

CONTENTS:

PAGE 1

Budget undermines independence

PAGE 2

Margaret Simons New MD appointed

PAGE 3

Southbank vigil

PAGE 4

June Factor: mandate to govern

PAGE 5

Celebrating ABC's diversity

PAGE 6

Staff-elected board position abolished From Eureka Street

PAGE 7

Activities around the country Letters

PAGE 8

BBC AND US

Budget undermines ABC independence

Glenys Stradijot

The Government's federal budget allocation for the ABC's next triennium is more cause for concern than celebration. While funding to the ABC was increased by \$88.2 million over three years, the broadcaster received less than it needs to maintain its existing level of service. The additional funds come with 'strings attached' that undermine the ABC's independence.

Despite several years of record federal budget surpluses, the ABC got \$37.6 million short of the additional \$125.8 million which leaks from a (still not released) KPMG report reveal it needs for the next three years. That is, just to continue at its present depleted level of operation, not to ensure the ABC is a strong participant in the emerging digital media environment. The national broadcaster, required to promote Australian culture, did not receive sufficient funds for it to screen even the level of Australian drama which commercial networks are legally compelled to broadcast.

Increased Government Control

The Government has used the Budget to increase its control over the ABC's operations: the broadcaster's triennial base funding has effectively been frozen at the level to which it was cut after the Government was elected in 1996, indexed but not truly maintained in real terms. Program funding above the base is tied, targeted to Australian TV drama, documentaries and to regional programming. Targeted funding overrides the ABC Board's responsibility to ensure all areas of the broadcaster's charter responsibilities are met.

Imagine where it could lead if governments, and not the ABC, were to determine ABC programming. We could have more lightweight programming and less investigative journalism that scrutinises the activities of governments. Science might survive in the first funding round, but not the next if powerful interests are upset at reports on the human contribution to environmental damage. Documentaries could be acceptable, as long as they stick to the past.

Backdoor Privatisation

And there is more in the Budget. The ABC is required to spend the funds provided for Australian drama and documentaries to purchase programs from the private sector. While the BBC has outsourced programming, as does the ABC, it also has a strong core of in-house production. The Government's action – starving the ABC's creative base of resources and forcing the broadcaster to outsource – is privatisation by stealth.

ABC Complicit

Murray Green, acting managing director, has claimed the additional funding received in the Budget does not undermine the ABC's independence because it has been provided for areas for which the ABC specifically sought additional money. However the danger of targeted funds is not negated simply because a desperate ABC invited funding for areas and in a manner likely to be acceptable to the Government. It is a sign, as ABC presenter Phillip Adams would say, of the 'pre-emptive buckle'.

In spirit and at law the ABC is meant to be independent. Undermine that independence, and there will be no reason for the ABC to exist. It looks like this is precisely what the Government is seeking to do. All friends of the ABC will need to be vigilant if the ABC is to survive in more than name.



'Shrink to fit vision' (reproduced with permission of the artist and AFR)

Friends of the ABC (Vic) Inc.

GPO Box 4065

Melbourne, VIC 3001

Tel: +613 9682 0073

Fax: +613 9682 0074

FABCvic@vicnet.net.au

www.FABC.org.au

Inc No A0034181A

A Champion of Content

Margaret Simons, media correspondent for *Crikey.com.au*, the author of numerous articles on the media and a lively campaigner, is more aware than most commentators of the complexities of the media landscape. Here is a selection of her comments on *Crikey.com.au* which we publish with the permission of the author and the lively organisation that keeps being shut out of the budget lock-up. Perhaps all that will change when we get a new Treasurer. Margaret's next book, about the media in Australia, will be published by Penguin.

Media Reform

Where are the journalist activists of yesterday? Gone in to government jobs, relaxed and comfortable, retired or perhaps just plain tired. In any case they are very quiet.

Compare this to the late 1980s, which was the last time there was significant change to media ownership legislation. Then, journalists led the protests – albeit unsuccessfully. It is not that there are no efforts underway but they are comparatively low key.

Don't look to Labor. Its policy is to leave things as they are. Perhaps, the Shadow Minister, Stephen Conroy, has been too busy with other matters. There is also the fact that so much of Coonan's proposals remains uncertain, which makes responding to her a bit like wrestling the marshmallow man.

