services. Every action, however small, makes a difference.

Dr Tess Howes

President, ABC Friends (NSW & ACT)

The Python defence of the ABC

Continued from page 4.



Part 2: Potential pitfalls facing the ABC

None of this is to say the ABC is perfect. Like any large institution, it makes mistakes. It should be criticised, challenged and held accountable. And like the governments it keeps track of, that scrutiny is needed to keep the ABC on its toes. But critique is not the same as erosion. Persistent political attacks, funding cuts, and culture-war skirmishes have a cumulative effect. They narrow ambition. They encourage caution. They risk turning editorial independence into a theoretical principle rather than a lived reality.

There is a reason these pressures matter. Trust. At a time when confidence in media is fragile, the ABC consistently ranks as the most trusted media brand in the country. That trust is not accidental. It is the product of editorial standards, transparency, and a long institutional memory of serving the public rather than shareholders or parties.

Trust, in democratic terms, is not about agreement. It is about legitimacy. Citizens may argue with what they hear on the ABC, but they largely accept that it is produced in good faith, according to rules that prioritise accuracy over outrage and evidence over ideology.

Which brings us back to the counterfactual. What would Australia look like without the ABC?

It would be a country dependent on commercial incentives to shape public debate. A country where regional news deserts spread further and faster. A country where investigative journalism became rarer, more fragile, and more easily intimidated. A country where global platforms filled the vacuum—not with our own public-interest reporting, but with algorithmically optimised attention traps.

In such a nation, democratic discussion would not disappear. But it would become thinner, noisier, more polarised, and less informed. The cost would not be immediately visible on a budget line. It would be paid over time, in reduced accountability, weaker civic culture, and a public less able to see itself reflected honestly and critically.

So, what has the ABC ever done for us?

Like the Romans' roads and aqueducts, much of what it provides only becomes obvious when it is gone. The ABC is not simply a broadcaster. It is part of the country's democratic infrastructure—quietly holding things together, until we forget why it mattered in the first place.

Prof Peter Greste

Professor of Journalism at Macquarie University and
Executive Director of the Alliance for Journalists' Freedom

Action alert danger lurks

Celebrating 50 years of ABC Friends is warranted—but beware 'the thin edge of the wedge'.

A Motion for the LNP Queensland to privatise the ABC was proposed by their Logan City Branch and passed at the Queensland State LNP Conference in October 2025.

The Resolution 22 states:

“That this State Council of the LNP calls upon the Federal Coalition to sell the ABC and the SBS and establish a new media corporation to provide media services in regional and outback Australia only, where private sector media corporations cannot operate profitably.”

Co-convenor of ABCF Qld, Mark Hayes, suggests the resolution is a move by the National Party to shut down the ABC and replace it with a commercially driven 'well-funded, but closely supervised, rural and regional broadcaster' and Hayes postulates the notion that 'the National Party would like shows like Landline, provided it doesn't mention climate change as impacting on rural and regional communities, etc and so forth'.

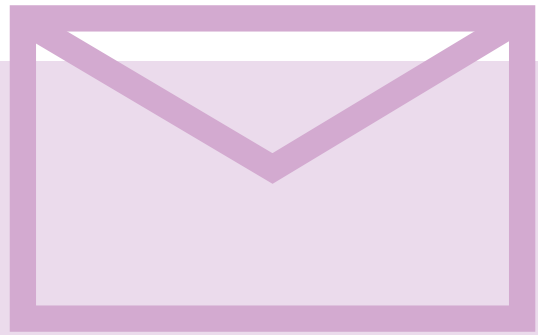
Currently, the proposal by the LNP Qld is not the Federal party's policy. However, the danger remains as the window of opportunity to adopt a similar resolution federally remains.

Hence the call to arms. Members are encouraged to be proactive, seek out more members and, as a result, grow our political heft in protecting the viability and longevity of the ABC.

To join the ABCF NSW/ACT Branch, use the link below and you will be welcomed.

www.abcfriends.net.au/join

Letter from Federal Member Jerome Laxale



In September 2025, Janine Kitson (Convenor, ABC Friends Northern Suburbs of Sydney branch) wrote to local Federal MP Jerome Laxale to ask that he considers pushing for more funding for the ABC and other things. See the Autumn 2025 issue of the ABCF NSW/ACT Bulletin for an article about Janine's recommended letters for lobbying local politicians.

Janine's letter to Mr Laxale produced a great result. This shows how lobbying of local members can achieve favourable results.

In an email to Janine Kitson Mr Laxale acknowledges how important the ABC is and highlights the recent announcement of the new \$50m funding, with particular focus on kids' content. The Northern Suburbs of Sydney Branch (NSoS) also received the following letter.

