

Update

Stan Grant's Shameful Treatment



Compiled by
Dr Diana Wyndham

ABC Management was roundly criticised in May for its delay in responding to hostile, racist remarks directed at **Stan Grant**, the award-winning Indigenous host of the ABC's Q+A. The furore continued until it was eclipsed by a new one in June – when ABC announced that **Andrew Probyn's** position and that of political editor had been abolished.

Grant said he had experienced “grotesque racist abuse” which escalated after his “reluctant” 6 May participation in an ABC panel discussion which highlighted Indigenous perspectives on the monarchy, including the impacts of British colonisation. Grant said on 15 May he would leave Q+A after the next episode, at least temporarily. The Q+A audience showed its support by standing to applaud Grant's emotional farewell speech.

As award-winning freelance journalist **Margaret Simons** explained in *The Guardian* on 27 May: “The controversy

surrounding ABC journalist Stan Grant is about the shortcomings of the media, about the role of **News Corporation** in our national conversation, about the nature and duties of the ABC and, of course, about racism.”

A 2017 survey by **Aon Management Consulting** found that only 17% of ABC staff believed that senior management valued them and the slow response to recent attacks supports this belief. **George Megalogenis**, an award-winning journalist and regular guest on the *Insiders* and *Q+A*, wrote this about his friend:

Stan explained his decision to walk away from the media in structural terms. “No one at the ABC – whose producers invited me on to their coronation coverage as a guest – has uttered one word of public support [in the following ten days]. Not one ABC executive has publicly refuted the lies spoken about me.” (*SMH*, 3 June 2023).

BuzzFeed's political editor **Mark Di Stefano** identified several factors that contributed to the huge fracas, including key personnel changes and ill-timed scheduling decisions; shifting Grant from his role as international affairs analyst to host Q+A which was a frequent target for the ABC's most rabid critics, who accuse it of bias against conservatives; selecting Grant for a 45-minute panel discussion of the role of the monarchy when it was clear his appearance would cause a backlash; and running the segment while the official guests were arriving for the coronation despite being advised to put it at another time (*Australian Financial Review*, 28 May).

The sustained racist campaigns and complaints about Grant's “gratuitously offensive” coronation comments were seen to be part of a right-wing war against the ABC led by **Rupert Murdoch's News Corp** (particularly **Sky News**),

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Update

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From the Editor

We Stand with Stan

ABC Friends quickly responded with a message of strong support to **Stan Grant** following the appalling treatment of Stan and his family on social media and by the **Murdoch** minions at **NewsCorp**. It is regrettable that ABC Management took so long to respond in support of Stan, and to admit that the timing and placement of the panel discussion immediately prior to the Coronation may have been unwise.

We must remember that Stan was invited onto the panel to provide a **First Nations** perspective on the monarchy, and that is exactly what he did. British colonialism has resulted in wholesale theft of land and extermination of First Nations people, hardly a cause for celebration! We must remember, too, that other panel members were not great supporters of the monarchy – **Craig Foster**, **Teela Reid** and **Julian Leeser** – but it was Grant who suffered the abuse. Sadly, racism is alive and well in Australia. The ABC is to review how it responds to racism against staff.

ABC Funding Shortfall, and What We Have Lost

While the Albanese government has made some positive moves to provide certainty on ABC funding into the future, the government must be reminded of the devastating impact of ten years of Coalition government failure to provide sufficient operational funding, resulting in the loss of 1,200 ABC jobs, many of them senior and experienced staff, and the cutbacks in many services once considered essential for the ABC to fulfil its charter. Letters in this Update bemoan the recent loss of state-based news services, retired ABC producer **Ian Parmenter** details the range and diversity of programs which came from the ABC studios in Perth, and the arts community is concerned at the recent axing of two specialist arts editorial positions as part of the "restructure."

According to **Michael Ward**, former planning and policy head at the ABC, the broadcaster's real terms funding is now at a "historically low level" when adjusted for inflation, with income reduced by over \$900 million between 2014 and 2021. Ward says that reductions of the past decade continue to hurt the ABC's capacity to meet legislative objectives, and its real funding fell by 14% between 2013 and 2022, with the funding allocated in the final year of the Morrison government the lowest government allocation in 40 years. He says that an additional \$40-50 million annually is required to return it to its 1983-84 funding levels.

ABC Goes Digital

With the announcement of job cuts and shifting focus from TV and radio to digital in a bid to win younger audiences, **Jonathan Holmes**, former host of *Media Watch* and an ABC journalist for 35 years, says that even with a refreshed strategy, getting younger Australians to connect with the ABC will be an uphill struggle. "The biggest challenge for the ABC has always been being a visible part of young people's media habits. It has always skewed old, with Australians coming back to television in their 40s." The difference now, Holmes says, is that young people are not watching TV at all, with streaming baked into their media habits.

Former ABC broadcaster **Paul Collins** has questioned the new direction for the ABC in 'Our Digital Aunty' (page 9) He says: "It caves in to the lowest common denominator as it struggles for eyes and ears in a highly competitive digital marketplace. The whole process reflects an uncritical surrender to superficiality and anti-intellectualism. It sets the ABC on a course of complete irrelevance."

Shortwave Still an Issue

A recent visit to the Northern Territory provided a reminder that huge areas of Australia are in radio silence since the ABC's cutting of its Shortwave service in 2017. The AM and FM transmitters in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Darwin have a range of 50km at the most. It is estimated that 50,000 people, particularly in Aboriginal communities, are without a radio service, despite the ABC's Charter to serve All Australians. When questioned at the NSW Friends dinner on 20 July about Labor's 2018 promise to provide the funds to restore Shortwave, **Michelle Rowland** indicated that she was travelling to Darwin the next day to meet with First Nations representatives, and would be making an announcement. The result was the launch on 23 July of the First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan (2023-26). <https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/rowland/media-release/albanese-governments-first-nations-digital-inclusion-plan-released>

My thanks to **Dr Diana Wyndham**, **Sue Zeckendorf**, **Raul Arregui** and **Paul Martens** for the production of Update
Mal Hewitt OAM, ABC Friends

The ABC Freeway



Cartoonist: Phil Somerville

Stan Grant's Shameful Treatment

continued from page 1.

The Australian (particularly **Janet Albrechtsen**, a former ABC board member), **Tom Switzer** (who hosts *Between the Lines* on ABC Radio National and runs the right-wing **Centre for Independent Studies**) and **David Flint AM** (leader of **Australians for Constitutional Monarchy**). Their complaints and those of social media trolls were investigated by the ABC's independent **ABC Ombudsman** which, in its report on a televised 45-minute panel discussion about the role of the monarchy which attracted 1,832 complaints, found the broadcaster did not breach impartiality standards during the coronation coverage. The panel discussion was hosted by **Jeremy Fernandez** and **Julia Baird** and the complaints, which were only made about Stan Grant, related to the discussion between Grant, Australian Republican Movement chair **Craig Foster**, Liberal backbencher **Julian Leeser** and lawyer **Teela Reid**.