Back in the 1980s, the best informed and most cogent campaigners on media reform were journalists and their supporters. My guess is that most journalists are too besieged and bemused by the speed of change to propose alternatives. But it's time – in fact, past time – to get with it again.

Moguls after internet

A new front has opened in the battle for media diversity – and this one has even more long-term implications than changes to cross-media ownership regulation.

In the US, big telecommunications companies are mounting a well financed campaign to get Congress to pass measures which may limit internet freedom. The proposed measures are a blow to network neutrality – the principle that all online activity must be treated equally, and that telcos must allow the smallest blog to be viewed just as easily and quickly as the largest corporate website.

If network neutrality dies, then those sites that earn the most money will dominate independent and not-for-profit operators. Favoured sites will become easier to find, and faster to open and use. Some sites may be blocked altogether.

The implications are huge for business of all kinds. Startups and entrepreneurs could be muscled out of the marketplace by big corporations that pay internet providers for dominant placing on the Web. Political organising could be slowed by a handful of dominant internet providers who ask advocacy groups to pay "protection money" for their websites and online features to work correctly. Dominant internet companies like AT&T (or in the Australian context, Telstra) could block access to more affordable providers for online video and phone calls.

Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, has stated: "The internet is increasingly becoming the dominant medium binding us. The neutral communications medium is essential to our society. It is the basis of a fair competitive market economy."

If Big Media and Big Telcos are allowed to make accessing independent sites more difficult then much of the opportunity for a media renewal represented by the internet will be stillborn.

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Chairman, Graeme Samuel, is currently considering issues to do with markets for news and information. He is also struggling with Telstra, and issues of abuse of market power. Let's hope Samuel is up with the network neutrality issues – or at least as up with them as Sol Trujillo.

Licensing Content

It looks like it's on – the commercialisation of the ABC's content online, starting with its wonderful archives and possibly soon spreading to its news and current affairs.

Yesterday (21/4) Crikey asked the acting Managing Director of the ABC, Murray Green, to comment on rumours that the ABC Board will next week consider licensing the streaming of ABC content by a third party website, with the license fee based on advertising revenue.

Green didn't confirm it, but he sure as hell didn't deny it either.

Yes, Green said, the Board is always looking at ways to augment ABC revenue. And yes, although legislation prohibits taking advertising on television and radio, taking advertising on the internet is "a matter of board discretion".

Meanwhile Quentin Dempster has called on the Board to release all proposals currently before it to commercially exploit ABC audio, video and online content.

Dempster says: "(The Board) should state up front whether it intends to apply its discretion to allow a revenue stream from advertising to be wrapped around ABC content on the ABC's own website or through the website of its licensed business partners."

Dempster believes such deals would distort the ABC's purpose. The taxpayers have already paid for the content. It should be free to air in all media, and advertising free. Otherwise "within a short time the commercial imperative will overtake the Charter obligations and inevitably destroy the high level of trust the Australian public has shown in the ABC".

As Green points out, there is already advertising on the ABC's Asia Pacific television service, and in ABC associated products like *Gardening Australia* magazine and *Delicious* magazine.

Aunty is already half a virgin. The fear is that new media will make her a harlot by proxy.

New MD for the ABC

Mark Scott, Editorial Director at Fairfax, has been appointed the new Managing Director of the ABC. Mr Scott, 43, has worked as a teacher, as a policy advisor to controversial Education Minister, Terry Metherell, in the Greiner Coalition Government in NSW, and later as a print journalist. Prime Minister John Howard says the appointment of Mr Scott is a matter for the public broadcaster's Board. "I wish him well. I know him but he's been appointed by the Board. It is not a Government appointment."

Vigil at ABC Southbank

FABC set up a vigil to highlight the ABC's funding plight in the run-up to the Budget, the Government's abolition of the staff-elected director position on the ABC Board and the Prime Minister's failure to rule out advertising on the ABC in the future. The vigil was a remarkable achievement. It ran across five weeks and sent a strong signal to the Government that, regardless of what it does, the community will not give up its ABC.

President Judith addresses the vigil on opening day.



