



## The Pub Test: Fake News or Fact?

We had intended to present this forum on misinformation & disinformation (aka *Fake News*) in 2021, but due to COVID restrictions we postponed it until 3 April this year. Ably presented by our MC (Annette Stevenson) and five panellists, a public audience was kept entertained and informed at the Wicklow Hotel for 2½ hours. Each panellist provided a 10 minute talk on their respective topic (listed below), followed by 10 minutes or more of audience questions/discussion.



1. Fake News: Does anyone believe it? And does it matter if they do (or don't)? - Prof Alan Scott
2. Totalitarianism and Depolitisation of the Public Sphere - Dr Ivana Gulic
3. (Almost) all news is fake - Prof Brian Byrne
4. An Economic Take on Fake News - A/Prof Vic Wright
5. As individuals, what can we do about Fake News? - Dr Bruce Stevenson

All panellists were either current or past academic staff at the University of New England. It was pleasing to note the energy of the audience in the context of a pub gathering, with the talks well complemented with questions and discussion.

## April Market and a survey of ABC Radio Broadcast strength in Armidale



On a brisk April morning in Armidale some intrepid characters were on the Northern Tablelands ABC Friends stall speaking with market-goers on the importance of public broadcasting, taking comments, and distributing ABC Friends merchandise. Apart from much discussion on the up-coming election, we also undertook a survey of the broadcast strength of multiple ABC stations in the Armidale area.

The results of our radio listening survey suggest that most people in the Armidale area have no problems listening to ABC North/North West (Local), ABC News and Triple J, but one person identified a problem with listening to ABC Classic. The outlier is Radio National (RN), with 60% of those who tried to listen to RN experiencing reception problems. This is in spite of RN being on the AM band (normally better over long distances). We have contacted ABC previously concerning the poor broadcast quality for RN, and will do so again.

**We would appreciate any feedback on the quality of ABC broadcast reception (does not include transmission via the internet) from listeners across the Northern Tablelands. If you have problems receiving either ABC Radio or Television broadcasts, could you please let us know.** This will help in our next submission to the ABC. Please let us know concerning (i) the nature of the transmission problem and (ii) your location, using the Northern Tablelands branch email address provided at the end of this newsletter.

## Federal Election: Where do each of the eight New England Candidates stand in respect to the ABC?



With a federal election to be held on 21 May, our local branch sent copies of a questionnaire asking each of the eight New England candidates to rate their agreement with each of six statements. This questionnaire is based upon one that was developed by ABC Friends and ABC Alumni for national distribution. The candidates were each asked to rate their agreement to each of the following statements by selecting: (a) *I agree with this entire statement*, (b) *I agree with most of this statement*, (c) *I disagree with most of this statement*, (d) *I disagree with this entire statement*, or (e) *I'm not sure of my views about this statement*.

1. Guarantee that ABC services will remain independent of government, will be free-to-air and free-to-access, and publicly funded from consolidated revenue.
2. Improve funding certainty and the ABC's ability to plan ahead, by introducing five- year funding agreements, indexed annually to compensate for inflation.
3. Enable the ABC to fulfil its charter obligations, including the provision of comprehensive rural and regional services, by progressively restoring the ABC's operational budget to the level of funding it received before the budget cuts imposed in 2014.
4. Ensure that all ABC Board appointments are made from a short-list selected on merit by an independent non-partisan nominations panel, as laid down in the ABC Act.
5. Restore and enhance funding for ABC International, so it can resume its vital role as Australia's trusted voice in the Asia- Pacific.
6. Ensure that good quality ABC radio and television broadcasts can be received throughout rural and regional Australia.

Responses from candidates are provided below:

Candidate (party)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Average rating a(4) to d(1)
<b>Pavlo Samios (LDP)</b>	No acknowledgement of receiving our questionnaire and no responses						
<b>Cindy Duncan (UAP)</b>	No acknowledgement of receiving our questionnaire and no responses						
<b>Natasha Ledger (Ind)</b>	ABC radio and television along with Maggie's cooking show [SBS] is all the value I gain from TV and radio. ABC delivers a balanced view with facts, a rarity of late, keeping grounded with sufficient coverage.						
<b>Barnaby Joyce (NP)</b>	No acknowledgement of receiving our questionnaire and no responses						
<b>Matt Sharpham (Ind)</b>	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
<b>Richard Thomas (ONP)</b>	An acknowledgment of receiving our questionnaire, but no responses						
<b>Carol Sparks (Greens)</b>	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
<b>Laura Hughes (ALP)</b>	4	4	4	4	4	3	3.8

Note that average rating is the average across the 6 statements, where a=4, b=3, c=2, d=1, and e is not included.