Dear Janine,

Thank you for your kind congratulations on my re-election as the Member for Bennelong, and for your invitation to the 50th anniversary of ABC Friends. While I was unfortunately unable to attend, I appreciate you sharing the details of the celebration, and I commend the important work your organisation has done over many decades to champion the ABC.

You have raised several questions in your correspondence. I will address each in turn:

ABC Friends Federal Election Platform

The Albanese Labor Government is committed to maintaining and strengthening funding for the ABC, in contrast to the successive cuts made under the former Coalition Government. We recognise the vital role the ABC plays in providing trusted, independent news and supporting Australian content across a wide range of genres. With respect to the specific adoption of the ABC Friends Federal Election Platform, I will seek further advice from the Minister for Communications and provide you with an update.

Regular meetings

I value the ongoing dialogue with ABC Friends and the Northern Suburbs branch. While I cannot commit to a fixed schedule of annual meetings at this stage, I am open to continuing discussions with your branch where possible, and my office will stay in touch regarding opportunities to meet.

Promotion of events

As a federal parliamentarian, I must remain impartial

and cannot formally promote the activities of external organisations through my office channels. That said, I do acknowledge the importance of your events to many in the community, and I encourage you to continue sharing information with my office.

Parliamentary Friends of the ABC

I will give consideration to joining the Parliamentary Friends of the ABC group in this new term.

Attendance at local events

I greatly appreciate your invitations. My diary is very full at present, but I will certainly keep your monthly program of events in mind and attend where commitments allow.

Updates on ABC matters

I understand the strong interest of your members in ABC-related developments. My office will endeavour to keep you informed of any significant legislation, inquiries, or other relevant matters that arise.

Thank you again for your advocacy for the ABC, and for your ongoing engagement with me as your local representative. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with my office if there are particular issues you would like to raise in future.

Kind Regards,

Jerome Laxale MP
Member for Bennelong

Branch Updates

Blue Mountains

The Blue Mountains Branch has this year, a non-election year, reverted to the bi-monthly pattern for meetings, beginning on 14 February. Our guest speaker at that meeting was Dr Michael Ward, known to all as the Chair of the ABC Alumni. For the rest of the year our meeting dates are: April 11, June 13, August 8, October 10 and the AGM on November 14. Between these meetings there will be three Coffee Morning gatherings at Springwood Sports Club. Please check our Facebook page for dates before or with Carole on 0405381997.

Our focus is very much on March 14 and the Friends State event at Penrith RSL, 8 Tindale St, Penrith, starting at 2.00 pm. All welcome. We're hoping to attract people in the western suburbs of Sydney (and lower Mountains) interested in defending the ABC. Once again, we are very fortunate to have Dr Michael Ward speaking to us about why the ABC is needed now more than ever. It's always extremely interesting to benefit from the wisdom and experience of the ABC Alumni. Hopefully we'll be able to report later this year that a Western Suburbs of Sydney Friends branch has re-emerged.



Outreach at markets will continue this year with bookings at Clarendon, Glenbrook, Lawson, Winter Magic Festival and the Springwood Spring Fair. We always have amazing conversations with people concerned about the survival of our public broadcaster.

Other than that, we love to get to the events of other branches where possible, and look forward to any future Open Days put on by the ABC of their studios.

Carole Dent
President ABC Friends Blue Mountains

ACT/South East NSW

Let's talk

ABC Friends ACT is trialling a new initiative aimed at drawing together those who enjoy discussing ABC programs they've seen on TV and listened to on radio, or ABC articles they've read online. Linking into the wonderful U3A network in our region, we hope to provide a stimulating and entertaining forum by convening a course known as Chat ABC in the first half of 2026.

While the name may have a familiar ring to it, it won't be driven by AI but will rely to some degree on technology to facilitate participation.

Similar to a book club, this group will discuss selected ABC TV and radio programs (and sometimes online articles) led by a convenor. Each month we'll consider two or three programs (drama, documentary, current affairs, comedy, etc.), chosen by the convenors or based on suggestions from group members.

Participants will be told in advance which programs will be featured so that they can view or listen on iView or the Listen app if they've missed them. The technology that brings us catch-up video and audio certainly makes it easier to take a deeper dive into interesting programs, not to mention offering convenient and personalised watching and listening.

Vale, Eric Hunter 1935-2025

Regular readers of letters to the editor in the Canberra Times and Sydney Morning Herald may well have come across those from a dedicated—though, at times, not uncritical—defender of the ABC, signed Eric Hunter. An ABC journalist for 20 years, Eric maintained his passion for the ABC in retirement as an active member of ABC Friends in the ACT and ABC Alumni. He enlivened our discussions with his inside knowledge of the workings of the ABC, and with his sharp wit and ready humour. Eric died aged 90 in Canberra on 19 October last year. He is sadly missed by our group.



Join us!

