

Margaret Throsby 50 not out

as Marian Wilkinson retires

Amanda Meade
the Guardian



Margaret Throsby has just clocked up 50 years at the ABC. It was 1967 when Throsby was hired as an announcer – alongside 28 male announcers – and then made the first female newsreader in 1978. Her appointment was reported thus: “Australia’s newest sex symbol is not a naughty nurse from The Young Doctors, a titillating teacher from Glenview High or a passionate policewoman from Cop Shop. Believe it or not, she’s an ABC newsreader and mother of a teenage son.”

Throsby says: “When I joined the ABC, I was the only woman on air and there were no women in management or executive

positions at all ... You could rise only so far and that was it and it would have been shocking if a woman had been appointed to any senior role in management. Roll the film forward to 2017 and we have a lot of women on air – probably 50-50 women in my state, NSW. We also have women in senior roles and a female managing director.”

One of those senior women at the ABC is investigative reporter Marian Wilkinson, who is retiring after a stellar career to travel the

world with her partner, Matthew Moore, a former *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist. Fresh from leading the *Four Corners* investigation of the Paradise Papers, Wilkinson announced her retirement from the program and was farewelled by her *Four Corners* colleagues on Thursday.

The multi award-winning former executive producer of *Four Corners* has made her mark across print, radio and television and has covered politics, national security, terrorism, environment and refugee issues as well as writing several books, including *Dark Victory* with David Marr.



Marian
Wilkinson

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Update

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Who to write...

Anyone seeking basic information about writing to persons of influence might find it helpful to go to www.fabcns.org.au where there are some menu items under "Be Active" leading to pages of information: Who can I write to? What can I say?

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From the Editor (and National Vice-President)

Once again we look back upon a year of great change within the ABC and lament the disappearance of great programs and vital services, both as a result of cuts in funding and sometimes highly questionable decisions by ABC Management. We began 2017 with the removal of the short wave radio service to Northern Australia and the Pacific Region, and are closing the year still trying to come to terms with the major restructure of the ABC announced by Michelle Guthrie on 13th November. I think that only the passage of time will provide us with the opportunity to assess the impact of the restructure on particular platforms, networks, programs and staff, but in this Update Dr. Margaret Simons provides us with her initial analysis of its impact.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

NSW Friends hosted, on 6th October, a first for Friends – a national, public conference, on the theme Public Broadcasting in the 21st Century – Democracy Demands Diversity. Held at the NSW Teachers Federation and attended by over 100 people, the conference addressed a range of issues related to public broadcasting – changing technology and delivery methods, changing audiences, the implications of the digital revolution, the importance of maintaining a strong defence of public broadcasting, with speakers and panellists of great expertise and experience – Dr. Margaret Simons, Shadow Minister Michelle Rowland; journalists Quentin Dempster, Graeme Dobell, Matt Peacock; editor Professor Peter Fray; unionists Katelin McInerney and Sinddy Ealy; youth advocate Natasha Lay; Director, Australian Children's TV Foundation, Jenny Buckland; Deputy Director, Australia Institute, Ebony Bennett. In this Update you will find an edited transcript of all conference sessions, and I thank Angela Williamson, who devoted many hours to this task. Speaker at the conference dinner was Michelle Guthrie, and you

will find the text of her address, which attracted much media attention, on the NSW Friends website.

ABC DEFENDERS

August 2017 saw the launch of the ABC Defenders program – both high profile and ordinary Australians saying a few words about the importance of the ABC to them, initially Julian Burnside QC, Professor Marcia Langton, Rosie Batty, Father Bob Maguire. The Defenders program is rolling on, with more defenders being added to the ranks, thanks to the work of Jeff Waters, Friends' National Social Media Manager. Be sure to check the National website for recent additions to the Defenders, and if you wish to become one, please contact your own state's branch of Friends.

WE MOURN THE PASSING OF TWO ABC GREATS



Mark Colvin

In 2017 we lost two wonderful broadcasters, both of whom have left gaps which it is impossible to fill. The unmistakable sound of Mark Colvin's beautiful and measured voice on PM at 5 is sadly missed. Originally

from UK, Mark spent 4 decades with the ABC, covering news from around the globe with deep insight and masterly interviews. In 1994, whilst covering the Rwanda genocide, he contracted Wegener's Granulomatosis, a rare blood disease, and suffered ill-health for the next 23 years. He fought his illness with courage and determination, returning to ABC radio as the iconic host of PM. In the words of Gaven Morris, ABC News Director: "To young reporters he was an inspiring figure. To older ones he was a trusted source of wisdom and experience. We all felt strengthened by his presence in the newsroom."

When John Clarke came to Australia from New Zealand, he was already an iconic

figure there in his creation of the gum-booted Fred Dagg. He rapidly established himself here as an inspired satirist, with 20 years on the ABC doing his Thursday night Clarke and Dawe take on politics and newsmakers.

He skewered them, not cruelly or unfairly, but by exposing pomposity, dishonesty, double standards and spin. All done with his wonderfully dry, flat delivery and with that compellingly mischievous twinkle in his eyes. John was a particular friend of ABC Friends, giving generous advice as we prepared creative messages in 2016.



John Clarke

Leigh Sales, in bidding John farewell, said he was “respected by his peers, adored by his fans and loved by his colleagues.” Magda Szubanski described him as “a beacon of intelligence and decency.” (My thanks to Randal Macdonald for these words of tribute to John.) ABC Friends, in co-operation with John’s family, have produced a 2018 calendar featuring some of John’s remarkable bird photographs. Details in this Update.

THE FIGHT GOES ON

It is the example of talented and selfless figures such as Mark Colvin and John Clarke, and a dwindling group of passionate broadcasters and writers still working for the ABC which provides ABC Friends with the inspiration to keep up the fight, because we believe that Australia will

be a better, kinder and happier place for all its citizens as long as it has a strong, independent, fearless public broadcaster, free of commercial and political influence. That is why our thousands of members, along with our leadership at a local, state and national level give so generously of their time, their expertise and their energy in defence of our public broadcaster. The fight for adequate funding from government goes on, but we urge ABC Management that, as they search for new and different audiences for its various platforms, they do not abandon its current, loyal audiences who care with great passion about “their ABC,” and have a voice which deserves to be heard.

Mal Hewitt

National Vice-President, ABC Friends



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ABC Friends 2018 Calendar

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photographed by
Mr John Clarke

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of Australian bird
photographs, taken by
a master of satire, who
found solace in birds,
and photography.

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A Sign of the Times And a Talking Point

Valerie and Derek Minter, based in Melbourne's Eastern Suburbs and Members of the Eastern Suburbs Local Group, have built a very visible, signed trailer to draw attention to the cuts to the ABC and the need for active involvement of citizens to rectify this.

The sign is 1800mm x 1200mm, clear of the trailer sides, enabling things to be transported without compromising visibility. Derek and Valerie have done 1000 kms around Melbourne, Frankston, McCrae, Williamstown, Belgrave. They are planning to take it to Ballarat & Sorrento. The trailer has been parked outside the Whitehorse Spring Festival & in shopping centres.

The sign is properly secured for safety reasons; it slides into sockets & is bolted to the trailer so it can be easily removed.

Construction was by the very practical Derek who made sure it was meticulously painted.

Reactions: it's been a great talking point with neighbours and members of the bowling club, who have been intrigued & surprised and wanting to know more.

Anyone wanting to discuss with Derek and Valerie, please ring on (03) 9898 8462.



CATALYST

FACT CHECK

by a Concerned Scientist

The Claim:

On 6 October 2017, ABC Managing Director Michelle Guthrie told the Friends of the ABC public conference that:

"Catalyst is a good example of how the ABC has reinvented a long running program, giving it new energy and purpose, and our audiences have reaped the rewards. I recall at the time we announced the change it was pilloried as "dumbing down" science and walking away from our Charter obligations. The reality is the reverse. Catalyst has introduced the audience to new scientists and provided compelling viewing on topics as diverse as the miracles of the heart and the dawn of the driverless car. The audience has embraced the innovative approach and its connection to the core mission of the program."

What the numbers say

"Audience has embraced..."

Average annual ratings (5 city metro consolidated):

2013 Catalyst	689,449
2014 Catalyst	690,832
2015 Catalyst	682,000
2016 Catalyst (to Oct)	640,000

2017 Catalyst (program ratings, 5 city metro consolidated)

Ep1	15 Aug	444,000	Avatars	Ep6	19 Sept	401,000	Rings of Saturn (BBC remake)
Ep2	22 Aug	492,000	Seaweed	Ep7	26 Sept	399,000	Driverless Cars (BBC remake)
Ep3	29 Aug	439,000	Alien Life	Ep8	3 Oct	307,000	Can We Save the Reef?
Ep4	5 Sept	503,000	Dinosaur Crater (BBC remake)	Ep9	10 Oct	400,000	How to Exercise Better
Ep5	12 Sept	454,000	Heartbeat	Ep10	17 Oct	532,000	Gut Revolution pt.1

On these figures, the average of annual ratings for this year (to date) is 437,000. This represents a drop of around 35% from the previous-four-years' average of more than 675,000.

YouTube figures for the Catalyst channel reflect similar significant decreases in audience appeal. Barely any of this year's clips have attracted over a thousand views. Compare this to stories from previous seasons such as "Why Am I Still Fat" (415,000 views), "Low Carb Diet" (358,000 views), "Battery Powered Homes" (347,000 views), and "Fire Tornado" (287,000 views).

"Topics as diverse..."