The vigil was launched by President Judith Rodriguez ("We are standing within the 'footprint' of the ABC and we can be proud to do so for that 'footprint' is much wider than this portico."). Speeches followed by Dr Liz Jones of La Mama Theatre and Louise Connor, State Secretary of the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance. The Community & Public Sector Union sent the email below.

Denise Sproson, Ken Carney and Julie Cattlin made good use of Georgina Simmonds' 'Toot' sign and the response was overwhelming.



Over 100 dedicated members staffed the vigil. They reported on the pleasure of meeting other FABC members. Many chatted with interesting people from inside and outside the ABC, including those who work behind the scenes to bring us ABC programs. People they met included Jon Faine, Chris Clark, Julie Copeland, John Clarke, Brian Dawe and Peter Mares. They also met Sandra Winter-Dewhurst, acting manager of ABC Vic, and Murray Green, the acting MD of the ABC, as well as many security staff!

With speeches and cakes, Friends packed up its vigil outside ABC Southbank to await the Budget day outcome. People included Peter Monie, Sally Moseby, Jeff Shelley, Glenys Stradijot, Gwen Lees and Judith Rodriguez.



Diane Cilento, along with hundreds of others, signed a postcard to the PM to protest at the ABC's inadequate funding. Russell Broadbent, the Coalition MP for McMillan, let the vigil know he is a friend of the ABC (keep watching closely).

Expressions of support for FABC members were received from ABC staff all around Australia. Many staffers and 'talent' gave us a warm welcome and thanked us for our support. One day a tram driver stopped his tram and rushed over to the vigil to plead that Friends get the ABC to rectify problems his mother at Epping was having with ABCTV reception. Also a bunch of young Yarra Trams ticket checkers demanded postcards to the Prime Minister. They were dutifully completed. If we all had their understanding and enthusiasm we'd have an electorate that would demand and get a decent deal from our national government!

"The ABC Section Council of the Community and Public Sector Union on behalf of all ABC members wishes to thank the Friends of the ABC for their hard work, determination and the genuine friendship that you have demonstrated towards the national broadcaster.

Staff of the ABC are genuinely appreciative of your efforts and support in your current campaign to highlight the attacks from both government and commercial interests, the inadequate funding for the ABC and the recent decision to abolish the Staff Elected Director. Staff also wish

to record that the true friendship and support you have shown for the ABC has lifted the spirits of staff throughout the decades of attacks on the ABC.

We wish to record our appreciation for your current demonstration of support at the Southbank vigil. We also wish to record our dismay at the short-sighted action taken by ABC management to turn their backs on true friends of the organisation."

Graeme Thomson
ABC Section Secretary
7 April 06 by email

Power corrupts; absolute power ... June Factor

It seems the 19th century British peer, Lord Acton, was right: power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Sadly, we are witnessing just such wilful, largely untrammelled corruption of power in our federal parliament. With control of both houses of parliament, the government is pushing through changes to the ABC Act to abolish the staff-elected director position on the ABC Board. The Act, including the ABC Charter, is the binding legal document which establishes the national public broadcaster as a statutory authority, Neither business interests nor government may influence programming and staffing decisions. The ABC Board is obliged 'to maintain the independence and integrity of the Corporation.'

No easy road

It is hardly news that the Howard Government, perhaps more than any in the last 50 years, has viewed the ABC with suspicion, antipathy, and on occasion, hatred. Within months of its election in March 1996 it was attacking the broadcaster and 'promising' severe funding cuts. It kept its promise: a 12% cut – \$66m – has never been restored. The ABC Board – all but the staff-elected member appointed by the government – is widely viewed as generally leaning comfortably in the government's direction.

Controlling the budget and the Board gives the government a great deal of power. But this government is greedy – it wants more. Why waste absolute power?

Its manifold attempts to 'tame' the ABC into obedience have not succeeded (or succeeded only in part), and even friendly Board members do not always follow the party line. Time to pull out that grand plan for the ABC, the one spelt out remarkably frankly back in 1987 by a collective of radical conservatives.