News Corp denied it played a part in Stan Grant's decision to leave Q+A amid racist attacks and on 24 June Murdoch's Australian media chief, **Michael Miller**, called on ABC to "correct the record", saying that Stevens had made "misleading" accusations that News Corp's coverage was excessive and had encouraged racist social media trolls.

Megalogenis commented (*SMH*, 3 June): "The ABC could have spared [Grant] and the nation this agony if they had included a comment which showed that his views aligned with those made by **King Charles** 35 years earlier. Historian **Mark McKenna** published extracts from the speech by **Prince Charles**:

On 26 January 1988 Charles delivered the major address during the bicentenary celebrations at Sydney Opera House. He was the only speaker to confront Aboriginal dispossession, albeit implicitly and without offering an apology. For Australia's "original people", he said, the process of British colonisation "must all have seemed very different, and if they should say their predicament had not yet ended, it would be hard to know the answer, beyond suggesting that a country free enough to examine its own conscience is a land worth living in, a nation to be envied" (Mark McKenna, *The Monthly*, June 2023, p.5).

ABC Managing Director **David Anderson** said he regretted not defending Grant earlier. Director of News, **Justin Stevens** also confessed, in an interview with ABC Melbourne *Drive* host **Rafael Epstein**, that he had not done enough or responded quickly enough. Stevens said the ABC was dealing with an unprecedented level of attack: "There are new dynamics at play in the media, particularly in **News Limited**, which were piling on our staff individually or on what we do with a clear agenda of seeking to undermine trust in the public broadcaster just because we threaten their business model." Secondly, social media trolling is such a new phenomenon [and staff] are subjected to horrendous abuse (ABC transcript 22 May 2023). The **Public Media Alliance** (the largest global association of public service media organisations) condemned the racist abuse of an ABC journalist in its 22 May news.



"We Stand With Stan" - image and comments posted on 23 May by ABC Friends on https://www.abcfriends.net.au/we_stand_with_stan

Grant was also supported by hundreds of ABC staff around the country walking out of their offices and many carried signs saying, "I stand with Stan." ABC Friends posted support on National e-News and on **Facebook**. **Justin Stevens** told a crowd of hundreds outside the organisation's Sydney headquarters: "Enough is enough. The line in the sand is here, and we will not tolerate our staff being subjected to racial abuse, or any form of abuse. It must stop."

ABC Chair **Ita Buttrose** was quoted by *SMH* journalists **Hannah Story** and **Nick Bonyhady** on 26 June: She was "appalled by what Stan went through" and had been unaware of the abuse he faced. She said that she and senior ABC executives supported Grant and hoped he'd return when ready after eight weeks' leave.

Head of Indigenous News **Suzanne Dredge** said her colleagues were heartbroken by Grant's statement and his stepping back from hosting duties. "We have thick skin. It's OK to scrutinise us in our work if we get it wrong. But it's not OK to come at us with personal attacks," she said. Dredge described a fresh ABC review into how the broadcaster handles racist attacks of its staff as a landmark opportunity. She was responding to an email **David Anderson** sent to all staff on 23 June which said:

There is an intention from the broadcaster to review how they respond to racism towards staff, saying the reporting from some commercial outlets had been "sustained and vitriolic". How the ABC supports people in these moments is important. Stan Grant has stated that he has not felt publicly supported. For this, I apologise to Stan. The ABC endeavours to support its staff in the unfortunate moments when there is external abuse directed at them.

Grant received loud cheers and whistles at the **Sydney Writers' Festival** on 26 June, when he read excerpts from his new book, *The Queen is Dead*. One woman shouted, "We love you Stan".

More Aussie Content



Do Aussies want to see more Australian content for their viewing pleasure? Well according to the **Roy Morgan** report commissioned by **Australian Made** and **Screen Producers Australia** (SPA), the answer is a resounding **Yes**.

SPA is a founding partner of the “**Make it Australian**”

campaign, and the CEO, **Matthew Deaner** advocates for more investment in Australian content to be shown for our viewing enjoyment, which according to the Roy Morgan report is what 89% of Australians surveyed want.

Revive is the Australian government’s new policy that will fund the arts and culture sector. *Revive* will be funded by **\$286 million** over five years. **Creative Australia**, a new arts investment and advisory body, will be established under the policy. Remember, more Aussie content means more Aussie jobs.

See: “New research highlights Australians’ desire for more Aussie content” at <https://australianmade.com.au/latest-news/2023/new-research-highlights-australians-desire-for-more-aussie-content/>

See also: Bryan Brown tells the National Press Club that Australia must fight ‘for our culture’ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-07-12/bryan-brown-national-press-club-of-australia-address/102592002>

Editor’s note: This is from **Paul Reid**, former ABC Friends NSW Committee Member.

Congratulations Laura!

ABC Staff have voted for **Laura Tingle** (ABC 7.30’s chief political correspondent) to become the staff-elected director of the ABC Board. She began her part-time position on 1 May, replacing **Dr Jane Connors** (an adviser on ABC editorial policies and a former *Radio National* manager) who finished her term on 30 April.



Four Corners investigative reporter Louise Milligan tweeted: “So absolutely delighted for the ABC, that she is our new staff-elected director. Laura is a beacon of decency, intelligence and integrity”.

Laura Tingle tweeted:

Thanks for all your good wishes on my new job on the ABC Board. Quite the experience having to run in an election rather than just report on one! Thanks to my colleagues who also put their hands up with the wish to contribute more to the public broadcaster we care about so much.

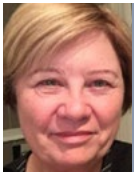
BBC Exterminates *Dr Who*

On 26 October 2022 the ABC announced, that after than 50 years, *Doctor Who* will no longer be available free on ABC television. The BBC announced a partnership with **Disney+** and from 2023 on, viewers wishing to see *Dr Who* will have to pay \$11.99 a month for a Disney+ subscription.



When the ABC decided to drop the show in 1976, the **Doctor Who Club of Australia** (DWCA) was formed by science fiction fans at the University of Sydney who picketed the ABC. Thanks to their campaigns outside ABC offices (with posters, leaflets and a life-sized **Dalek**) the ABC reversed its decision and *Doctor Who* became one of the broadcaster’s most popular series. This time the DWCA accepted defeat but was “shocked and saddened” by the decision.