In 2016, Catalyst broadcast 40 episodes. Inexplicably, only episodes 26-40 are still available on the Catalyst website. The others have been removed. Nevertheless, these 13 episodes covered 18 different topics. By comparison, 10 episodes of Catalyst in 2017 have covered only 10 topics. Four of these

stories (eg. coral bleaching, exercise, gut microbiome, alien life) were covered in recent seasons of Catalyst. Three of these programs were buy-ins from the BBC, topped-and-tailed and revoiced for an Australian audience.

"Introduced the audience to new scientists..."

While some scientist-presenters are new to this series, many were featured in the old Catalyst - including Tim Flannery, Emma Johnston, Jorden Nguyen, Alan Duffy, Graham Phillips, and Brian Cox.

The Verdict:

Claims that the new series of Catalyst (made without in-house producers and specialist science journalists) has been 'embraced' by audiences for its 'innovative' programs, 'new scientists' and 'diverse' topics are incorrect and misleading.



ABC Friends National Conference

6 October 2017 in Sydney

Democracy demands diversity

ANGELA WILLIAMSON'S SUMMARY

Attended by over 100 people from every state and territory, conference participants listened to and discussed the issues facing Public Broadcasting in the 21st Century.

The keynote address was given by Dr Margaret Simons, who drew her audience attention to:

- Currently, half of the ABC Board is ideologically opposed to the ABC!
- Change so often seems to mean threat
- But change is essential – without it the ABC would never have established digital platforms, nor iView or Triple J
- Direction of change is the issue.
- Guthrie sees a harder turn to the digital world as imperative.
- Guthrie sees children and over-50s as over-served.
- The ABC has survived because user-pays is not acceptable with respect to news & information.

Dr Simons asked her audience to consider the following fundamental issues:

- Not many countries have 1 public broadcaster; very few have 2. Is it, therefore, time to consider a merger of SBS and ABC? Mindful of the risk of amalgamation being an excuse to claw back funding. The Friends are encouraged to engage well in this debate.
- Do we need ABC2 and SBS2?
- Do we need iView and SBS On-Demand?
- Should SBS and ABC be competing for viewers?

Dr Simons asked what is public broadcasting about?

- Market failure, i.e. those areas of need which the commercial market fails to satisfy – important mission
- Ability to innovate – adoptable by commercial sector
- Remains about Nation-building – not taken by surprise by its own citizens
- The ABC remains the biggest employer of journalists.
- The ABC should ensure that journalism is still being done well. It should spend more time on in-depth stories, instead of easily accessed news items. Journalism not churnalism !
- The ABC represents the best chance that Australians will be best informed.
- The ABC should balance niche and popular. The balance between private spaces and the town square. The rubric against which to measure.
- Concerns about ownership rights with regard to; outsourcing of drama production. ABC is an acquirer of drama content. The benefits to the public are that we see more drama. ABC is now partnering with Netflix, but content will be owned by Netflix. Rights issue.

- We are losing the non-glamorous work of state parliaments, with the loss of Stateline. It's easier to find out what the PM had for dinner than water quality in the local river.



Dr Margaret Simons, keynote speaker, asked: Should SBS and ABC merge?

Finally, Margaret Simons asked: What are Friends of ABC for? She suggested:

- That we moderate and target our conservatism
- Reach the ABC Staff
- Accept that change is not optional – failing to change is the most certain route to failure
- Keep an eye on how funding is spent
- The ABC is doing a good job, remarkable considering. Be a critical friend. It is an immense legacy.
- Educate ourselves about media
- Some vocal critics in government will never be convinced. Worth trying? Probably not. Better to not be too reactive.
- Concerns in sectors of the broader community about competitive neutrality. Is the ABC competing unfairly with its commercial counterparts? How does The Friends address that?

Addressing the question: How can Public Broadcasting protect Australian Culture and Institutions to limit the influence of foreign owned media?

Michelle Rowland, Shadow Minister for Communications, expressed the ALP view that the current Government is keen to eliminate any competition - ABC, Google, Facebook, etc. Further:

- The argument from the Murdoch press is that we have to cut ABC as commercial media is doing it tough with the new digital platforms.

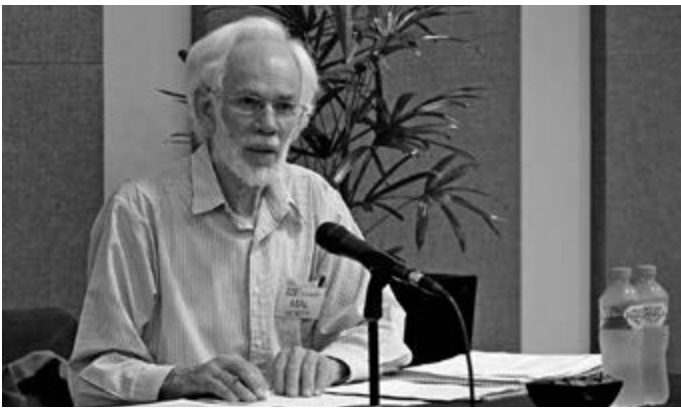
- In Rowland's view, all balance each other and all are relevant.
- Removing diversity safeguards is the wrong move.
- Labor opposes the "2 out of 3" rule in Media ownership concentration in one place, also competitive neutrality and disclosure of salaries.
- Australians trust the ABC, and the brand remains strong.
- We've just passed the 25th anniversary of the main provisions of the Broadcasting Services Act. That diversity is now being dismantled. There is an undermining of the National broadcasters. Last election: Labor supported more ABC drama, women's sport broadcasting. Rowland pointed out that \$30m of taxpayers' money went to Fox Sports !
- SBS and ABC merger not on Labor's agenda at the moment. She is interested to hear The Friends' views.
- Media is in transition - platforms have changed been added to, but majority of Australians still prefer appointment viewing. The internet is complementary with other media platforms.

Ed Davis, Vice-president NSW&ACT, asked Michelle Rowland about comments by Peter Dutton, Tony Abbott, Eric Abetz, what is your view and what is the ALP going to do about funding? She has been arguing very strongly for public broadcasting. "We don't have divisions in ALP on the topic. The ALP is not fractured."

Michelle Rowland will continue to engage with ABC Friends.

ALP agrees that the importance of the ABC is paramount, and will support funding in the Senate Estimates. The ALP is committed to an independent broadcaster.

When asked about 130 hours of children's television, Rowland said: not keen to see the National Broadcaster become the broadcaster of last resort: it should be a role across the board.



President ABC Friends NSW&ACT, Mal Hewitt introducing Quentin Dempster. Image by Asbjørn Kanck.

Quentin Dempster referred to the successes of the just-axed Lateline programme, its international standing: exposure of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church -> Newcastle Herald -> Joanne McCarthy -> informants -> then PM Julia Gillard -> moved for a Royal Commission.

ABC's specialisation in Radio Programmes: these Dempster sees as vital not to lose.

Influence of foreign cultures?

- The CBS bid for Channel 10 and our domestic insularities. American culture and its influence on Australian culture will become more prevalent.
- Rod Sims, in ACCC, will be looking at Australian local content.

Local content is legislated, otherwise, in Dempster's opinion, it wouldn't exist at all.

- Sport used to be big on ABC, then it became big on mainstream. Then Pay-TV got in and then gambling.

Professor Peter Fray, Editor or former Editor-in-chief of Sydney Morning Herald, Canberra Times, and was Deputy Editor of The Australian. A journalist and Professor of Journalism Studies.

Professor Fray summarised:

- He never wishes to see the Australian media landscape dominated by Murdoch or ABC: that diversity is important.
- New business models: Change is a constant, rate of change more intense; Murdoch has right to fight for market share.
- ABC pays for promoting using Google: you need to fish where the fish are.
- The ABC is better placed than others to manage change.
- Hard hearts and sharp minds are engaged on how to adapt to the changes. Instagram, snapchat, etc.
- What does a journalist do about a lying politician? The New York Times has been calling out Trump. What would happen to the ABC's notion of objectivity?
- He believes advertising dollars have reached peak now.
- Fray says we shouldn't use the digital world to become thieves. ABC is an aggregator. If it wasn't for other media, the ABC would be more silent.
- Professor Fray said his life would be much poorer without the ABC, & encourages his students to engage with the ABC.

Ross McGowen, Central Coast (NSW) Branch, expressed concern for the increased employment of casual & part time workers, leading to potentially a more cowed and intimidated staff. Casualisation necessarily does give management more leverage.



Audience contributions added much to the debate. Image by Asbjørn Kanck.

Other comments from the floor:

- Content and reach: quotas -> implication of compliance -> doesn't necessarily mean quality.
- In commercial sector, there are ratings. How does the community measure the loss of something like Lateline? We want a National Broadcaster that doesn't work on 'ratings'. Need nuanced measuring.
- Children's media content: commercial sector shouldn't be let off the hook. Variation should be preserved within and without the ABC.
- Concerns expressed about intellectual property for media

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workers. Corporations aggregate and pass around and re-work. Copyright law doesn't help. Market fundamentalism doesn't help. Rowland commented: "Content is King": ensure that intellectual property is not thieved. Come down on the creative side. She is working with Mark Dreyfus.

Addressing the question: How can Public Broadcasting create a more Australian News Service that reflects all regions of the country and is more attuned to the Asia Pacific Region?

Margaret Reynolds, ABCF National Committee President, introduced Graeme Dobell, former ABC journalist, and Matt Peacock, ABC Staff-elected Director on ABC Board. Former Senator Margaret Reynolds commented on a preponderance of US footage and Sydney-based news and information.



President Margaret Reynolds introduces Graeme Dobell & Matt Peacock. Image by Asbjørn Kanck.

Graeme Dobell said: 'I laboured for the ABC for 33 years and loved it.' Before the ABC, Dobell worked in afternoon newspapers: Daily Mail and The Sun.

The ABC was quite mendacious in the way it went about turning off Short Wave.