To understand the importance of these statements please refer to the National ABC Friends [election campaign and 10 Point Plan](#), and issues raised on our local branch blog site ([Latest News from ABC Friends Northern Tablelands](#)).

Only four of the eight candidates (marked by blue) acknowledged our request for information and then subsequently returned the questionnaire or provided a short statement in lieu of questionnaire return. All consistently showed positive support for each of the six statements. Additional comments by those who responded to each statement included:

- The integrity & reliability of the ABC as a broadcaster, but there is still evidence of some political bias.
- This bias may be reduced, resulting in better quality broadcasting, if more appropriate funding were provided, ABC Board appointments were not made by the government of the day (i.e., apolitical appointments), and the Board included people with a wider range of backgrounds.
- The Australian community deserves unbiased, independent and quality broadcasting. This is critical for the ongoing operation of our democracy.

The other four candidates (marked by grey) largely provided no acknowledgment of our request, and none provided a response. This struck us as very remiss for those seeking to hold a public office with the role of representing all of the people within the electorate of New England, including members of our local ABC Friends branch. Unfortunately, among the non-responders was our current sitting member/representative, Mr Barnaby Joyce.

## Some observations on the Murdoch press

News Corp

The Murdoch media often condemns new developments & progressive ideas; although at times there can be eventual recognition for the substance of those ideas, such as climate change. NewsCorp is also critical of publicly funded broadcasting, as in the case of the ABC. For an article on the importance of all political parties distancing themselves from media outlets, have a look at <https://johnmenadue.com/keeping-the-media-at-arms-length/>.

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## Northern Tablelands website ([https://www.abcfriends.net.au/nsw\\_act\\_northern\\_tablelands\\_branch](https://www.abcfriends.net.au/nsw_act_northern_tablelands_branch))



The Northern Tablelands branch of the ABC Friends has a website which provides information on our branch (contact details, history & past speakers), details on public broadcasting throughout the Northern Tablelands, and regular posts on relevant issues as they arise ([Latest News from ABC Friends Northern Tablelands](#)). Refer to the *latest news* for information on current local and national issues. Note that this site is not interactive, but you can email us direct if you have a comment, or refer to our Facebook page (link below, and on the branch website) if you wish to make a comment.

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## Importance of ABC Friends Membership

ABC Friends  
NSW & ACT

Most of those reading this newsletter will already be members of the ABC Friends, but for those who are not, please consider becoming a member. ABC Friends is an independent organisation (including independence from the ABC) which seeks to protect the independence of the ABC from political and commercial interests - for a detailed account, click on [Our Objectives](#).

The cost of membership on a yearly basis ranges from \$20 (low income/concession) to \$50 (household/organisation), and a little cheaper if you enrol for 3 years. In becoming a member you do not have to be actively involved, though you will receive regular information from your local branch.

The primary value of your membership is that it will contribute to the current 3,564 NSW/ACT (over 8,000 national) members which can be cited by the ABC Friends as they lobby to protect the independence of the ABC, allowing it to continue as the [most trusted media source](#) of news and analysis in Australia.

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## Introducing the ABC Alumni



Our local branch has recently become an associate member of the ABC Alumni. The Alumni consist of past employees of the ABC, and have become very active in advancing the interests and importance of the ABC as the primary public broadcaster in Australia. For more information on the ABC Alumni, go to <https://abc alumni.net/>, and in particular scroll down and view some of their short videos.

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## Next Branch Meeting - May 12 (2022)



The next branch meeting is on May 12, in Kent House (141 Faulkner st. Armidale) at 5:30pm. All local ABC Friends members are welcome to attend in person; a meeting agenda is routinely sent out at least one week prior. If you are in the Armidale area, and concerned about the future of independent public broadcasting in Australia, please do come along. If you have any questions beforehand, email us via [northerntablelands@abcfriends.net.au](mailto:northerntablelands@abcfriends.net.au). For issues currently confronting the ABC and public broadcasting more generally, refer to our website and to the preceding (Alumni) item.

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[northerntablelands@abcfriends.net.au](mailto:northerntablelands@abcfriends.net.au) : for direct contact with our Northern Tablelands ABC Friends branch

[www.abcfriends.net.au/nsw\\_act\\_northern\\_tablelands\\_branch](https://www.abcfriends.net.au/nsw_act_northern_tablelands_branch) : local branch information and blogs

[www.facebook.com/fabcarmidale](https://www.facebook.com/fabcarmidale) : entertaining and informative posts with opportunity to provide comment

[www.abcfriends.org.au](https://www.abcfriends.org.au) : for information from the national branch