From the National President



Cassandra Parkinson
National President,
ABC Friends

When the ABC announced a restructure of its operations in July, most attention focused on redundancies and cuts to programs and services. But underpinning the restructure was the ABC's **Five-Year Plan** and its commitment to a **Digital-First ABC**. The strategy will significantly alter the ways in which the ABC creates, produces and distributes content.

The Plan states:

By 2028 the ABC will be an integrated digital operation and most of the audience engagement with the ABC will be through our digital products.

It goes on to say that by 2028:

We will have implemented a digital-first approach to commissioning, producing, and distributing content. We will have increased investment in our core digital products – *ABC listen*, *ABC iview* and *ABC News* – and expanded awareness and use of the ABC's content and services, particularly among younger Australians.

What will a Digital-First ABC look like?

We can expect to see more on-demand radio, podcasts, and less live radio. The ABC intends to "rationalise" its broadcast **radio** services to "align them better with audience needs". Some radio stations may disappear or be merged.

Given declining audience numbers for many ABC radio offerings and the fact that many new electric vehicles no longer include AM radio, it might make sense to reduce the AM footprint, thus freeing up funds for investment in other, more popular technologies. But the **unique audio content** the ABC offers should not be reduced. And it's essential that ABC audio is accessible for all audiences. AM radio can cover large areas, which is vital for maintaining services in a country like Australia, especially during natural disasters. **The ABC's emergency service must be maintained.**

There'll also be less focus on **broadcast TV** and more streaming through *iview* and other platforms, such as **YouTube**. There'll be more VOD (video on demand) for news and entertainment, with the ABC giving priority to creating new content especially for digital.

The ways in which people access news are changing and the ABC says there's less appetite for hard news stories. The ABC plan says that content will need to be more varied and

"authentic" to the platform where it appears. It talks of the need for relatable stories that have an impact on people's lives, and suggests that the production of such stories might extend the appeal of ABC news and reach more audiences. I worry that this might lead to a dumbing down of *ABC News*.

It's important that the ABC not under-estimate younger people and their appetite for weighty subject matter. They may not watch much live TV, but that doesn't mean they're uninterested in penetrating content, particularly on issues of interest to them. And let's not forget that **the ABC's greatest strength is in investigative journalism**. The ABC will need to consult younger people to fully understand what motivates them and what they'd like to see from their public media organisation.

We also need more international news coverage, despite the ABC finding that it's not quite as popular as local or national news. The ABC has an obligation to keep Australians well-informed of the world outside our borders.

The ABC wishes to attract younger audiences, but to succeed and build loyal new audiences it will need to work hard to promote its programs outside its own platforms. The ABC recognises this need in the Five-Year Plan, but it's no easy undertaking. And it's vital that the ABC brand be widely recognised on all platforms where ABC content appears. Potential audiences need to learn what a national public media organisation is, what it does, why it's important, and why it can be trusted.

The strategic priorities in the ABC Five-Year Plan are ambitious and they'll be difficult to implement.

Of fundamental importance is the need to produce **quality content**, whether in news, entertainment, children's programs or documentaries. The race for new audiences shouldn't come at the expense of depth and analysis.

The digital-first strategy should aim to guarantee **access** to the ABC for all Australians, regardless of where they live. At present there are large swathes of this vast land where the ABC isn't available – or if it is, only at prohibitive costs. That problem must be rectified.

Managing the transition will be difficult, but the ABC has a responsibility to make it work for its employees and its audiences. Consultations with interested groups will be crucial and ABC Friends stands ready to support that process.

Underpinning all of this is the need for more funding.

I can't see how the ABC can do its existing job, let alone manage a major transition, without increased funding. The ABC's funding shortfall is already bad, but it's set to worsen over the next five years because the indexation formula the

government has applied to the ABC falls well short of current and projected inflation.

Without more funding, expect more program cuts, more job losses and more impacts on quality.

Over coming months we'll be calling on our members for support as, once again, we campaign to restore and renew Australia's public media organisation – because once it's gone we'll never get it back.



David Anderson
Managing Director
ABC

Dear David,

I am writing on behalf of ABC Friends about the structural changes at the ABC which were announced yesterday, and particularly about the removal of the position of ABC Political Editor. Given the crucial role the ABC has in holding our national political leaders accountable, many of the 71,000 members and supporters of ABC Friends are concerned about this development.

We don't understand what implementation of the ABC Five Year Plan will mean for either ABC staff or its audiences. However, given the long and difficult adjustments the ABC has been forced to make over several decades now, we think it vital that the Plan's objectives be well understood and that its implementation be handled sensitively, lest further damage be done to our national public broadcaster. The latest changes do not even seem to have been understood by ABC staff, let alone the general public.

We find it difficult to conceive how a national public broadcaster can be effective without a Political Editor, and we have concerns about the implications of other changes, such as the elimination of the standalone arts team.

ABC Friends is worried about the impact which management's handling of these sensitive matters is having on individual ABC staff members, and on morale in the organisation more generally, during what will be a difficult transition for the national broadcaster.

We ask for an opportunity to meet with you to discuss these matters at your earliest convenience. I will phone your office on Monday [19 June 2023] to seek an appropriate appointment.

Sincerely

Michael

Dr Michael Henry AM
Acting President
ABC Friends

Media Release: 19 November 2018

Labor Will Restore ABC Shortwave Radio to NT

<https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id:%22media/pressrel/6342087%22;src1=sm1>

The link to this media release is above - here is the transcript:

In Alice Springs today [19 November 2018], Shadow Minister for Regional Communications, **Stephen Jones MP**, joined with **Senator Malarndirri McCarthy** and the **Hon Warren Snowdon MP** to announce that a **Shorten Labor Government** will provide the ABC with \$2 million in funding to help re-establish shortwave radio services across the Northern Territory. Australians living in remote areas already face significant communications challenges and the loss of access to ABC services from shortwave radio cuts people off from emergency broadcasts as well as being an important connection to the rest of Australia.

The Liberal Government's budget cuts to the ABC forced some bad decisions on the organisation, including the decision to cut their shortwave radio transmissions in January 2017.

Since then, organisations like the NT Government, NT Cattlemen's Association, Northern Territory Seafood Council representing commercial and tourist fishing businesses, Amateur Fisherman Association, Indigenous Rangers, long haul transport drivers and the Toyota Land Cruiser Club representing Grey Nomads have raised concerns about the loss of these services. The Territory is a draw card for grey nomads with around 600,000 visits each year.

For remote First Nations communities, shortwave radio equipment is relatively cheap to purchase and does not require external power to operate. By contrast, other forms of communication such as mobile phones, TV and broadband all rely on mains power.