Commercial sponsorship

In their publication, *Mandate to Govern**, the authors trawl every aspect of government responsibility. Six pages are devoted to the ABC, which they declare 'a middle-class rip-off', 'a liability', and 'a waste of taxpayers' money'. Their solution: 'a self-financing ABC' through sponsorship, 'direct payment by viewers' and 'commercial activities'. In a box, so that you can't miss it, they declare: 'The Government should prepare guidelines for commercial sponsorship of ABC programs' and continually reduce ABC funding. As for Radio National, which they especially abhor: 'The ABC should be encouraged to close Radio National.' The same fate awaits Radio Australia, if 'a cosy chat' with government ministers doesn't persuade our overseas public broadcaster to abide by the government's notion of 'the national interest.'

Voting power in both houses

That plan of attack was written almost 20 years ago, and until now no government has had the power to follow any or all of its edicts. As well, the unmistakable displeasure of the vast majority of Australians to the Howard Government's attacks on the ABC has made some government members wary. This is especially true of members representing rural electorates, where the ABC is a crucial and valued public good. But admiration and respect for the national broadcaster is by no means limited to the regions – just ask Bob Mansfield, who received 10, 615 overwhelmingly positive submissions to his review of the ABC in 1996. He said at the time: 'Any business would give its right arm to have such brand loyalty as the ABC.'

But now, opportunity knocks. If the government had the interests of the ABC at heart, they would introduce the system of Board appointments developed under the conservative British Prime Minister, John Major. This is a system that establishes an independent panel to assess applicants for a Board and then recommend a short list to the appropriate minister. With one stroke, stacking Boards becomes more difficult.

Keep the workers out

Instead, the government plans to abolish the position of staff-elected member of the ABC Board. The only person not directly chosen by government must go – even though this is the Board member with the greatest hands-on broadcasting experience, an essential contribution to the functioning of the Board. The person closest to those who work at the ABC is no longer suitable for Board membership. Do we detect the musty odour of 'we don't want the workers intruding on the Boardroom'?

If Lord Acton is right, the government won't stop there. Once you change one clause of the Act, why not change another? Why not get rid of that pesky line in the Act which says: 'The Corporation shall not broadcast advertisements'? Kites are already flying about the 'insignificance' to the ABC's

operations of some tasteful advertising between programs. And then, oh happy day for the inheritors of *Mandate to Govern*, budgets can be cut...

You know about targets

In the meantime, watch out for targeted funding of ABC programs. If the government allocates X amount of money in the next budget to TV drama production (now a pathetic shadow of its former vigorous self), it will be the Government, not the Board, that determines how part of the ABC's funds are to be spent. Every time this happens, the control of the ABC shifts, little by little, from the Board to the politicians. It's a short-term fix and a long-term disaster.

* *Mandate to Govern*, published under the auspices of Australian Institute of Public Policy and the Australian Chamber of Commerce, 1987.

June Factor is a former Victorian president and national spokesperson of Friends of the ABC. This was a pre-budget article, written on 24 April 2006, but is nevertheless extremely prescient.

Our Media Prayer

BY CAM SEMMENS

Our Media,
Whose art is manipulation
hollow be thy game.
Thy cameras come, it will be done
on Nine as it is on Seven.
Give us this day our daily sensation,
and feed us our fears
as we feed the fears of others.
Lead us on with mis-information
And deliver us from thinking.
For thine is the King-maker
With the power of the story,
Forever and ever,
Amoral.

Celebrating ABC Diversity

While we talk of the ABC as our most treasured national institution, it is not a monolithic entity. Being a 'comprehensive' public broadcaster is an essential part of its existence. Through a range of media – television, specialist national radio networks, local and regional radio stations, online and an international broadcasting arm – the ABC caters for a huge diversity of interests.

This can be demonstrated no better than in the award-winning programs having anniversaries this year. ABC *Play School* is celebrating its 40th anniversary, Radio National's *Singers of Renown*, presented by John Cargher, has been running a similar time (the 40th anniversary program was broadcast on 15/16 April), and the national edition of *The 7.30 Report* has turned ten. (Prior to 1996, individual state-based editions of *The 7.30 Report* existed.)

Since *Play School* was first screened in 1966, 1,781 episodes have been watched by children around the country in creches, lounges and kindergartens. About a million children view *Play School* every week.