ABC Friends ACT is a small friendly group based in Canberra. We're in the process of setting up a new committee and welcome newcomers who'd like to be more active. Do get in touch if you're keen to engage with us and make new friends. We're also keen to re-establish the South-East NSW arm of our remit and would love to hear from some of our great South Coast members who are interested in forming a local group. Please drop a line to actsensw@abcfriends.net.au

Gia Metherell
Convenor ABC Friends ACT & South-East NSW

Central Coast

Happy 2026 to all. We welcome everyone back to another year of sharing our common interest in supporting our ABC. In 2026, on the Central Coast, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of our *Friends of the ABC* organisation. We have invited Corin Fairburn Bass to be our special guest at a screening of the celebratory film, *A Conversation with Corin*—date to be determined. We also plan to arrange for an ABC or ABC Alumni guest speaker at the screening to explain the importance of the national broadcaster. We hope to hold additional events with guest speakers who can inform our members about the value of the ABC in the changing media landscape and other engaging topics.

We will work in alignment with other branches and our State and National leadership to continue the campaign to contact our local politicians to press the continuing need for better funding for the ABC, as well as to engage and mobilise existing members and motivate new membership. Strategies will include emailing members of parliament, emailing existing members, and using local community noticeboards, local newspapers and local social media groups, to promote the value of *Friends of the ABC*, our branch meetings and our events. The newly

updated brochure from the State branch will support this process.

We also aim to increase the sharing of significant information about the ABC itself, as well as the publicising of interesting new ABC programs and formats. (The November announcement of [a \\$50 million funding boost for the ABC](#) to support the production of new Australian children's and drama content was good news—thank you to the Minister for the Arts, Tony Burke, the Minister for Communications, Anika Wells, and to Senator Sarah Hanson-Young who helped secure the additional money for the ABC as part of her negotiations on the new laws for streaming services.) Our end-of-year message to local members invited them to submit their own thoughts on the ABC. We will publish contributions in our next newsletter.

Our first Central Coast Branch social meeting was on Saturday 14 Feb at the Elanora Hotel in East Gosford, from 10.30am until 12.00pm. All are welcome to attend our meetings. We extend our thanks to the management of the Elanora for generously providing our meeting room without charge.

Nell Knight

Convenor ABC Friends Central Coast

Northern Tablelands

The Northern Tablelands branch was involved in a number of activities in 2025. Activities included Armidale Market attendance, where members engaged in conversation with the passing public and sold fashionable ABC tote bags and kitchen aprons. We also maintained a dedicated web page and a newsletter that was distributed to local members twice a year.

In October, we arranged a talk by Professor Jackie Huggins, the inaugural Elder-in-Residence at the ABC. Jackie provided a very engaging talk titled *Who is listening to First Nations people and why the ABC is so important*. Using a conversational style of delivery, Jackie engaged 60 attendees at the Armidale Playhouse, where Jackie's knowledge of media in conjunction with Indigenous Australians was very well received. Jackie was welcomed to Country by Anaiwan Elder Lesley Widders.

Our local ABC Friends Media Prize (\$300) is awarded to one or more Year 11 students who have been recognised for outstanding communication skills. The purpose is to promote the value of public broadcasting to a teenage audience. In 2025 the award was split between seven Armidale Secondary College students,

who all gained an 'honours' result in *language literature* for the 2025 Tournament of Minds, International category. This Media Prize recognises that communicating clearly and understanding the complexity of the current media environment are valuable skills in many fields, including the importance of independent news reporting and analysis for ensuring an optimal community; we need good journalists.

We finished 2025 with a November AGM. Following the meeting a presentation was made by Dr Bruce Stevenson on the topic *Where public broadcasting stands in 2025, and its ongoing role*. This talk covered the current state of public media within Australia and internationally.

In early 2026, a General Meeting was held to address the issue of falling active membership numbers in the branch. Numbers had been reducing for some years, which had made performing branch activities more and more difficult. Sadly, the decision was made to close the branch. We hope to be able to do some promotional activities in the future, but the Northern Tablelands branch is no longer operational.

Bruce Stevenson

(Former) Convenor ABC Friends Northern Tablelands

Northern Suburbs of Sydney (NSoS)

NSoS branch partners with Twilight House

In January 2026 members of the Northern Suburbs of Sydney (NSoS) Branch were invited to attend the Twilight House Aged Care Annual Art Exhibition at Hunters Hill to celebrate creativity, connection, and community.

The exhibition showcased artworks created by Twilight residents through its Art Therapy program. The program aims to support emotional wellbeing, social connection, and self-expression for residents living with dementia. The art exhibition highlighted the therapeutic value of creative engagement and challenged perceptions of ageing and residential aged care.

Funds raised from the sale of resident artworks and donated works by local artists were donated to expanding Twilight’s Art Therapy program.