In January 2017, Opposition Leader **Bill Shorten** wrote to then Prime Minister **Malcolm Turnbull** asking him to work with the ABC to restore the shortwave.

Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator Nigel Scullion criticised the ABC's decision but was unable to convince his own government to reverse it, again leaving Territorians without a voice in Cabinet.

Labor believes that it was premature to cut ABC shortwave radio services and that if the ABC had not been under intense budget constraints, this decision would never have been made.

Labor has been campaigning against the ABC's decision to cease shortwave transmissions since it was announced in mid-December 2016. We know how important shortwave is, that's why we are switching it back on. By switching the shortwave back on a Shorten Labor Government will ensure, towns, communities and travellers are connected to the rest of the nation.

Labor's funding commitment of \$2 million to restore ABC shortwave services is in addition to Labor's commitment to reverse the Morrison Government's \$83.7 million unfair cut to the ABC, as well as our guarantee of funding certainty over the next ABC budget cycle.

Stephen Jones MP

Shadow Minister for Regional Communications Regional Services, Territories and Local Government

The Hon Warren Snowdon MP

Shadow Minister for Indigenous Health, Shadow Minister for Northern Australia, Member for Lingjari

Luke Gosling MP OAM

Minister for Solomon

Editor's Note: This ALP Media Release was published in Update, December 2018, on page 20.
It's time for the Albanese government to honour this promise.

Our Digital Aunty



Paul Collins

Pearls and Irritations, 21 June 2023

The ABC is in trouble again as it abandons its cultural role to become “fully digital” by 2028.

On [15 June] the ABC told a “pretty flabbergasted” political editor **Andrew Probyn** that he’d been made redundant along with 120 others, 41 of them in news, in a major cost-cutting measure. The purpose: so that the ABC could save money to “become more like YouTube, Spotify and Netflix instead of a traditional broadcaster,” to quote *The Financial Review*.

The ABC puts it more discreetly in its new **Five-Year Plan**. It says that “By 2028 the ABC will be an integrated digital operation and most of the audience engagement with the ABC will be through our digital products” as it moves toward “a digital-first ABC.”

Less noticed than Probyn’s departure was the fact that the talented Sydney-based political reporter, **Ashleigh Raper**, was voluntarily leaving the ABC to join Ten News First.

The whole process is a self-inflicted disaster. Of course, the ABC must go digital; in many ways it’s already digital. But what aunty means by “fully digital” is something more. It’s really about chasing an audience, particularly a younger audience, on a broad spectrum of digital platforms and of tailoring content to suit that audience.

It’s about chasing eyes and ears with content those eyes and ears want to see and hear. I think this is a disastrous betrayal of what the ABC is fundamentally about as Australia’s premier cultural organisation.

Sure, as a former ABC specialist editor in religion and a superannuated radio and TV presenter, I would say that, wouldn’t I? People like me are living in an idealised past, while the present ABC leadership is bravely replacing legacy roles like editors, technical operators and presenters with people specialising in on-demand digital productions who are presumed to be much more in-tune with contemporary Australia, particularly young people.

Actually, the **Background Paper** (BP) to the Plan reveals much more than the Plan itself. The BP concedes that the ABC is no longer a public broadcaster focused on accurate information and cultural development, but is an audience-aware, digital producer for the 21 million Australians who use social media. It says that “social media users are spread across platforms and tend to consume content that they find to be personally relevant,” while admitting that “the landscape changes frequently.”

This is the nub of the argument of the **Five-Year Plan**: an absolute focus on “personally relevant” audience demands

with a focus on the latest obsessions and interests, to the exclusion of factual and cultural content that reflects a broader world.

Traditionally, the role of a public broadcaster is to focus on local, national and international realities that reveal a bigger picture and context, rather than the constant emphasis on what the BP calls “meeting audience expectations [and looking] for ways to reach and engage younger audiences using third-party platforms.”

In fact, as society increasingly degenerates into crass individualism, we need an even stronger public broadcaster that is focused on broader reality, rather than obsessive subjectivity. The BP ignores the fact that sometimes the young grow-up and their needs change, and that unmitigated individualism might well be a passing fad.

The BP also tells us that an increasing number of Australians are showing “clear signs of news fatigue and disengagement.” As a result, “news providers will need to increasingly focus on on-demand services and personalisation to ensure they remain relevant.” This seems to me to be an abject surrender to a Trumpian, post-truth, individualist world, which is precisely the opposite of what a public broadcaster, committed to factual accuracy and responsibility, should be doing.

It is precisely the role of the ABC as a *public* broadcaster to maintain objective standards of news reporting to counter what the BP calls “news avoidance and the formation of partisan ‘echo chambers’ in the media landscape.”

It’s clear in the BP that AM radio is in trouble because its sound quality is inferior to FM. That creates real problems for the capital city Metropolitan stations which are on the AM band, and for some of Radio National’s urban based transmission. But, as the BP admits, AM radio is important in a country the size of Australia, especially in isolated areas, given that the ABC is “the only news organisation ... with the scale and expertise to deliver sustained coverage across natural disasters.” This was abundantly demonstrated in the bushfire crisis of summer 2019/2020.

While there is much in the BP that is factual, it fundamentally surrenders to modern individualism by focusing almost entirely on the projected priorities and interests of the audience, while essentially abandoning the ABC’s pivotal role in cultural formation. It caves-in to the lowest common denominator as it struggles in a battle for eyes and ears in a highly competitive digital marketplace.

The whole process reflects an uncritical surrender to superficiality and anti-intellectualism. It sets the ABC on a course of complete irrelevance.

Reproduced with the permission of **Paul Collins** – historian, broadcaster, presenter, interviewer, commentator and writer who has had a long association with ABC TV and radio. From 1993-96 he was Specialist Editor of Religion for the ABC. From 1990-95 he presented *Insights* on Radio National and from 2004-06 he presented 150 episodes of *Sunday Spectrum* on ABC TV.

ABC and the Budget

When the **Labor** government delivered its second federal budget on 9 May it allocated funding of \$6 billion to the ABC until 2027, while the SBS will receive \$1.8 billion, most of which has been allocated to the operating budgets of each broadcaster.