- 'Aunty' sabotaged its own SW signal.
- Turned off half of its transmitters at Shepparton which led to a degradation in broadcast.
- Saved a whole \$2m. Out of its own mouth, 'Aunty' admitted it needed \$4m to turn it on again. Dobell called this technical bastardy.
- Shocked that the ABC could do that. Why and when? Because it was coming to the end of its transmission time? Why? In 1990s still having a couple of decades in Pacific.
- Mobile telephones still coming: not across the entire region yet.

Dobell said this was not the best way to talk to the Pacific. This Short Wave shut down has hurt PNG.

- ABC is walking away from its Charter responsibilities. Charter gives equal stress to the functions. Charter point 1b is to broadcast to the nearby neighbours.
- How the corporation is seeking to divest itself of responsibilities. ABC is the 'daily newspaper' in the Pacific. Dobell urged the ABC to 'look at what you are doing.'
- ABC is hearing the calls for it to look at its responsibilities.
- The Abbott Government terminated the Radio Australia broadcast licence 1 year into a 10 year contract. Australia is failing its own interests.

Matt Peacock spoke of historical reviews, that discussions about switching off SW have been around for quite some time. Australian TV in Asia was built on top of the Radio Australia broadcast. His key points:

- Cutting of SW: Not a careless act by the Government but a deliberate act driven by Janet Albrechtsen, et al. Mark Scott was dealing with a hostile board.
- Censorship of copy in China. Michelle Guthrie reacted to having China recommencing broadcasts in Mandarin outside China.
- Political climate within which ABC was operating.
- Julie Bishop was far from friendly. ABC didn't send a reporter with her when she visited the Pacific where there were 300,000 viewers.
- Opposed to governments who cut funding in this significant area.

Dobell and Peacock added:

- By axing Short Wave and the broadcast of Radio Australia into Indo-china, and parts of the Asia Pacific a vacuum has already been filled by a powerful northern country. Contra views no longer being expressed.
- Recent discussions within the ABC which show that our media freedom is valued, and that some steps might yet be taken to repair retrograde steps of the recent past.
- Pressure on Government needed. Perhaps mood in DFAT has changed....



Short Wave reach to our NE neighbours; Quentin Dempster at the mic.

Margaret Reynolds urged conference attendees to encourage, via letters and phone calls, the Government to reinstate ABC's broadcast capability into our northern regions and particularly to our northern neighbours. It's a complicated environment but worth us helping the ABC to be reinstated and not giving ABC's detractors an easier run.

Sue Pinnock and Asbjørn Kanck, ABCF SA & NT representatives on the National Committee, spoke of the so-called 'efficiency review' and addressed technical matters pertaining to broadcast

capability in the forms of SW(Short Wave), AM(Amplitude Modulation), FM(Frequency Modulation) and DRM(Digital Radio Mondiale) with respect to their capacities to reach remote, regional, and Asia Pacific areas, and the effects:

- Consideration of mountain ranges in PNG for example. Does 'beefing up' FM antennas work?
- Importance of the ABC reaching the permanent residents, including Aboriginal communities, as opposed to transient 'grey nomads'
- Radio Broadcasts into North Eastern neighbours to balance other newer views

Addressing the questions: How well is the ABC meeting its Charter responsibilities to different age groups? Is there a Sydney centric bias in determining audience reach?

WA President and National Committee Secretary, Bobbie Mackley, introduced the panellists Jenny Buckland, Director Australian Children's Television Foundation and Katelin McInerney, Media Section Director of the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

Jenny Buckland hopes the Broadcaster would vary the programs for children across a wide age spectrum, and she notes that children are not specifically referred to in the ABC charter.

Ms Buckland then outlined existing legislation and effects as follows:

- Commercial broadcasters are required to provide:
 - 130 pre-school hours of content.
 - 160 hours of school age children content.
 - 32 hours have to do first release quality. Australian children's content. That requirement is unique in the world. Eg "Round the Twist" on Channel 7.
- Animation now qualifies as drama. Nowadays "Vik the Viking" is animated.
- Commercial channels do not wish to do children's content anymore.
- The public broadcaster doesn't have formal requirement; there is an assumption that it will provide children's content. Russell Balding used children's content as a pawn. And BTN went. Back it came.
- Dramas like Little Lunch, very good. Response to children's TV on the ABC is varied.
- Back in 2005, the ABC was doing 13 hours only: "Bluewater High".
- Indigenous children's channel. John Howard promised but lost the election; Rudd turned it on.
- There have been funding cuts, but at the moment and coming up in the week following this conference: The Girls and a soccer team. However, ABC says: 'We don't want to be the only game in town.'
- In Buckland's view over the years - oscillating support for children's programming.
- She says the ABC shouldn't measure itself against commercial channels.

Jenny Buckland's final comment was that if broadcasters worry about losing audience, well, don't, because if they do good children's television, they'll get them while they're young! Local

content will distinguish them from Netflix, et al.

Katelin McInerney's key points were:

- Actors equity seek that 50% of children's content would be Australian made.
- Actors in Australia need more acting input via the ABC and SBS, but currently funding seems to have dried up.
- ABC's remit dependent on current funding circumstances. Not bound by the same quota system as commercial sector.
- Animations good and uses some talented voice-over.
- Equities ask is for the ABC to do more acting Abbott govt was asked in 2015. Jobbing actors are struggling.
- ABC is one of the key drivers of local content, including SBS.
- A quarter of Australians hail from elsewhere. More indigenous faces and voices.
- 'Make it Australian' campaign - on what platforms will it be delivered. Maintain creative effort.
- Question for journalism: last round of cuts with the Abbott Govt: Current affairs: cuts have a number of impacts. 170 content makers gone! There were 1200 content makers. Now really stretched.
- Consideration of the internal workings in the ABC - ABC News24 channels - scraped, saved, cut & moved. ABC has since fallen victim to the same as commercials.
- How does the ABC manage to maintain quality? Training is no longer available. Cadets were trained properly, no longer now. And a trainee is lucky to get an hour's training - which is voluntary.
- ABC was an early adopter of digital. RN was at the forefront of the podcast mania.
- Quality needed. 80 new positions regionally. Will there be any training?
- Good that the ABC Board is on the road, talking to communities. Important to ensure executives are talking to journalists.
- Sydney centric? Well, there are 36 stations that remain in the regional areas. Katelin believes these should be fully funded. Decentralisation: this approach has defined the success of the ABC.
- Apparently, the ABC no longer produces television outside of Sydney. Perth has a completely empty beautiful office, verified by Panel moderator, Bobbie Mackley.
- It is so underfunded for the remit that it has. ABC staff are constantly aware that they believe they are letting down the audience they serve.

Graeme Connelly, National Committee and Victorian ABCF Treasurer, asked if funding is unlikely, might there be something in the nature of tied funding? Is tied funding challenging the funding of the ABC? Jennifer Buckland said it is a complex issue: journalism is not to be a Government mouthpiece. News and current affairs: tied funding is clearly problematic. Children's content: often politicians have trouble with asking for more funding. Buckland proposed that children's TV should be quarantined funding, otherwise there are often raids on the children's tv 'kitty'.

Insufficient programmes with female leads. International cartoons have male boy leads.

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Don Sinnamon, Queensland ABC Friend, said that One Nation is on 18% there. Query ABC's soft diplomacy role. Concern expressed that One Nation people don't see themselves reflected -> if ABC is more Sydney-Melbourne-centric, then people aren't seeing themselves. Inference is that they become stronger in their feelings of being ignored and are less part of the national conversation.

Katelin says she believes the ABC plays a big role in our national discourse: witness Paul Lockyer's reporting bringing the drought into our lounge rooms. ABC decision to axe Stateline. Maybe 7:30 on Friday night not the easiest, so moved to the digital platform. Majority of those stories are on the Radio National digital platform.

Concern that ABC is lagging behind -> need a better picture of what our National identity is.

Ross McGowen commented that BTN as an invaluable tool, a wonderful resource - range of formats and support - impress on management that the ABC should keep it up. Rooky reporter had a 12 year old to act the part -> a voice to children -> BTN is highly valued.

Catalyst changes: currently programme now in bite-size format. Could be used in classroom. Old Catalyst had 18 hour specialist 1 hour shows which were not able to be shared on line. Magazine style. Younger audiences relate to the ABC with these sorts of programmes and JJJ.

Ranald MacDonald said democracy demands diversity. Credit to the new CEO for promoting diversity. Domination in news if there is tied funding. Katelin says union is very concerned with the ability to reach all Australians. Multitude of views and access to opinions important. Pull-back to Sydney is evident: not good. Women not reaching higher levels.

Comments from floor of conference:

From a non-ABC Friends man, who worked for the Advertising Standards Authority, suggested a 2% levy on advertising. There are other ways to get funding in. Self-regulation - broadcast media.

To help maintain the ABC's independence, Gayle Davies, Secretary ABC Friends NSW&ACT suggested Google and Facebook should be taxed and funds directed to the ABC.

Inclusion: the senior community is being silenced; we're not getting the wrinkles and wisdom.



ABCF National spokesperson Ranald MacDonald pushes a democratic point with panel: Jenny Buckland (centre) and Katelin McInerney(r). Moderator Bobbie Mackley(l).

Peter Monie, ABCF National Treasurer and ABCF VIC President, introduced 3 women panellists: Ebony Bennett, Deputy Director of the Australia Institute, Natasha Lay, Youth Advocate from Youth Action, and Sinddy Ealy, ABC's CPSU representative. Peter commented what a pleasure to see 3 articulate young women interacting with attendees who are mostly over-50s.



ABCF's Peter Monie introduces an impressive all young women panel at the National Conference.