Every episode is scripted with the help of an early-childhood adviser. Suzy Freeman in *The Age* (6/5/06) wrote: "*Play School* is about generosity and letting your imagination soar ... *Play School* is a kind of 'poor theatre' where serious actors engage and delight but never talk down to their audience. Its DIY aesthetic and fondness for recycling are truly inspiring in this age of iPods and camera-phones. Where else would you see a toy dog made from a beach bucket, cotton reels, a toilet roll and pipe cleaner? What other program comes close to *Play School* in terms of longevity, freshness and commitment to a vision?"

The *Play School Birthday Live Show* is touring remote areas of Australia until 8 September. It will travel to 17 locations and there will be 40 free concerts. Visit online ABC.net.au/children/play for more details.

John Cargher's *Singers of Renown* has delighted music-lovers since 1966 and we suspect it shall continue to do so for many years to come.

People staffing Friends of the ABC's Southbank vigil were thrilled to meet John, his wife and their many guests as they

arrived at the ABC to celebrate the 40th birthday. Guests included Sir Zelman and Lady Cowan, Harvey McBeath (the founder of the music store that John Cargher once managed) and Barry Jones. John, after greeting the group at the Vigil said, 'Friends of friends are what the ABC is always looking for.'

The ABC's national flagship current affairs program, *The 7.30 Report*, is compulsory viewing for everyone. Compered by Kerry O'Brien, one of Australia's most respected and experienced journalists, it asks the hard questions that need to be asked of those in authority and contains serious analysis of the important events of the day.



The 'renowned' John Cargher



Present *Play School* company

Will David Gonski be the next Chairman of the ABC Board?

His very recent retirement from the position of Chair of the Australia Council has fuelled speculation that he is the Government's choice as the next Chair of the ABC. Chancellor of the UNSW, director of many companies and chair of a number of arts bodies, David Gonski at 53, has, according to Peter Garrett, transformed the structure of the Australia Council.

Campaign for Australian Media Diversity (CAMD)

CAMD's submission on the Government's discussion paper, *Meeting the Digital Challenge: Reforming Australia's Media in the Digital Age* which contains proposals to weaken Australia's media ownership laws, can be accessed on the Friends of the ABC Website – www.fabc.org.au

FABC is a participant in CAMD

Membership renewals for 2006/07 are due now. Your address label on this newsletter specifies the date on which your membership expires. The community depends on the ABC to inform and educate on such a diverse range of matters that its future should be of concern to every individual and every organisation. Please encourage others to join.

Government-controlled Broadcasting

The abolition of the staff-elected Board member *Glenys Stradijot*

The Government is not satisfied with having stacked the ABC Board with people widely perceived to be its political allies. In another cynical step to control the ABC, it is abolishing the sole Board position not appointed by the government, the staff-elected director. (The exception to this is the ABC's managing director who is appointed by the Board but, in practice, only after the approval of the government of the day.)

With no mandate for its actions, the Government is ramming through the Parliament changes to the ABC Act to abolish the position. It acquiesced to political pressure and held an inquiry. The inquiry was a sham; conducted with haste it prohibited full public debate.

The Government has put forward the spurious justification that staff election of a director results in the risk of a conflict of interest. Yet all ABC Board directors are bound by the same legal duties and obligations, regardless of how they are appointed. Government-appointed Board members have no less, and possibly more, potential for conflict of interest.

While Communications Minister, Senator Coonan, has attempted to imply an incident of impropriety, there has been no evidence of a single occurrence or of a staff-elected director having acted at odds with their legal or ethical obligations on the ABC Board. For 25 years the position has been held by seven different people. The Board has never censured a staff director. On the contrary, staff-elected directors have demonstrated integrity and a commitment first and foremost to the ABC.

In abolishing the position, the Government is denying the Board valuable input from people with knowledge and expertise of the ABC's creative and program-making operations. The contribution of ABC staff becomes even more important as the Government has appointed to the ABC Board no one with experience in public broadcasting and journalism.

From the public's perspective, the staff director position is critical. It has evolved as a vital structural protection of the ABC's independence and integrity.

Staff directors have a strong commitment to quality programming and an intimate knowledge of how the operations of the ABC impact on it. They are the sole, albeit small, counter to governments of any political persuasion stacking the Board. It is crucial when the Board is considering commercial ventures and other practices that risk compromising the integrity and independence of programming.