National ABC Friends President **Cassandra Parkinson** [created a table which summarises the budget measures and our response to them.](#)



The budget at a glance

Our policies	What's in the budget	Our response
Improve funding certainty with five year funding for the ABC.	The government has confirmed its commitment to 5 year funding in the forward estimates.	The government's decision is an important first step in creating a more sustainable funding base and improving the ABC's capacity to plan.
Fully index ABC funding and restore \$84m that was lost between 2019 and 2022 as a result of the Coalition government's indexation freeze.	The government has agreed to index ABC funding, but it is not clear that the level of indexation will keep pace with the CPI, or the escalating costs of production. The October 2022 budget restored \$84m as Labor promised in opposition.	If the indexation formula doesn't compensate fully for inflation, the ABC's real level of funding will fall further behind, with more losses to programs and services.
Roll the Enhanced News Gathering (ENG) program into the ABC's operating budget to remove uncertainty and secure the program's future. The ENG has been funded on a three-yearly basis since 2012.	The government has rolled ENG program (around \$15m per year) into the ABC's operating grant, a welcome move that gives certainty to the program going forward. The TV audio description program has also been rolled into the operating grant, at a cost of \$1 million a year.	We welcome the government's decision to guarantee the future of these programs, especially the ENG which provides a valuable service for local communities.
Restore ABC funding which was cut by around \$80 million per annum between 2013 and 2022.	There is no increase to the ABC's operating grant.	With no additional funding the ABC will continue to struggle to provide quality journalism and Australian content.

The budget at a glance - *continued*

Our policies	What's in the budget	Our response
Enhance funding for ABC International. The ABC's international service all but disappeared in 2014 when it was stripped of \$200m.	The Department of Foreign Affairs has allocated an additional \$8.5 million over 4 years to expand FM transmission infrastructure in the Pacific. In 2022 the government allocated \$32m over 4 years for the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy.	While the additional funding for transmission will not support programming, it will allow the ABC's voice to be heard more widely and give communities in the region access to a valuable service.
Guarantee access to the ABC for all Australians. After the ABC discontinued shortwave radio services in 2017, many communities in northern Australia lost access to the ABC.	The government has renewed access to the VAST satellite service through 2030.	The government's decision will provide certainty for those Australians who rely on VAST for their TV services. We need additional measures to improve access for communities that are unable to use VAST.
Remove the ABC efficiency dividend.	The government has scrapped the efficiency dividend, a welcome move.	The dividend was a punitive measure that put further strain on the ABC's limited resources. We welcome its end.

Here are some responses:

ABC Managing Director David Anderson:

The five-year budget allocation reflects the ABC's important role in Australian life and the value it delivers to the community. The funding provides a solid foundation as the ABC continues to evolve its services to meet the needs of Australian audiences. The funding certainty provided by the Budget is vital, as it enables the ABC to plan with confidence. Notwithstanding the five-year funding outcome, the ABC will need to meet the challenge of upward cost pressure, and position itself to continue to be trusted, relevant and valued by all Australians. I will soon announce a new Five-Year Plan setting out the ABC's priorities. The plan will ensure that we embrace the opportunities of the future, and that the ABC remains the most important cultural institution for all Australians.

Communications Minister Michelle Rowland:

The Albanese Government will deliver a more connected, informed, and empowered Australia by providing funding stability to critical institutions in the communications sector in the 2023-24 Budget. Labor's commitments provide certainty, and support many important areas... These measures will collectively improve online safety, safeguard our democracy, enhance emergency communications, and support regional and First Nations communities – key priorities for the Government.

ABC Alumni director and former Editorial Director of the ABC Alan Sunderland:

As ABC Alumni has **pointed out before**, the damage inflicted on the ABC budget in recent years means the broadcaster would need at least an extra \$80 million a year, every year, just to bring us back to the real level of funding it had in 2013. Today's announcements go nowhere near addressing that structural damage. The bleeding has been stemmed, but the wound remains.

ABC Friends National President Cassandra Parkinson:

The Budget includes some valuable measures that will provide the ABC with greater certainty and ability to plan, but it is disappointing that there is no improvement in the ABC's operational funding after years of cuts. ABC Friends advocated strongly for the introduction of five-year funding, indexation of ABC funding and the incorporation of the ABC's enhanced news gathering program into the ABC's operating grant. The program, which funds around 70 journalists and the creation of content in local communities, has been funded on a three-yearly basis since 2012. The change will give it a secure future and commits the government to extend funding beyond 2024. We are pleased that these measures have been included in the Budget. We also welcome the expansion of transmission services in the Pacific, which will build on funding for the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy and allow greater FM transmission for Radio Australia. But after years of brutal cuts, the government needs to do more to repair the harm that was done to the ABC.

Is the ABC Suffering from Friendly Fire?

Compiled by Dr Diana Wyndham

In recent months the ABC has endured many attacks, from both external and internal sources. **Peter FitzSimons**, in his 4 June *Sun-Herald* interview with veteran ABC reporter **Kerrie O'Brien**, asked about external attacks on the ABC and O'Brien responded: "For 20 of the last 26 years, when the conservatives have been in power, it has been under attack and has sustained damage" [and it still faces] "huge challenges" and "it's in danger of losing its way". These political attackers were encouraged by the **Institute of Public Affairs** and the **Murdoch** media. *

The latest attack has unexpectedly come from within the ABC. On 15 June ABC Managing Director **David Anderson** told staff about plans to cut 120 jobs when he released part of a major restructure, starting on 1 July as part of the ABC's new **Five-Year Plan**. This is "a first step to build an ABC that is prepared for a digital-majority audience" away from linear products. ABC Director of News **Justin Stevens** said this would highlight the role of social media in news distribution. He said the ABC needed to adapt how its content is provided to attract and retain younger audiences. The cuts include 41 from the news division including journalists, editors, camera and sound operators on 7.30, *Australian Story*, *Four Corners* and the investigations team, as well as a further seven jobs in the previous regional and local division. The highest profile position to go will be that of political editor **Andrew Probyn**, who had twice been named as **Parliamentary Press Gallery Journalist of the Year**. The decision drew an angry backlash from ABC staff and others as Probyn told external media, including *The Guardian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian*, the decision had left him "gobsmacked" and "flabbergasted". He said:

I struggle to understand the direction the ABC is going in that it could consider the role of political editor is not needed.

Hours before Anderson met ABC staff, the ABC's NSW Political Reporter **Ashleigh Raper** announced that she was leaving

after 15 years to become Political Editor at the 10 Network.

When **Matt Golding** heard that *ABC News* would lose two broadcast-focused roles in the Canberra Parliament House bureau he produced a cartoon headed: "Bureau skinned".