Ebony Bennett, Australia Institute, spoke succinctly:

More than half of Australians don't trust commercial media. Only 1 in 10 do trust commercial media. The ABC is trusted far above all others; 41% trust, while 15% don't.

She sees huge support for the ABC both regionally and in Metropolitan areas. A system designed in 2017 probably wouldn't have 8 free-to-air channels, 2 sprawling on line, and 50 radio stations. iView has been and is a raging success: huge rewards. Podcasts: RN dominates with its quality of content with huge audiences. However, in free-to-air and broadcast: each download costs the broadcaster, what it can probably ill-afford. ABC needs to keep ahead of the curve.

Natasha Lay, Youth Action said:

People regularly ask Youth Action where 12-25 year olds get their information. Answer: Social media - Facebook, Instagram, snapchat, YouTube, etc. However, that is not true in the country and regional areas: some young folk still look on the public noticeboard.

Young people grow up not knowing what it was like before the Internet. A girl asked recently how she did her assignments without Google.

Instant information is wonderful, but the sheer volume can be overwhelming. She questions volume and content? Fake news, while she's scrolling through her Facebook feed. Outburst, a volunteer group, what are the skills needed to become change makers? Where do you go to get info? And do you know if you can trust it? Climate change, asylum seekers and marriage equality: young people care about these 3 issues. Generation compassion ~80% of most young people enrolled to vote on the Same Sex Marriage issue.

Information from Google: say, on topic of climate change, there are millions of sources. The public broadcaster, the ABC, needs to help sift that information to be relevant, reliable and reflective.

Diversity of ideas: Young people are acutely aware of the need to get all sides of the argument: they value that debate. They try to discriminate between what's real, what's fake, and avoid click bait.

Relevance: ABC: the government doesn't necessarily engage, then young people go to ABC, eg JJJ, and The Hack.

Natasha says that news and information needs to be reflective of yourself, and be reliable. When Natasha grew up in SW Sydney, she was 1 of 2 people in her class non-white. She never saw a face like hers ever on the TV.

Sinddy Ealy, CPSU: said she believes Margaret Simons was a great keynote speaker, but she took issue with one aspect: the way that Simons prefaced resistance to change by staff: Sinddy doesn't agree; she believes staff think best when management work with staff.

10 years ago, a colleague of hers in CPSU said his mature age children are the 2-screen generation: i.e. laptops and mobiles and talking to you. Less than 10 years on, Sinddy herself uses 3 screens, and converses with her toddlers. To stay relevant, the ABC needs to be there in that world.

Sinddy recommends that the advocates for the ABC, such as ABC Friends, can be seen as white-anting progress. She suggests ABC Friends shouldn't give room to the haters. Try to find allies inside the ABC: internal support. Get captains & captainesses of industry to campaign too.

Not about which platform; much more about delivering better services and extending the reach. Stick to basics as the ABC is under public scrutiny: it holds the hopes and dreams of many Australians in a complex environment.

Some statistics:

- In the period Oct 2013 – May 2016, the ABC retrenched 646 staff, and restructured.
- In the same period, the ABC advertised 1517 new jobs. Half were on-going positions. Half were back-filled positions.
- Only 17 people were actually rehoused in other parts of the organisation.
- In 2013, the ABC spent nearly \$12.8m, followed by \$3.8m in 2014, \$47.1m in 2015, and \$11.7m in 2016 all on redundancies, totalling \$75.5m.
- External consultants cost \$26m. In 4 years \$65m was spent on consultants. (So far in 2017, ABC has spent \$29.1m on redundancies.)

Ms Ealy concluded by saying the public expects a lot from the public broadcaster. The ABC is a bit like your life partner, who sometimes comes in with muddy shoes on. It's more good than bad, even if it lets you down occasionally.

Natasha Lay said in a Federal election, young folk will vote for the ones who talk about the issues they care about. Facebook is 10 years old. That's old to young people. Are we there yet? Yes, we are in it. In the last decade, in the way we consume media, most young people never watch TV shows at a set time; usually only podcasts and iView.

Sample of 'fake news', shooting from the hip without verifying: 4 tweets of who shooter *might* have been in Las Vegas. They were all wrong. The ABC *didn't* say until it *knew*.

Sue Pinnock, South Australian President & National ABCF Committee, asked: Compared with traditional broadcasting, the

Quentin Dempster, ABC Friend.
Image by Asbjørn Kanck.



digital future is going where?

Not leaving our analogue world behind. Once TV started, people reported on the death of radio, but decades later, not yet. At some point, Ebony said she came from Triple J to RN, and now uses the ABC Listen App. She believes there needs to be a recast of how RN operates: 85% audience listen to it doing housework or in the car. Queensland Symphony Orchestra, for example, is listened to by farmers on tractors.

RESOLUTIONS from the ABC Friends National Conference 6 October 2017:

RESOLUTION 1: That ABC Friends National Conference urges all political parties with Federal representation intentions to adopt their communication policy platforms to ensure that regional populations in Australia as well as our near northern neighbours are able to get real time greater communication for entertainment, news, and emergency broadcasts as is required in ABC's Charter for Australia.

(Moved: Asbjørn Kanck, 2nded Sue Pinnock. Carried.)

RESOLUTION 2: That ABC Friends National Conference supports the efforts of the Board and the Management of the ABC in increasing its share of ownership of original ABC content that is produced in its name.

(Moved: Peter Monie, 2nded Ross McGowen. Carried.)

RESOLUTION 3: That ABC Friends National Conference rejects the need for any enquiry into competitive neutrality because it is in contravention of the ABC Act's requirement for a comprehensive broadcasting service and its independence.

(Moved: Randal MacDonald, 2nded Kate Durkin. Carried.)



National President Margaret Reynolds & ABC MD Michelle Guthrie at dinner following the conference. Image by Asbjørn Kanck.

Big picture, few hilltops...

The Latest ABC Restructure



Dr Margaret Simons

– Inside Story

Margaret was
Keynote Speaker
at the ABC Friends
National Conference

in Sydney on October 6th Her knowledge of the ABC and Media in general is second to none. Here are her thoughts on the restructure, announced by Michelle Guthrie on November 13.

There are really only two ways to organise a big media organisation. You do it either according to the platforms on which your content is delivered, or by the genres of content you are producing.

At different times over its history the ABC has tried both. Yet the determinant of success has never been the big-picture organisational chart; it's been the internal communications, leadership culture and strategic vision.

This means that ABC managing director Michelle Guthrie's big announcement yesterday, in which she opts firmly for organisation by genre, is probably not quite as important as it looks. The restructure might be a big change, but by itself it tells us little about her vision for public broadcasting, nor about her capacity to achieve it.

And, of course, restructures are necessarily disruptive and risky. The risk is that the organisation becomes so focused on its internals — dealing with entirely new lines of authority and ways of operating — that it loses its focus on audiences.

Having said all that, the core idea behind this restructure — that genres matter more in the new media world than platforms — has a compelling logic.

Not that it's a new idea: in late 2011 and early 2012, Guthrie's predecessor Mark Scott was considering just such a shake-up as part of a review called "Project 21," which was examining how the organisation could remain relevant over the decade ahead.

By 2021, the review concluded, the ABC executive should be structured around a series of "hilltops" representing genres of content on which the ABC wanted to stake its continued claim to the public purse. Radio National would form the basis of an "ideas" hilltop, for example. Current affairs shows would be part of a "national conversation" hilltop, and so on.

Scott didn't go ahead with the plan, although he largely agreed with it. Choosing the right moment in what was seen as a ten-year project was part of the problem, and weighing in the balance was the trenchant opposition of the existing content division heads, including radio director Kate Dundas and television director Kim Dalton.

Others among his executive were


frustrated by his lack of action, and there was a general recognition when the baton passed to Guthrie that this was a difficult job still to be done.

We can see the remnants of the Project 21 thinking in Guthrie's announcement, although she has chosen a much steeper organisational hierarchy, with just three big content divisions. This is in line with what most of the world's broadcasters are doing, and it makes sense at a time when audiences access video and audio on televisions, computers and mobile phones without much caring whether it is a broadcast, a stream or a download.

There are also arguments against this kind of structure. Producing content for television and radio still involves specific and different skill sets. If your principal organisational structure is genre, then each area will presumably have to have a team further down the tree that holds those skills, or you will need a service division somewhere that shares its skills out. At the time of writing, the ABC has not released that level of detail.

Then you have to make it all work, and ensure that somebody is keeping an eye on your ratings and reach, communications between the divisions, your budget, the politics and your key editorial content decisions.

Once you think it all through, what might seem conceptually right and logical becomes much more complicated, and the benefits of one organisational model over another less clear.



Guthrie’s announcement says the Content Ideas Lab will be responsible for “incubating initiatives to introduce ABC content to new audiences.” That could mean almost anything.

So, having said all that, what will the newly structured ABC look like?

The ABC is using the word “teams” to describe the three big content-related organisational units in the new structure — a much cuddlier word than departments or divisions. It is also aspirational.

The success of this restructure depends on whether the “teams” live up to the term. Talk to any ABC insider and you will know that the fights between the old platform “silos” of radio, television and news have for many years epitomised the ABC at its worst, as everyone scrambled for scarce resources. “Seagulls fighting over a cup of chips at the beach,” as one former executive describes it. It’s nice to think that the restructure would fix that; but probably also naive.

The first new team is News, Analysis and Investigations. Given that the news and current affairs division has been creating content for all platforms for years, it will be the least disrupted part of the ABC under its existing head, the innovative and savvy Gaven Morris.

Guthrie also said that the recruitment of forty regional reporters, producers and presenters, announced in March this year, will be sped up. Pushing more reporters out into the regions is politically smart and right in principle. It is local and regional journalism that is suffering most as a result of the crisis in media business models. Addressing shortcomings in the commercial media is one of the reasons for the ABC’s claim on the taxpayer dollar.