The interests of the ABC could be no better represented than by Quentin Dempster AO. The staff has elected him to replace Ramona Koval on the Board when she retires in June. Quentin is an award-winning current affairs journalist.

He served on the Board from 1992 to 1996 and has a long record of working fearlessly for the ABC's independence. Unfortunately, the position will be abolished before he takes up his position.

The staff director provides essential information and, alone, can only observe and draw matters to the attention of other Board members. There is therefore cause to be seriously concerned about what a government intent on abolishing the position may be planning for the ABC.

The Government's professed interest in the good governance of the ABC is beyond credulity. Senator Coonan claimed in her media statement of 24 March that 'the Board of the ABC will be restructured to improve corporate governance at the national broadcaster', yet announced only the Government's intention to abolish the staff-elected director position.

Australia is in desperate need of a new process for appointments to public bodies – one that is merit-based, transparent and independent of government.

FABC's submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment Bill 2006 can be accessed on FABC's website www.fabc.org.au

From Eureka Street

"As the first *Watching Brief* was being written, John Howard was already telegraphing the future by refusing to go on the ABC to debate the then PM, Keating. He wanted Ray Martin and Kerry Packer's Nine, and he got what he wanted because, as we look back on the decade of wedging, dog-whistling and weasel words. I find myself wondering time and again, 'How the heck did we let that happen?' I don't think I'm alone, but we wonderers don't seem as organised, ruthless or determined as the people we are wondering about: Yeats said it all:

'The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity' — from The Second Coming.

When Howard was elected he slashed the budget of the national broadcaster that he had so feared as a host for his pre-election debate, and installed as boss, Jonathan Shier, to run the organisation into the ground. It's all the more credit to ABC employees that news and current affairs have continued at all. And as we now go to press with *Eureka Street's* last print issue, Communications Minister Helen Coonan has announced the abolition of the one and only staff-elected position on the ABC Board. Once, that would have meant a strike, a nice big fat one, with strong debate in the press. But it was tucked away behind some bloody Commonwealth Games reporting and nobody seemed to notice. In any case, are strikes 'legal' any more under the draconian industrial laws that have just come in?" — **Juliette Hughes, in the very last printed issue of *Eureka Street*, May/June 2006. Reprinted with permission**

Now there's a potted history for you. I wonder whether her so accurate words will have quite the same effect when *Eureka Street* goes online.

Friends' activities around the country



"Steer clear of the Friends of the ABC. Bunch of sandal wearing lunatics who write letters to *The Age* and use low energy light bulbs." —Jonathan Biggins, *Arty Facts, Age Good Weekend, April 22.*

Friends in Tasmania planned a "Picnic in the Park", but when rain began to pour in Launceston, speakers and live music were quickly moved and it became "Band in the Hall" on 25 February. The community was not deterred in the least and over 250 people joined the rally. Speakers included Australian actor, Tonia Todd (*McLeod's Daughters* and long ago *Police Rescue*), who told the audience of the ABC's critical importance for both viewers and for people working in the television and film industry.

In an action to coincide with an ABC Board meeting on 31 March, Friends of the ABC NSW joined ABC staff in the foyer of ABC Ultimo to protest the removal of the staff-elected director position.

Back home (as they would say on the nightly weather report) there has been much activity through the regional sub-committee. Two local groups met recently with their local Members of Parliament. Others are planning meetings.

Southern Bayside members (Ivor Donohue, Don McLean and Ron Dixon) and FABC president Judith Rodriguez met with Ann Corcoran, MP for Isaacs. Four Friends

(Jim Evans, Dawn Colbourne, May Arbuckle and Cliff Butler) and FABC Committee member Peter Monie met Steve Gibbons, MP for Bendigo and Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services.

FABC is seeking from Labor politicians a re-commitment to its policy for an improved system of Board appointments and enhanced funding, and a pledge to restore the staff-elected Board position.