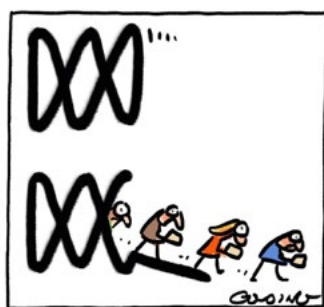
Illustrator **Matt Golding** reproduced with permission

Former Foreign Minister **Bob Carr** tweeted "Sacking Probyn and replacing him with junior reporters who can get stuff on **TikTok** will drive down audience even further. The Chair and Board must reverse this." Former host of *Insiders* **Barrie Cassidy** said it was "like saying a restaurant doesn't need a head chef. The cooks stay. The ABC now needs to explain how the kitchen works without a head chef." Dozens of angry letters appeared in the *SMH*, including this from **Philip Bell**, formerly the Foundation Chair of the Media and Communications Unit of the University of NSW:

ABC management has forgotten its charter and seems to have lost its way. Axiing the arts unit and sacking senior political journalists continues to dumb down the national broadcaster. Soon the state television news bulletins will be completely tabloid, sensationalist and sports-obsessed, aping their commercial counterparts. ABC MD David Anderson needs to be reminded that his public corporation is charged with providing quality programming that advertisers won't pay for, especially sophisticated coverage of national and international politics and Australia's vibrant visual, literary and performing arts. This is true of radio as well as multi-platform productions and television. If viewers want to hear ex-footballers screaming about rugby league, there are plenty of options available, but only the ABC employs expert journalists and commentators in fields almost entirely ignored by the advertising-dependent broadcast media. (See also Update April 2023, page 5).

The ABC defended the decision by saying that the Parliament House Bureau had more than 20 political reporters and editors, plus other senior correspondents including **Laura Tingle**, **David Speers** and **Greg Jennett** and outside Canberra it has **Sabra Lane (AM)**, **David Lipson (PM)**, **Sarah Ferguson** on 7.30, **Annabel Crabb**, **Patricia Karvelas (RN Breakfast)** and Chief Election Analyst **Antony Green**.

Media writer **Calum Jaspan** reported (*SMH* 19 June) that Communications Minister **Michelle Rowland** has requested a briefing from ABC management. **Dr Michael Henry AM**, Acting National President ABC Friends, expressed concerns to **David Anderson** in a letter, which is published separately. In response to his letter, **Dr Henry** and **Margaret Whealy**, ABC Friends NSW & ACT, had a 90-minute meeting with **David Anderson**. Details of the meeting were posted in 23 June ABC



Illustrator **Matt Golding** reproduced with permission

Friends News on https://www.abcfriends.net.au/abc_friends_visit_abc_md

On 16 June **Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance** Director **Cassie Derrick** issued two media releases: "ABC cuts disrespectful to arts workers and audiences" and "ABC job cuts won't secure audiences or future-proof the public broadcaster". She also said the ABC decision was at variance with the **Revive** National Cultural policy which seeks to restore the importance of the arts in Australia's society and economy. ** When *Revive* was launched on 30 January **Tony Burke**, Minister for the Arts, said:

It is a comprehensive roadmap for Australia's arts and culture that touches all areas of government, from cultural diplomacy in foreign affairs to health and education. Our artists are creators and workers. This sector is essential for our culture and for our economy. As the sector recovers from years of neglect followed by the tough pandemic period, *Revive* will set the arts sector on a new trajectory with fresh momentum.

The blow to the arts community was also soundly condemned in *Limelight Magazine* which covers music, arts and culture.

Jason Blake wrote:

The first mass job cuts at the ABC since 2020 will heavily impact the corporation's arts coverage and, some argue, may put the corporation in breach of its own Charter, which requires it to "encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia". The cuts will [reduce] arts coverage with two of the corporation's senior arts editors made redundant and the reporting team distributed among news and a newly created Arts, Music and Events department. It marks the end of an online editorial dedicated solely to arts coverage.

The ABC's dedicated online arts team (led by editor **Dee Jefferson**) will now be "managed from the Digital Innovation team" The loss of Jefferson's particular expertise has been widely commented on. "I don't know another person as wholeheartedly dedicated to Australian arts, another editor as rigorous and talented, or another arts writer as thorough, thoughtful and passionate," wrote *Guardian Australia's* Arts Editor **Steph Harmon** in a Twitter post. **Michaela Boland**, a former national arts, culture and entertainment reporter for ABC, and former national arts reporter with *The Australian*, wrote: "ABC management's degradation of the arts continues". Jane Howard, arts and culture editor at *The Conversation* described the cuts as "a slap in the face to every artist and arts worker in Australia". Media commentator Ben Eltham wrote: "Disastrous decision from ABC management. Their arts team was already small and massively under-resourced. A dark day for Australian culture." The former BBC Arts Director **Jonty Claypole** wrote (*SMH* 19 June) "Yet again, the ABC diminishes the arts – the soul of its survival."

Salient comments by **Paul Collins** are in the preceding article but **Karl Quinn** (*SMH*, 24 June) had a different view:

To reach younger audiences, the ABC needs to go where those viewers are – principally the platforms via which they consume content, such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and, increasingly, TikTok ... and that means finding people who can work with those media. The task ahead of the ABC is enormous. It needs to cater to its existing but declining older audience, while developing the technological and distribution means, to reach a younger audience. It is staring at an abyss of irrelevance and preparing to take a leap of faith. It can't be sure where it will land, but the ground under it is crumbling fast and it has no choice but to jump. In having identified the challenges so clearly it has at least shown it is willing to make a move.

While **Ita Buttrose** remained silent, **Andrew Probyn's** sacking incited a savaging from both the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader on 21 June at the Midwinter Ball. **Anthony Albanese** said "Good to see the ABC here tonight. You guys have had a bit of a week. No money for a political editor. No money for an arts division. But enough money for *The Weekly* to have multiple episodes of a segment called 'Albo's f---ing dog'." **Peter Dutton** called this treatment a "disgrace" [adding] I think the ABC should be ashamed of its actions."

After the ABC faced heavy pushback about the proposed scrapping of local Sunday night local news bulletins, **Calum Jaspan** reported (*SMH*, 1 July) that **Justin Stevens** told staff it will include an "Around the States" segment in the new national bulletin, which would showcase its highest-value local original and investigative journalism and capture the key stories across the nation and sport coverage that meets audience needs.

On 5 July the ABC announced that *Insiders* host **David Speers** would take on an expanded role in the ABC's federal political coverage and within the ABC's Canberra Parliament House bureau as ABC News' National Political Lead. **Calum Jaspan** reported (*SMH*, 5 July): "David Speers appointed ABC News political lead after **Andrew Probyn** departure". The ABC insisted. "This announcement is a separate initiative to the ABC's recent proposed changes to the Canberra bureau and across ABC News, designed to increase our capacity to serve digital as well as broadcast audiences".