But it will take more than a few junior graduates from journalism courses sitting in regional offices to alter the Sydney-centric culture of our national broadcaster. Under the structure currently in place, Fiona Reynolds as director of regional sits at the executive table with a specific remit to look after the regions. Reynolds will leave, with the current director of radio, Michael Mason, to head the second big team — Regional and Local — which includes “rural and regional teams, capital city and regional productions.” In other words, he will run everything that isn’t national, including local radio across the nation. It’s massive.

Mason’s job will still be largely about overseeing radio, since that is where the bulk of regional and local staff work — although presumably some promising but limply executed Mark Scott initiatives like ABC Open, in which producers are sent to the regions to help people tell their own stories, will also come under his remit.

The third team, and the most disrupted, is “Entertainment and Specialist.” It might as well be called the “everything else” division. It will include children’s content, music and creative development, factual and entertainment, drama, comedy and Indigenous programming. It will be headed up by the current director of television, David Anderson.

Anderson was one of a number of internal applicants for the job of managing director, and he and Michelle Guthrie were the only two to be interviewed at the last

stage of the selection process. Incredibly, major talents such as Kate Dundas, former director of radio, were passed over without full interview. Anderson is a favourite of the board, and both his track record and his enormous new portfolio make him a man to watch.

And how will it actually work? Who will make the key decisions on Monday night television, for example, where the ABC has a line-up of news and current events shows like no other? Who will keep an eye on the ratings for Foreign Correspondent, and decide the budget? Who will decide whether to purchase Peppa Pig and manage the contracts and the schedule?

I understand there is to be a “distribution head” in each of the organisational units — a “fat controller” type, as one source described them — who will be in charge of pushing content out across the platforms and watching reach and impact.

There will also be a new Content Ideas Lab, responsible for experimentation. Over the past fifteen years, divisions called variously “Innovation,” “Digital Network” and other names du jour have repeatedly been either broken out to allow focus on change and experiment, or returned to the platform-based organisation units to encourage ownership and cohesion.

Guthrie’s announcement says the Content Ideas Lab will be responsible for “incubating initiatives to introduce ABC content to new audiences.” That could mean almost anything. And how will it work with the other genres?

To sum up, Guthrie is not wrong to reorganise. Something like this has been coming for a very long while. The test will be in the execution. More importantly, is she going to be a good managing director for the ABC? Incredibly, more than eighteen months after she took the top job, it is still too soon to say. She has yet to communicate either internally or externally what she is trying to achieve, or what she thinks publicly funded media should be doing in the decades ahead.

We know she wants the ABC to reach audiences who are not current ABC users. But to what purpose? How does it all fit together in the new media world, and why should future governments continue to invest?

Guthrie’s answers to these questions remain unclear, and today’s announcement doesn’t change that.

State News

Tasmania

An Inspiring AGM

We held our Annual General Meeting on a sunny day in Ross on 12 November. We had the usual formalities and adopted a fully revised version of our Association Rules.

But the highlight of the day (apart from a yummy shared lunch) was the input of our Guest Speaker, Matt Peacock, the ABC's Staff-Elected Director.

Matt talked about the challenges of being the staff rep on the Board in challenging times and gave us an excellent overview of current issues. He also shared his ideas about some key strategies for the Friends over the coming months. These were built on by contributions from members during our discussion with Matt.

One set of ideas related to the need for rigour in holding Michelle Guthrie accountable for the things she has publicly stated to be her goals:

- Make a list of all of the things Michelle Guthrie says she believes, has said she wants to do, has said she is committed to. She says that, one by one, she will deliver them. Figure out where we agree with her. Track what she does and give her 100% support when she delivers on them. Ask her which are her top priorities. Hold her to it. Encourage and endorse. Don't bang on about program cuts - those fights are lost. We don't need the ABC's supporters to be bickering amongst each other. It's not the time to fracture that support.
- As one example, Guthrie has committed to increasing Australian content, improving its quality and making sure we own it. This has seen the withdrawal from sale of a studio in Gore Hill that can be used to make our own content.
- Guthrie's commitment to regional stations should see a renaissance in this area. One or two extra pairs of hands can make a huge difference in a regional station. Guthrie found the money for that.
- To start our list, some things that Guthrie has committed to:

- increased Australian content;
- improved quality;
- increased diversity;
- increased traineeships in the regions.

A second set of ideas stressed the importance of the language we use:

- Talk about the Australian public as the ABC's shareholders. Reinforce at every opportunity that we, not the government, are the shareholders. Hold the Board to this.
- Talk about service to the public, not public service.
- Spruik "audience at the centre".
- Friends as advocates for funding. Need to update the "10c a day message". Need to use an updated version of this so we can avoid using the \$1 billion number. Or disaggregate that \$1B to take out dollars for transmission. Or talk about the \$30M to Foxtel. Friends could be very constructive on funding models.

And, more generally:

- We need to get over our obsession with individual programs and focus on the big picture.

- Future of staff-elected Board member position can't be guaranteed. Has been abolished and reinstated a number of times.
- As the transformation happens, there is a real need for the ABC to invest in researching trends, getting hard data, canvassing community values and monitoring shifts in those. There might be a role for the Friends here. Guthrie loves numbers and pays attention to what people like / don't like.
- Build links with people on the Executive. Don't waste their time but find solutions they will like.
- Get to know the ABC Charter and use it to hold the ABC accountable. Promote it - talk to people about it. We know it could be improved but it's best to hang on to what we have got as it is at great risk if opened up for review.
- Need to be election-ready. Push the ALP on its commitment to ABC funding. Get political parties to commit to the role of a staff-elected Director. Once we have compiled the list of those things Guthrie has committed to, ask politicians to rate their commitment on each of them.

Here in Tasmania, we have a very full agenda for 2018!

Kate Durkin
Secretary



The incoming Tasmanian Committee. From left: Fay Gervasoni (Vice President), Belinda Wright (Treasurer), Peta Fitzgibbon, Margaret Reynolds (President), Anne O'Byrne (Northern Convenor), Kate Durkin (Secretary), Peter Tatham, Ros Stoddart (Southern Convenor), Rowan Wylie, Kevin O'Dea.

South Australia/ Northern Territory

At our AGM on 13 August Narelle Graham, from ABC Adelaide, was our guest speaker. Narelle has had extensive experience as a regional journalist and was host of "Late Afternoons With Narelle Graham". This program brings listeners news of the day and speaks to interesting people who live and work across regional SA and Broken Hill.

With criticism of the ABC being too Sydney and Melbourne centric her topic, "Through the eyes of a rural and regional journalist", was timely. Many questions from the audience followed. The following positions were filled on the new Executive: President Sue Pinnock, Secretary Dianne Jones, Treasurer Aussie Kanck and Membership Officer Rosemary Abbott. At the conclusion of the AGM, Narelle cut a cake in celebration of the ABC's 85th birthday.

On 31 October we were delighted to hold a member and community event titled "Annabel Crabb in Conversation with Sandra Kanck". Sandra Kanck was a member of the Legislative Council, elected for the Australian Democrats, from 1993 to 2009. After parliament, Sandra has continued to be very active as a social justice and human rights campaigner and environmentalist and she is a former President of Friends of the ABC (SA/ NT). Sandra expertly engaged Annabel in conversation over a range of themes from her early childhood, career path and the current state of journalism and politics. Dillons bookshop was present to sell Annabel's books. The 120 strong audience was thrilled to hear from and meet Annabel and get their books signed. Wilderness School, Annabel's alma mater, was represented on the morning by a



Top: Annabel Crabb in Conversation with Sandra Kanck. Above: Annabel Crabb with Wilderness students.

calendar and t-shirts. Next year we will have tote bags and aprons to add to our merchandise range.

At our last Executive meeting for the year we resolved that, following on from the National Conference, our plans for 2018 include: strategies to tap into young ABC supporters, attending country shows around SA to gain support, political and ABC Adelaide connection building, more social events for members and further

developing ideas for other merchandise.

The last event for the year is our End of Year Luncheon being held at La Vita Cafe Ristorante, Kidman Park on 26 November. We have had a very busy but satisfying year in SA and we plan to celebrate the year at our luncheon! Special thanks to the Executive who have worked so hard on behalf of members.

Sue Pinnock
President



Left: John Clarke Calendars were popular at the Gardeners Market. Right: Hannah and Nate holding SA Friends mascot at the Gardeners Market.



Ross McDowell, ABC Weather Presenter Jenny Woodward, Kent Eising.

Queensland

On 7 October, ABC Brisbane had their Open Day at the ABC Building at South Bank which was well attended by the public, but slightly down on last year. As we do each year, the ABC Friends had a table near the entrance to hand out flyers and membership details to those interested. It was a shame the ABC did not promote their 85th anniversary as I am sure more people may have attended. Over the last few years, ABC Friends has put a table in the Queen Street Mall to promote the ABC Friends to the public which have responded well with lots of supporters indicating how much they love their ABC. Unfortunately, the City Council have made it very difficult to continue in that format and ABC Friends is currently looking at other venues to promote our activities. Hopefully in the new year this will be resolved.

In October, ABC Friends had its AGM which was a good opportunity to inform the attendees of the activities of the National committee and how the integration of the Queensland branch with the National body will have enormous benefits and much better communication with government and the ABC. It was also an opportunity to align our processes with the National body so Queensland is in step with the other States regarding fees and administration.

Wishing all our supporters in Queensland a merry festive season and a prosperous new year.