Diamond Valley, Maroondah, Southern Bayside, Boroondara and South Gippsland groups ran stalls at local events – the Warrandyte market and Festival, Mornington Human Rights Forum, festivals in Boroondara and a music event at Mossvale. Ballarat and Boroondara held film afternoons, Ballarat a quiz night and Southern Bayside an event at a local nursery where the guest speaker was John Patrick from *Gardening Australia*. Jenny Svendsen of Maldon invited Judith Rodriguez to address a meeting at the Maldon Visitors Information Centre.

There are many other FABC members and groups who are active. We'd like to hear of your activities. Please write direct to the office at GPO Box 4065, Melbourne, Vic 3001 or email: fabcvic@vicnet.net.au.



Queensland Friends at their April Fools' Day Stall outside Brisbane City Hall

Letters ...

Last year we were privileged to win the FABC Holiday Raffle.

We spent three beautiful weeks at "The Cove" on Wilson's Inlet in Denmark, WA. The ocean is turquoise, the sand is white and birdlife abundant – pelicans, egrets, black swans, ospreys and herons grace the waters.

At Walpole we did the Tree Top Walk, swaying among the huge Karri and Tingle trees. In perfect weather we cruised around Wilson's Inlet and the Denmark River. We could have stayed forever.

Many thanks to Friends of the ABC especially to Georgina and also to Harry (of Cottages and Castles) who arranged the great accommodation.

Carol and Gary Messenger, Barkers Creek, Vic



Carol and Gary on Wilson's Inlet

The ABC is the cohesive force which makes us conscious, from *Play School* through to old age, that we are Australians. The ABC gives expression to every facet of our lives.

It gives us history and pride; it gives us breadth of ideas and informs us of new inventions, new trends of thought & more.

The ABC invites us to air our own views on talkback radio which is tremendously inclusive of the public.

Australia is a wealthy country. To penny-pinch with a treasure like the ABC could have really serious consequences. I ask the powers that make decisions not to tamper with a treasure we call "our ABC".

Annemarie Mutton, Middle Park



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Your membership expires on the date above your name on the address label.

If your membership has expired and you do not renew it now, this may be your last newsletter.

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Robert Beveridge A contrasting voice



Is the BBC at risk too? was the title of an address given by visiting academic Robert Beveridge on 15 February for Friends of the ABC.

Robert is a lecturer in Media Policy at Napier University, Edinburgh and tutor at the Open and Edinburgh Universities. He is also a director of Voice of the Listener & Viewer, a UK sister organisation of Friends of the ABC.

He spoke about the current state of public broadcasting in the UK, addressing the relations between culture, commerce, citizenship and national identities in a context where technologies, deregulation, and new laws and codes on the UK and European levels are challenging the existing structures and practices in broadcasting.

While there are significant differences – the size and strength of the BBC in the media market being one, and the second being the present assurance of licence fees as a funding base - many matters confronting the BBC sounded familiar. In some instances, they are likely indicators of things ahead for the ABC.

Jana Bennett, boss of the BBC'S TV, was in Australia last year and her comments are worth repeating.

“We’re the biggest news gathering organisation in the world – all through a funding formula that is critical (the vast majority of our \$6.4 billion annual budget comes from compulsory TV licence fees) and we are not competing for commercial revenue in advertising. We are moving to an age of control via viewers. This is what the BBC is about; it is not about choice, it’s about control.”

Perhaps even more importantly the BBC has recognised that it risks losing a generation of younger audiences. Its vision, outlined in the recently published *Creative Future*, includes the creation of a new brand aimed specifically at teenagers which will encompass radio, TV and the Internet, and focus on the new media. Three years ago Friends of the ABC asked the ABC for its vision for youth. We got an outline of existing activities. It is difficult with 10 times less funding than the BBC but the ABC cannot afford to neglect the demographic we call youth!

Friends Committee

President Judith Rodriguez

Vice-President Jack Clancy

Secretary Georgina Simmonds

Membership Secretary Gael Barrett

Treasurer Mary Mahoney

Members Ellie Pond, John Collins, Judy McKenzie, Peter Milton, Peter Monie, Rosie Spear, Olivia Tattam, Charles Wilkins

Campaign Manager/Executive Officer Glenys Stradijot

Admin Officer Damian O’Keefe

Friends Newsletter

Editor Glenys Stradijot

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Check the website: www.fabc.org.au

The full Winter News & Views is available on the website