Jon Faine, who had a 30-year career on local radio (two years on *RN* and two with ABC TV) made insightful comments in "A Boring Aunty: How the ABC is Alienating its Audience" (*SMH*, 18 June):

Adopting a "digital-first" strategy has been a flawed ABC mantra since **Michelle Guthrie** turned everything upside-down seven years ago. Claiming that taking content and putting it online before it goes to air on "legacy" radio or TV will somehow magically attract a younger audience is as laughably unsophisticated as it is wrong. ...The repetitious mantra from panicking managers is always about being more balanced, more cautious, while at the same time insisting on program output that will attract a younger audience. That approach will not only never attract a younger audience – it is alienating the existing audience, leaving no audience at all...

The Board and Management must respond appropriately to prevent a replication of the unhappy episode when **Michelle Guthrie** was MD and **Justin Milne** was ABC Chair.

***Editor's Note 1:** See also "The ABC Move: A Poisoned Political Legacy". This, and the former government's election of Board members, are examples of it continuing its influence.

Laura Tingle and **David Anderson** are the only non-Coalition government-appointed Board members.

****Editor's Note 2:** See "National Cultural Policy – Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place", by Dr Tess Howe, President, ABC Friends, NSW & ACT in Update April 2023, p.11.



A letter by Ian Parmenter in *The West Australian*, 15 July 2023.

As usual, the ABC is under attack from within, especially where anyone outside Sydney is concerned.

For the past 50 years, this former print journalist has had an intimate relationship with the ABC, having joined the ABC in Western Australia (WA) in 1973 as a Publicity Officer, after arriving from London as a "Ten Pound Pom". By 1974, through the ABC's then foresight, I managed to become a TV producer/director, after a training course in Sydney. It was always a struggle getting our output noticed nationally. At one time, the BAPH states (Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart) provided brilliant shows for both local audiences and the network, though it was always tricky to convince Sydney that we had something to offer.

However, I did manage to pull off a few coups with music and the Arts. The first national series we achieved was *Manteca*, a ten-part jazz fusion series filmed at the **Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts** (WAAPA), which was done on a shoestring. Then there was *Rock Arena*, a series that grew to become *Rage*, which is still with us. The first outside broadcasts from WA, which I initiated, were the **Leeuwin Estate Concerts** with **Ray Charles**; **Kiri Te Kanawa** and **James Galway**; and **Dionne Warwick**. Each one was backed by the **West Australian Symphony Orchestra** - WASO - which in those days was part of the ABC. It should be remembered that all the nation's symphony orchestras were part of the ABC. Again, it was produced on a shoestring.

Having witnessed the organisation's decline in recent times - with creative talent leaving while top-heavy management takes a Sydney-centric approach to all it does - the last thing the ABC needs is a digitally-focussed organisation. Many Australians who rely on the ABC still do not have the luxury of digital radio, fast internet speeds, even mobile telephone services, yet we are constantly reminded of the various apps and technological options available. The latest acts of folly are the sacking of **Andrew Probyn** - one of the ABC's most effective News and Current Affairs journalist/presenters. In recent news, the ABC has announced that **David Speers**, who joined the ABC in 2020 straight from **Rupert Murdoch's** Sky News Australia, will effectively be his replacement. Other appalling measures include the removal of regional cities news on Sundays. Sorry, Chair **Ita Buttrose** and Managing Director, **David Anderson**, you may be perfectly satisfied with the services that you have in your comfortable Ultimo, Sydney, headquarters. Most of the country is not happy with how you're destroying the nation's most trusted broadcaster.

Editor's note: **Ian Parmenter** was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia on 26 January 2011 for service to the food and tourism industries as an event director, author, journalist and broadcaster. Another letter he wrote appears in Update, September 2020, p. 4.

Backlash to ABC Cuts Grows as Artists, Authors and Performers Urge Rethink



Linda Morris
Sydney Morning Herald, 28 June 2023

Australia's live music, theatre, and arts sectors have called for the ABC to reverse its axing of specialist stand-alone arts news positions as the backlash against the national broadcaster's newly announced restructure grows.

Live Performance Australia, the peak body for the live entertainment industry, has warned any removal of the two specialist editorial roles would have a "damaging impact" on the coverage of Australian arts and culture in a letter it sent to the ABC chair, **Ita Buttrose**, last week. Live Performance Australia's chief executive, **Evelyn Richardson**, said Buttrose and the ABC board had been urged to reconsider its strategy.

The **National Association for the Visual Arts**, representing 35,000 artists nationwide, expressed grave concerns that the restructure would detrimentally impact the quantity and quality of arts content shared by the ABC. NAVA's executive director, **Penelope Benton**, said:

This is a significant loss. At a time when interest in the arts in Australia has never been higher, it makes no sense for ABC to diminish its specialist editorial staff. The job of co-ordinating and curating arts stories nationally will now fall to just two remaining arts journalists with no specialised editorial support.

Two dedicated arts editor positions are among 120 redundancies announced 10 days ago in a proposed shift of ABC resources to digital platforms with their workload to be handled by ABC's Digital and Innovation team. The newly created Arts, Music and Events department will produce the ABC's Sunday arts TV show *Art Works*, *Rage* and one-off events such as ANZAC Day and New Year's Eve. The ABC says it intends to increase its arts content in 2024 with savings from the restructure reinvested into arts coverage.

In the letter to Buttrose, Richardson said Live Performance Australia had noted the ABC's charter responsibility to promote musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia, and performing arts attendance by Australians outstripped all major sporting codes combined. She said:

Audiences are diverse in their ages and background and drawn from across metropolitan, regional and rural

communities across Australia. Given this, if the ABC is genuinely interested in engaging and growing its audience, it would be investing more in its reporting and coverage of the performing arts as opposed to further scaling back its coverage as has been the trend over recent years.

Benton said the decision contradicted the ABC's digital-first approach, and the terms of its charter:

Without a strong in-house unit to create and commission arts programming, the national broadcaster will fail its charter responsibilities.

Managing director of the **Australian Festivals Association**, **Mitch Wilson** said his organisation was concerned about the announcement of redundancies offered to arts editors and called on management to ensure there was no fewer staff covering the sector:

We do, however, welcome the creation of the new Arts, Music and Events departments which will bring a greater focus on live music and festivals to the ABC's reporting. A greater focus by the ABC on music and arts reporting on digital platforms and social media is welcome as that's where festival audiences get their content.

Meanwhile, the chief executive of the **Australian Society of Authors**, **Olivia Lanchester**, will report her deeply held concerns in a newsletter to be distributed Wednesday:

For writers the impact is twofold: fewer opportunities to supplement their income with journalistic work, and diminished exposure of their books. In the context of precariously low author earnings, and at a time when the government is seeking to underscore the vital contribution creators make to the fabric of our nation and culture, this decision is disconcerting.