Kent Eising

Western Australia

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

ABC Friends WA held its 2017 AGM on 20th August in the music studio, 620, at the ABC in Perth. The AGM included special resolutions to change the Rules of Association. Some of the changes were the result of new legislation which we were required to implement, but we also proposed clauses to recognise our new national association, ABC Friends National Inc., and provide for the appointment of two WA representatives on the national committee – the president and one other committee member. All these changes were passed unanimously by members at the AGM and came into effect on 21st September.

The AGM elected the following members to the WA committee: Bobbie Mackley, elected for a further term; Cathy Bardon and Terri Brown for another term as Secretary and Treasurer respectively; and Marie Glover, Michael Dowling, Lis Francis and Lizzie Long returning as

committee members. Thanks to all for their commitment. There are still two committee positions available if there is anyone reading this who would like to join us.

Our speaker and special guest at the AGM was Margaret Reynolds, Inaugural President of ABC Friends National Inc. Margaret opened with the statement that Western Australians have been to the forefront in areas that she has been involved and interested in. When she saw this beautiful building (the ABC Perth Centre), now sadly depleted of many ABC staff, she considered how Sydney-centric the ABC has become. Speaking about the activities of the new national organisation, Margaret mentioned our national delegation to Canberra to meet as many parliamentarians as possible; successful campaigns during the Federal election; how we identified ministers and supportive cross-benchers post-election; a meeting with the new MD of the ABC Michelle Guthrie; the social media campaign against the very short-



Margaret, Bobbie & Cathy 2017 AGM.



Enjoying the WA Quiz Night.

sighted decision to axe shortwave radio transmission; and quick responses to the recent spate of attacks on the ABC by politicians and Andrew Bolt.

At a short WA committee meeting following the AGM, Cathy Bardon was appointed as the second representative on the 2017/18 national committee.

Bobbie Mackley & Cathy Bardon

VISIT TO THE ELECTORATE OFFICE OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER

On 13th October Bobbie Mackley and Cathy Bardon had a meeting with Kate Barcham, the Electorate Officer of the Hon. Julie Bishop. Ms Bishop is Cathy's Federal MP. We concentrated on two issues of concern to ABC Friends WA – firstly the rundown of ABC staff, skills and equipment in Perth, in Ms Bishop's capacity as the senior Liberal Federal MP in WA, and secondly the decision to end short-wave radio transmission, which should have been an issue for Ms Bishop, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Bobbie spoke to the first, detailing the local losses and their effects, for example on TV news coverage. Cathy spoke to the second, and the staffer seemed surprised that DFAT had agreed to the ending of the transmission of Radio Australia to our near-northern and Pacific neighbours. We left our documents, which Ms Barcham promised to read.

Cathy Bardon

QUIZ NIGHT

The WA committee determined to try something new for an end of the year event and followed up on a suggestion made some time ago by a member of the previous committee – to hold a fund-raising quiz night. A search for a suitable venue was resolved when we chose the Snug Bar at Rosie O'Grady's in Northbridge. This room is indeed 'snug', holding a maximum of only 40 people – but it has a pleasant atmosphere and we decided it was a good idea to host such an event on a small scale for our 'first go'. We sold our 6 tables of 6 within a couple of days of our initial email to members, and I have no doubt that, with a larger venue, we could have attracted twice as many people if not more. But after the event, I still think it was a good idea to 'start small' – we learned a lot! The quiz was held last night, as I write this, and I can report a success as far as people's enjoyment was concerned, despite a few small malfunctions and missteps which mostly just added to the fun. We also sold some of the beautiful John Clarke calendars and the Leunig 'No ABC' aprons. In all, we cleared \$880 which will go towards running the national association and campaigns and lobbying activities. I'd like to thank our youngest committee member, Lizzie Long, for her huge contribution which included checking out other quiz night events, compiling the questions and answers, providing the audio-visuals, tallying the

scores and helping with announcements. Cathy Bardon also made a critical contribution, organising the venue and prizes and finding our wonderful MC and Quizmaster, Adrian Wood; Marie Glover was a big help with prizes and the raffle. I'd also like to thank those members who donated prizes or money. With some experience now under our belts, and the encouragement of those who came along, we hope to hold another, larger, quiz night next year.

On behalf of the WA committee, I wish all our members and their families a very happy and safe festive season and new year.

Bobbie Mackley

on behalf of the WA committee

New South Wales

Introducing Ed Davis: new NSW President

It is my pleasure to provide a brief introduction to my successor in NSW, Ed Davis. Ed was elected at the AGM on the 4th November. He is an Emeritus Professor in the Faculty of Business and Economics at Macquarie University. He retired from full-time work in 2008, after twenty years at Macquarie. His last post there was as Dean of the Business Faculty. He has also worked at Monash, La Trobe and the University of NSW. His main area of research and teaching has been Industrial Relations and he was a regular commentator on this for the ABC in the 1980s. He was elected to the NSW Friends Executive in 2013 and became Vice President in 2015. Ed was appointed a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia in 2006 for "service to education and to the community in the areas of equity in employment, industrial relations and human resource management".

I have asked Ed to outline some thoughts on challenges facing the ABC and the role for the Friends.

Mal Hewitt, NSW President, 2006-2017

My thanks to Mal and I am certainly conscious that he has left very large shoes to fill! His commitment, passion and advocacy over the past decade have been enormously important in defending and advancing the cause of the ABC. Mal has received the heartfelt thanks of members in NSW at the AGM and also at the November Executive of the Friends in NSW.

State News

These are very challenging times for the ABC. As outlined in the ABC's 2017 Annual Report, funding for the ABC has declined by 28% from 1985/6 to 2017/8. In recent years, the 2014 federal budget, introduced by then Treasurer Joe Hockey, cut with particular savagery into ABC funding. The 2017 budget resulted in a cut to base ABC funding of \$55.2m per annum, with a further cut of \$12.2m required in 2018/9 (ABC 2017 Annual Report, vol. 1, pp. 83-4). Randal Macdonald has aptly described the threat of 'death by a thousand cuts' to the ABC. The issue of restoring funding to the ABC, at least to 2013 levels, is critical to ensure that the ABC can fulfil its Charter obligations to deliver, "innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard..."

Government cuts to ABC funding have been accompanied by at times bizarre and ferocious attacks by senior government figures and others. In 2014, then Prime Minister, Tony Abbott accused the ABC of being 'un-Australian', of lacking a 'rigorous commitment to the truth' and lacking 'basic affection for the home team' (SMH, 29 January 2014). It appeared a blatant attempt to influence the reporting of News and Current Affairs on the ABC. Tasmanian Liberal Senator Eric Abetz described the ABC as a 'lefty love-in' and indicated his hope that Michelle Guthrie, as new ABC Managing Director, would sort this out (Examiner, 21 December, 2015) and Peter Dutton, Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, has been an unrelenting critic of the ABC. He showed his delight at the ABC's decision to axe Yassmin Abdel-Magied's program after a Facebook post by her in relation to ANZAC Day. 'One down and many to go', Dutton told 2GB's Ray Hadley (SMH, 26 May, 2017).

Leader of One Nation, Pauline Hanson has maintained her rage at the ABC, in particular over the *4 Corners* program, which revealed One Nation's 'brutal backroom politics' and questionable decisions in relation to payments for campaign activities (*4 Corners*, Please Explain, 3 April, 2017). An appalling outcome has been an apparent pact between the federal government and One Nation, with One Nation delivering its support to pass assorted government bills in the Senate in return for government



Newly elected NSW President
Ed Davis.

support for One Nation vengeance on the ABC, in the form of proposed draconian cuts to ABC funding and measures to undermine its operation. As yet, Labor, Greens and enough other Senate crossbenchers appear committed to preventing this but it is surely a deeply worrying sign of what might happen if a future alliance of conservative parties and One Nation ruled the roost.

The last year has seen other camps outspoken and outrageous in their attacks on the ABC. The most obvious example was Roger Franklin's comment in *Quadrant* lamenting that the awful bombing at the Manchester Arena in May 2017 had not occurred at the ABC's building in Ultimo. In his cross-hairs was Q and A: 'Unlike those young girls in Manchester, their lives snuffed out before they could begin, none of the panel's likely casualties would have represented the slightest reduction in humanity's intelligence, decency, empathy or honesty'. Initial 'well said' responses by the usual line up of ABC critics were overwhelmed by a tide of anger at Franklin's terrible language and imagery. *Quadrant's* editor apologised and Australia was told that Franklin had been 'counselled'. It all looked too little, too late. And, of course, the Murdoch media have kept up their daily barrage at the ABC, antagonised by its reach and deeply trusted place in Australian society.

A further challenge for the ABC is to be found in seismic changes in broadcasting technology, often referred to as 'digital disruption'. This has seen the ABC committed to investing in technology and organisational change to ensure that it continues to reach a very wide proportion of the population as people change their means of accessing ABC programs. As Michelle Guthrie pointed out to the Friends' National Conference on

6th October, global giants have emerged with a massive impact on broadcasting: for instance, Google (market capitalisation, US\$660 billion); Facebook (US\$500b) and Netflix (US\$70b). She contrasted this with the estimated combined worth of Australia's three major free-to-air media organisations at Australian \$2.1b!

The role of the Friends is as vital as ever. There is an ever-present need to press government and opposition political parties for adequate funding for the ABC and for SBS. The Friends must maintain their determination to confront attempts to censor the ABC and must continue their insistence that Australia is served by high quality public broadcasting, which informs, educates and entertains. We are all the poorer when the ABC is diminished.

Ed Davis

Victoria

This last year has been very eventful, exciting, challenging and extremely hard work.

Your hard working Committee has worked as a team with all contributing. And many of our partners have contributed big-time, as well. We have also had the benefit of wonderful volunteers who have helped in many ways to get things done. We organized a meeting of volunteers in May with plenty of two-way communication and exchange of ideas. We have communicated more with our Members and Supporters, improving our website and using Facebook and Twitter.