Twilight House’s Horton House residents at Gordon attended a NSoS meeting in November 2025 where Loosely Woven performed its ‘Trouble and Strife’ concert.



Left to Right: Tamia Hawkins, Twilight House music therapist; Emily Hams, Twilight House Engagement Manager; Lorraine Lovitt, Twilight House Chair; Janine Kitson NSoS Convenor; Niamh Mannion, NSoS CEO; Tim Prescott, NSoS Committee member

NSoS branch events

All held at Roseville Uniting Church, 7a Lord Street, Roseville from 11.30am-1pm followed by a delicious light lunch (\$15). Bookings essential at: www.abcfriends.net.au/nswact_events

Thursday 12 March: Professor Michael Atherton AM, musician & educator

Thursday 9 April: Dr Mark Diesendorf - The ABC and threats to democracy from vested interests?

Thursday 14 May: Hear from Macquarie University media students talking about the ABC

NSoS community events

Tuesday 24 March 10.30am-12.30pm: u3a Sydney Talk - **The ABC - Challenges and Achievements** by Janine Kitson, ABCF NSoS Convenor at the Dougherty Centre, 9 Victor Avenue, Chatswood, www.sydneyu3a.org/ or book via email to mail@sydneyu3a.org Phone: 02 9267 9056

Janine Kitson
Convenor ABC Friends NSoS

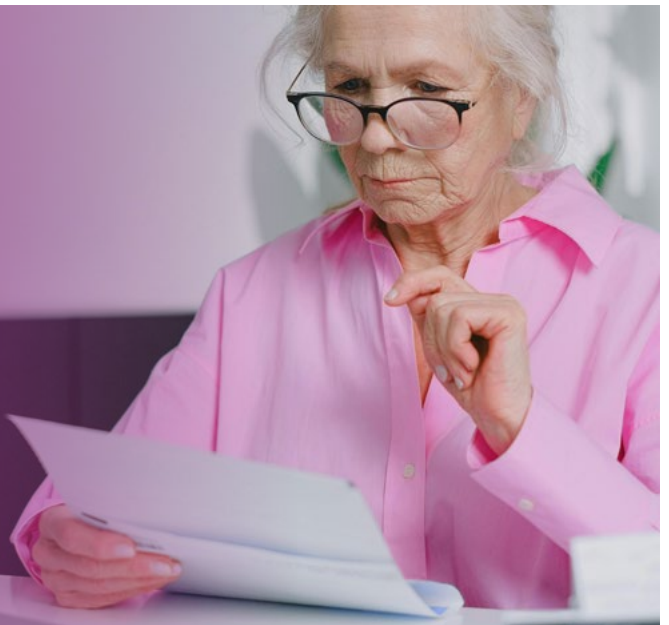


ABCF on social media

-  facebook.com/FriendsOfTheAbc/
-  instagram.com/abcfriends.au/
-  youtube.com/channel/UC-grALr8MIHvvbemqGfp-Qw
-  bsky.app/profile/abcfriends.bsky.social

You can join the conversation with other ABC Friends in NSW & ACT in our Facebook community group: facebook.com/groups/abcfriendsnswact

A legacy for the ABC: introducing our new gift & bequest initiative



As Friends of the ABC (NSW & ACT) Incorporated (ABCF NSW/ACT) approaches its 50th anniversary in 2026, we're not just looking back on five decades of defending Australia's national broadcaster—we're laying the foundations for the next fifty. Today, we're pleased to announce a new Gift and Bequest Initiative which gives members and supporters the opportunity to make a lasting contribution to our voluntary advocacy and ensures that our advocacy, outreach, and strategic priorities continue to thrive well into the future.

Every contribution—large or small—strengthens our ability to champion a strong, independent ABC for generations to come. Whether your legacy is a modest symbolic gesture or a larger endowment, it will help ABCF NSW/ACT remain a powerful voice in support of public broadcasting at a time when that voice is needed more than ever.

If you would like to leave a bequest in your Will, we recommend you discuss this with your legal adviser or a Trustee Company. An example of a suggested wording for your Will is as follows:

"I give (insert benefit, either residual gift, a percentage or specific gift amount) to Friends of the ABC (NSW & ACT) Incorporated (ABN 54530872593) for its general purposes. I declare that the receipt of the secretary, treasurer or other proper officer of the nominated beneficiary will be a sufficient discharge to my Trustees."

Please also note that ABC Friends Ltd (ABN 56642876800) (the National and peak ABC Friends body) now has DGR status. If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation, please click on the following link: [Donate - ABC Friends](#). Remember, as volunteer not-for-profit charity, we receive no funding from government. Your donations, gifts and bequests help us to sustain the good fight for and on behalf of our ABC.

William Howes

Public Officer,
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