We have pursued a deliberate policy of setting up or renewing Local Groups. So, we now have the following Groups: Boroondara, Eastern, Geelong/Corangamite, Inner Melbourne, Northern, Southern Bayside. With more to follow in 2018.

The untimely death of John Clarke this year, who was a great friend of the Friends, has led to your Victorian Committee deciding, with great support from John's family, to design a John Clarke Calendar for 2018, featuring his exquisite photographs of birds – an activity which took him "away from it all" with family and friends.

In the lead up to the next election (whenever that will be) we will be preparing our campaign. We have learnt a number of lessons from our 2016 campaign – one of which is that we need to be "on-the-ground" much earlier. The growth in number of local groups this year will help with this a great deal.

We plan to seek constituent meetings with Sitting MPs along the lines of a recent meeting with Sarah Henderson, Member for Corangamite. Sarah stated that she believes “the ABC is adequately funded; that there is no need for the Liberal Party to have a policy stance on the ABC; and that the ABC Geelong Office should be better funded and upgraded.”

I find those comments disturbing as we have been bombarded with Plans for ‘needed media reform’ from the Federal Government and a Bill is being proposed to alter the Charter without any consideration to the statutory protection from political interference as set down in the ABC Charter.

Further, there are the continuing cuts to ABC funding – with some 600 staff losing their jobs over the last four years and – according to the ABC’s Annual Report – a nearly 30% reduction in real terms of its budget over the last 31 years. To that we can add the further \$47million cuts listed in the just released 2017 Annual Report and the cancelling of the Australia Network one year into a 10 year contract. Yet the latest surveys indicate an 80% public satisfaction with the job the ABC is doing, with its journalistic credibility ahead of all the commercial outlets.

To sum up, I would like to repeat my gratitude to Members of the Committee for all their input and also to our growing team of volunteers who have helped in an increasing number of ways, including the giving of their time, their ideas, their suggestions and their enthusiastic support for a cause which is important for all Australians. Our bottomline is that we want: **A strong, independent, well-run, properly-funded, transparent and politically independent ABC.**

Max Gillies entrances Melbourne crowd with a candid interview



The life story of one of Australia’s most significant satirists, and songs by one of its most promising performers, captivated a large and enthusiastic audience at the ABC Friends Victoria annual dinner on Thursday, November the 23rd.

Legendary entertainer Max Gillies - playing only himself - was interviewed by the ABC Friends National Media Adviser, Randal Macdonald, and “Triple-J Unearthed” artist and rising singer-songwriter Tim Solly was joined by his wife Alison to entertain the crowd with some sensational original music.



Tim and Alison Solly performing on the night.

Almost 140 people filled the restaurant at Melbourne’s William Angliss Institute, which is a specialist TAFE training centre for hospitality and the culinary arts, for the evening of stories and music.

Tim Solly wrote the music for, and performed, the ABC Friends anthem: “Where would we be without our ABC,” and has been extremely generous with his time and talent in his support of ABC Friends.

He and Alison performed a number of beautiful, original songs, before rousing the entire company into a sing-along.

But Tim also spoke of how importantly the ABC had featured in his life, and the opportunities it had given him as a performer.

It was an important message to hear in these times of cutbacks and fear at the ABC - that our national broadcaster, in spite of its travails, is still supporting new Australian talent and helping it to grow.

Then the highlight of the evening was a very personal and candid interview with Max Gillies, preceded by some clips of a few highlights from the very popular Gillies Report and a later piece performed by Max as Rupert Murdoch - for ABC Friends in 2016.

Max spoke for almost an hour on sometimes intensely personal subject matter, including the early loss of both of his parents.

The audience found his stories riveting, from his early career - starting out as a teacher through the historically significant Australian Performing Group years, which Max helped found in the 1970’s and which had a subsequently overwhelming influence on Australian theatre, writing and film.

Then he treated the audience to yarns about the establishment of the Gillies report, including insights into the politics of selling political satire to nervous ABC Executives. “Some things about the ABC never change”, he said, “and that’s one of them”.

He went on to reveal to the audience just how close the world came to John Clarke giving up on being a performer.

John had come to Australia with his wife to enjoy some anonymity in the wake of his overwhelming local NZ fame and success with his Fred Dagg character.

Max told how getting John to actually come and work on the Gillies report was a weekly exercise in cajoling.

It appears if it hadn’t been for Max and his producers prodding and pushing this reluctant genius to perform in front of a camera, we may never have had John Clarke’s life-long body of work.

As usual, the William Angliss institute provided the crowd with wonderful food.

It was certainly an engrossing evening - with scores of non-Friends members being introduced to our organisation in the best possible way.

Peter Monie

President, ABC Friends Victoria

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- **Castlemaine area:** Contact Margaret 0421 338 155 or margaret@nashcc.com.au
- **Eastern (Melbourne):** Contact Neil 0411 487 348
- **Geelong/Corangamite:** Michael Kinnane is acting Chair. Contact Ivor 03 8580 6402 or ivor_donohue@hotmail.com
- **Inner Melbourne:** Contact Russell Huntington 0401 080 762 or huntingtonrk@gmail.com
- **Northern (Melbourne):** Contact Margaret 0421 338 155 or Margaret@nashcc.com.au
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NSW Branch News

ACT

Ranald caught in the ACT at “Public Broadcasting in the Pub”

Many thanks to the Victorian branch for lending us Ranald Macdonald for the first event in the rejuvenation of the ACT Region branch after a quiet few years. Over 50 people turned up for our first “Public Broadcasting in the Pub” to hear Ranald explain how more burdens are heaped on the ABC’s shoulders “while the commercials just shrug their shoulders” – with the \$400 million licence fee handout, removal of requirements for children’s TV programming, and the freedom to focus only on the profitable regions.

Coming the day after JJJ announced that it would no longer play the Hottest 100 on 26 January, and the subsequent criticisms of the ABC by the Communications Minister, Ranald suggested that if a substantial majority was accepted for the Same Sex Marriage plebiscite, the 60% support from a good sample of JJJ’s audience should also be respected. While supporting JJJ, he noted that ABC CEO Michelle Guthrie’s comparison of the costs of JJJ with that of RN was completely misguided, as the costs of broadcasting music were always much less than the production of quality talk programs.

Quoting Phillip Adams, he said that RN had one of the highest IQs of any radio station – with IQ being Involvement Quotient. People listened to RN, and didn’t just use it for background noise. But while much of that involvement was reflected in the high number of podcasts downloaded from all over the world, the vast majority of RN content was heard on radio, and any suggestion that it revert to podcast-only needed to be strongly resisted.

Ranald also pointed out that the ABC’s charter specifically required it to “transmit to countries outside Australia...news, current affairs, entertainment and cultural enrichment” – and yet these very programs had been cut too. An audience member remarked that the government’s recent Foreign Policy White Paper spoke of the importance of working harder to maintain our influence in the region and globally,



Visual evidence of Ranald ‘in the act’.

particularly through our “soft power” assets. And yet one of our most powerful soft power assets, the public broadcasting system, with the capacity to transmit quality radio, television and digital content overseas, was being systematically undermined.

After a lively and at times passionate Q&A (well, perhaps not quite as lively as some of the Monday night ones that you watch), the evening wound up, with many staying

to listen to local singer-songwriter Fred Smith.

As plebiscites seem to be all the rage, we used the pub evening to do our own version, asking about topics of interest for future meetings. Top of the poll were “Investigative journalism in the ABC” and “The ABC and competitive neutrality”. We’re planning to run these and other topics at meetings throughout 2018, so any suggestions for speakers on the two subjects will be gratefully received.

The branch currently has a loose Interim Committee, and is keen for more input into planning and running future activities. Our next meeting will be held at 7.00pm on 13 December at Gorman House. All welcome to come along, or contact us at abcfriendsintheact@gmail.com.

Peter Lindenmayer
Interim Convenor

Blue Mountains

This will be my last contribution to Update as I have resigned as Acting President of the Blue Mountains Branch.

Our branch has been busy as usual, but some things stand out. The first ever National Conference was held on October 6th in Sydney at the NSW Teachers Federation. It was a great venue for a



Mal Hewitt addresses the Blue Mountains AGM.

truly excellent day. I know there will be other references about the Conference elsewhere in this publication but I would like to add that all of our members who attended were as impressed as I was with the quality and variety of speakers who all came and spoke about their area of media experience.

There was so much emphasis on digital presentation, especially from the younger speakers. All of them agreed that the ABC was on the correct path in giving the online programming greater prominence and importance.. This is how media is evolving, and the ABC has no intention of being last entering this phase. Frightening words to many people, but like all new ideas we do adapt much faster than we thought.

I must give credit to our new National President Margaret Reynolds, formerly Senator Reynolds. She has managed to weld a National organisation together in a surprisingly short time, and has a program that will take us in to the next Federal election. We have been asked to lobby our local politicians and any other politicians that we may find ourselves close to sometime. For our branch our next notable event was our AGM. We had a number of positions on the committee unfilled and so the meeting was of some importance to us. However by the end of the meeting we had filled all positions, and so we start 2018 with a new president and she gives us confidence for the future.

We will finish the year with an end of year dinner on 5th December at our normal Meeting Venue the Grandview Hotel in Wentworth Falls. I would like to offer my very best wishes to all the new committee and wish them a successful year ahead.. I hope you have a happy reign and enjoy your time in office as much as I have done.

Margaret Foy
Retiring Acting President

Northern Rivers

On October 6, Peter Dickson(President) and Jennie Hicks (Secretary)were very fortunate to attend the ABC Friends National Broadcasting conference and dinner in Sydney which was held over a day at the NSW Teachers Federation Conference Centre. The following day, Peter and Jennie also attended the AGM of the ABC Friends National, as observers. This was an invaluable insight into the larger world inhabited by ABC Friends, and the ongoing setting of priorities on a national basis. We felt



The gathering at Northern Rivers AGM.

the conference was very worthwhile and informative.

In November a reporter from ABC staff addressed our members in relation to the vital role played by regional ABC in times of emergency, with particular reference to recent devastating floods in our region. Samantha Turnbull from ABC Lismore who works as a "cross" journalist – operating across a number of media platforms and areas – radio, TV and online, proved to be an excellent and engrossing speaker. She provided a detailed picture of the "beyond the call of duty" arrangements which swing into place during an emergency situation, with all hands on deck, and at all times.

Our 2017 AGM followed on November 25th and tentative dates were set for ongoing activities for 2018. Our Executive and area convenors were re-elected unanimously.

Jennie Hicks
Secretary, ABC Friends Northern Rivers

Central Coast

A Tribute to Klaas Woldring

The Annual General Meeting of the Central Coast branch of the Friends of the ABC in August was Klaas Woldring's last as convenor. Klaas has held this position for many years with great distinction. As a result of his dynamic leadership, our branch has been able to attract speakers of the calibre of Chris Masters, Geraldine Doogue, Jeff McMullen, Eric Campbell, Emma Alberici and Sabra Lane. There is also no doubt that, due to his stature as an academic and the contacts he has established in a very busy and fulfilling life, the ABC



personalities who have visited the Central Coast would have done so partly in appreciation of Klaas's commitment towards the ABC. His advocacy has extended to vigorous participation in rallies, delegations and conferences. In addition, he has organised petitions to members of parliament, as well

as written numerous articles online and in print on behalf of the ABC.

ABC Friends is only one aspect of Klaas's life in retirement. He has had associations with the NSW Community Relations Commission, Ethnic Affairs Council, Australian National Archives, the Mitchell Library, the Royal Australian Historical Society and has contributed to and sought to maintain the records of Australia's migrants. He is also a published author in the field of government and politics.

Having lived in countries opposed to a free press, Klaas has been a tireless defender of an independent and properly funded public broadcaster. In his time as convenor he has dedicated himself to making the Central Coast community aware of the value of maintaining ABC services and their role in informing and enlightening the public. He has sought to bring the problems our members have raised to the attention of ABC management and politicians in order to resolve them.

We are fortunate to have had Klaas's intelligent, determined leadership and advocacy in our branch. We can also appreciate that his careers in management, academia and politics have given him the skills and experience to raise the profile of the ABC here on the Central Coast as well as nationally.

Ross McGowen
President, Central Coast Branch

A fuller version of this tribute can be read on the NSW ABCFriends website

Hunter Branch Report

We are pleased to report that there was strong support from members of the Hunter branch of the ABC Friends to hear our two guest speakers, Matt Bevan and Ed Davis speak at the annual general meeting held in late September at the

NSW Branch News

South Newcastle Leagues Club.

Matt Bevan described his first appearance on ABC Radio when at the age of 14 his father, Paul Bevan from 1233 ABC Newcastle, called him to report on a radioactive incident at his high school. Fortunately no ill effects were suffered, Matt assured us. During the famous Pasha Bulker storm in the Newcastle region in 2007 Matt assisted the local ABC station by answering the phones and making tea for the hard-working station employees. He commenced an internship with the ABC in the following year.

After becoming a full-time ABC employee in 2010, Matt has produced a wide variety of programs, both in Sydney and Newcastle, including outside broadcasts with Robbie Buck and Dom Knight before he joined Linda Mottram on 702 ABC Sydney as a regular producer and reporter.

Since 2016 Matt has been reporting the news on weekdays for RN Breakfast with Fran Kelly and on Saturday mornings he presents the very popular Treasure Hunter community program on 1233 ABC Newcastle. It was fascinating to hear how Matt undertakes research for his daily RN Breakfast segments to ensure that listeners are exposed to news from a wide variety of sources which are not normally included in the standard ABC news programs. It was reassuring for the Hunter audience to hear from Matt of the ABC's strong commitment to its regional radio services.

Hunter members were grateful that Ed Davis, NSW Friends Vice-President, was able to join us at short notice to provide an update about the current situation at the ABC, particularly in light of the hostile attacks that had been made on the national broadcaster by a number of conservative commentators, including politicians such as Pauline Hanson.

Ed outlined the efforts being undertaken at the national and state levels of the ABC Friends to prevent further funding cuts and the loss of talent from the ranks of ABC employees, as well as to encourage ABC management to take a strong role in the ongoing media law reform debate.

The following members were elected to fill positions on the **Hunter branch**

committee for the 2017/18 year:

Allan Thomas (President)

Greg Struck (Treasurer)

Colin Lawrence (Secretary)

Margaret Christiansen (Minutes Secretary)

Margaret Conners (Publicity Officer).

General committee members include Anne Kirsten, Alan Baker, Hank Willems and Robert Conners.

Margaret Conners

Publicity Officer
Hunter Branch ABC



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You said **WHAT!**

Open letter to Communications Minister, The Hon. Mitch Fifield

Can we just be serious just for a moment?

Having read your piece in The Australian headed "Shrill Attacks on ABC Adjustments Are Hysterical, Unhinged" (9/10/17), I cannot believe that you, Minister, REALLY believe in what you have written.

You adopt the tone of surprise, astonishment and even of being slightly hurt by those who challenge your pronouncements.

- First, your proposed Charter requirement for "balance" on top of fairness, impartiality and accuracy for ABC news and current affairs coverage.

Yes, there are still some who believe the Earth is flat, but should their views be equally represented? The same goes for Holocaust-deniers, or even those who state that climate change is 'bullshit'.

Should their discredited views be given equal time, or they be equally represented on, say, Q & A panels – in the name of balance?

Most important, though, news stories often build from leaks, sources and whistle blowers. There cannot be 'balance' daily until all the facts are known. And, what happens when a reporter, seeking a response, is met by a "No Comment"?

Fairness over time – and accuracy. These are the prime objectives of responsible news coverage.

It is such a 'crock' that the requirement to imposing 'balance' is the price your government has paid for the (vindictive) Pauline Hanson's vote, plus the seriously threatening so-called 'competitive neutrality inquiry'.

- Second, there is the idea of enforcing specific controls on ABC board appointments, and on the time and allocation of regional and rural coverage through legislation and changes to the Charter. And, your threats to the ABC Board, if it does not publish the salaries of ABC staff receiving over \$200,000 a year for public consumption.

The board of the ABC and its Management have to abide by the Charter and will always be accountable to both the public and to the government of the day, provided they are able to meet the requirements with the funding given them.

There is no need to legislate for regional quotas and specific board representation. The Board and management are demonstrably committed to doing what the commercial media will not – and that is, to give rural and regional Australians a voice.

- Third, the ABC is by statute independent of Government direction with the responsibility of serving all of Australia according to its Charter. The current Government (under both leaders) has attempted to bully and weaken one of our most valuable and trusted institutions. It has reduced funding when more resources are required for the public broadcaster to do its job.

The ABC is publically owned, a vital independent voice in the changing media landscape and as broadcaster (with SBS) responsible to all taxpayers to perform in the public interest.

So – in the words of Mike Brady's song entitled "Where would we be without the ABC", just keep your mitts off and allow the ABC to do its job.

The burden for important, brave, innovative and vital broadcasting for all Australians is being directed more and more onto the ABC's shoulders, while the commercial operators just shrug theirs.

Yet, the Government continues to cut the ABC budget!

You, Minister Fifield, keep on saying that Australia's media outlets support your plans for "reform". But, have you thought why the unanimity of support?

It is obvious that the media moguls want the playing field to be tilted so that change or "reform" means increased profits and power for them – and a weakened ABC.

A national conference of ABC Friends just held in Sydney – and not attended by you or your staff – discussed Public

Broadcasting needs in the changing media environment.

'Democracy Demands Diversity' was the theme of the Friends conference.

The need in this country for strong and independent voices who have the courage to tell it like it is. To that could have been added - 'and a transparency of decision making by both the ABC and by the Government of its policy objectives and determinations'.

Surely – listening to the plethora of right wing commentators, plus those who wish a weakened ABC, those philosophically opposed to public broadcasting, the IPA and members of the ever burgeoning Murdoch Empire and its advocates who have everything to gain from weakening public broadcasting here, in Britain and in the USA – you must realise that we all lose if the Murdochs (Rupert, Lachlan or the aggressive James) totally rule the air waves.

Now is the time to determine whether we in Australia want plurality in the media, a range of opinions and viewpoints offered with the background solidarity of an ABC committed to providing the best of programming, of news, current affairs, children's television, rural and regional coverage, emergency services, documentaries and international reporting, music (classical and contemporary), emergency service reporting, arts and culture etc. etc.

We do need a strong and independent ABC, as (to repeat myself) democracy demands diversity of voices, sources, viewpoints and information.

You, our Minister for Communications, describe the changes you are advocating as "timely housekeeping".

I would describe them as part of a deliberate and continued campaign of harassment and assault being inflicted on 'Auntie' ABC with clear malice aforethought.

Ronald Macdonald

I rest my case.



Join the ABC Friends

There is strength in numbers, and every membership counts at this time of unprecedented attacks on 'Our ABC'.

To join go to www.abcfriends.org.au or phone your local contact below.

ABC Friends NEW SOUTH WALES & ACT

Friends of the ABC QUEENSLAND

ABC Friends SOUTH AUSTRALIA & NT

ABC Friends TASMANIA

ABC Friends VICTORIA

ABC Friends WESTERN AUSTRALIA

President ED DAVIS

President ROSS MCDOWELL

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