The ABC maintains the changes will in no way diminish the ABC's ability to meet its charter responsibilities to arts coverage. "Our commitment to the arts remains as solid and comprehensive as ever, with our excellent screen arts team moving into a new screen Arts, Music and Events department and our arts digital roles coming together within the newly formed Digital and Innovation team," an ABC spokesperson said. "Reports to the contrary are not accurate."

Linda Morris is an Arts and books writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*.

History of ABC Logos

Compiled by Dr Diana Wyndham

This is adapted from *Fandom*, a wiki hosting service, founded in October 2004 by **Jimmy Wales** (the co-founder of *Wikipedia*) and **Angela Beesley**. It is now owned by a for-profit Delaware company.

The **Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)** was founded on 1 July 1932 as the **Australian Broadcasting Commission**. The first diagram shows the first ABC logo to be used. The changes to the ABC logos are seen in date order.

In 1965, ABC graphics designer, **Bill Kennard**, who had been experimenting with telerecording of the cathode ray oscilloscope displays, submitted a design which was part of the waveform from an oscilloscope. The letters A-B-C were added to the design and it was adopted as the ABC's official logo. Kennard was presented with £25 for his design. It was used until 1974.

On 1 July 1983, the Australian Broadcasting Commission changed its name to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation while keeping the 1974 logo. In 2002, this logo was phased out in favour of the next one, but it was revived just 16 years later. In 2021, this logo of 47 years was the ABC's longest-running design.

On 1 July 2002, with the celebration of its 70th anniversary, the ABC adopted a new logo (designed by **Harcus Design**) for all of its media outlets. This logo used a silver 3D texture with the crossover design being left intact and is flanked with the ABC type. It was used until mid-2019 and is still used on the *ABC Children* website.

Following the on-air revival of the plain 1974 logo in 2014, the ABC reinstated the classic symbol in 2018 while using a new custom corporate font - *ABC Sans* - introduced by *ABC News* in 2017. The change comes with a press release that the ABC released on 12 February announcing a new brand positioning under its tagline, *Yours*.

1932-1935



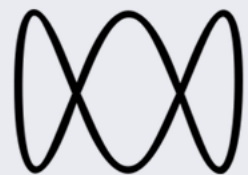
1935-1947



1947-1965



1965-1974



1975-2002



2002-2019



2019 +



History of ABC Friends Logos

Compiled by Dr Diana Wyndham

The first ABC Friends logo was used on ABC Friends National Newsletter Update from February 2014 until February 2022.

The second ABC Friends logo was used from February 2022 to April 2023 – see the explanation below for the change:

On 24 February 2022 **ABC logo 'no go'** was posted on ABC Friends Website. Here is an extract from the response by **Margaret Reynolds** (then ABC Friends National President) in Update, April 2022, p. 5:

Last week [15 February 2022] Senate **Estimates Senator Andrew Bragg** used parliamentary privilege to attack the ABC because the ABC Friends had been using the **ABC logo** to defend our ABC. The **ABC** subsequently released a statement on its website stating that “the ABC does not permit any of its content, logos or intellectual property to be reproduced for political purposes” and that “approval will not be granted for any use of ABC content or logos on any other intellectual property in political advertising or political messaging”. ABC Friends has used the **ABC lissajous** (the curly symbol) in our logo for many years without complaint from any quarter. That symbol has helped us convey an important message to the world: ABC Friends is here to support the ABC against persistent attacks on its independence and massive funding cuts.... ABC Friends has begun revising our logo (see above, centre) and our campaign materials. **But make no mistake.** We won't be silenced. In fact, we're determined to strengthen our campaign efforts. In a time of misinformation and attacks on democratic institutions around the world, the need for a trustworthy independent broadcaster had never been greater”.

2014–2022



2022–2023



The New ABC Friends Logo

The new ABC Friends logo was developed in April 2023 after ABC Friends National Committee commissioned **Mark Schiffer**, director of **Blick Creative**, to design it. It is intended to reflect the familiar ABC Lissajous in a new unique and identifiable style and to be positive, engaging, and approachable for communicating with a wide range of audiences. It was used to launch the ABC Friends' new, national e-news in May 2023 and it is also widely used on ABC Friends' social media sites. The e-news link is: https://www.abcfriends.net.au/tags/email_news



Letters

Sydney Morning Herald

It seems to me that the ABC's pursuit of ratings involves attempting to tell people what they want to hear, whereas the basics of its Charter are to tell people what they need to hear. I know which approach I prefer. **Aidan Cuddington, Umina Beach**

Stan Grant's quitting from Q+A is most disappointing and every attempt should be made by the ABC and support must come from more intellectual public opinion to reverse his decision. His resignation is a temporary win for racial prejudice and bullying but it should be another nail in the coffin of social media, which allows the type of abuse that aims to destroy people's lives. The simplest solution is for all thinking people to discontinue the use of this media and to completely ignore any reports of its vile content. **Geoff Harding, Chatswood**

Jacinta Price says the Voice will divide our country along racial lines. The treatment of Stan Grant is further evidence that we are already divided. The Voice will not prevent racial discrimination and vilification but it is an opportunity for ordinary Australians to take a stand against those who continue to see our First Nations people as second-class citizens. **Philip Cooney, Wentworth Falls**

Yet again we're told the ABC intends to do more to "resonate with younger audiences". If that is part of a strategy aimed at increasing Aunty's overall appeal, then it is surely doomed. Even a cursory analysis of our national demographics would tell the ABC planners that the 65+ age segment of the population is huge, and growing. If anything, they are more entitled to relevant programming from their public broadcaster than the young, having paid more taxes. **David Salter Hunter's Hill**

I worked as a health services manager in Alice Springs between 1994 and 2009. I found the local ABC staff very helpful in always reinforcing cultural protocols, most importantly around appropriate consultation with local Arrernte people on issues relating to them. Neither the ABC staff nor myself would have ever consulted local shopping centre workers or shoppers to advise on matters relating to Arrernte people, particularly on such sensitive issues as child abuse or neglect. Perhaps Dutton's media advisers could recommend that he undertake some media training that includes ensuring he attend to local cultural protocols before any return trips to Alice Springs. Dutton appeared to be just taking a leaf from John Howard's book on the NT intervention,

without having learnt any of the lessons of how patronising and paternalistic that exercise was experienced on the ground. This is precisely the reason why the Voice is so critical. **Vicki Stanton, Kiama**

I agree the ABC needs qualified First Nations people and those with culturally diverse backgrounds on the board. However, I am not sure that this will put an end to the racism evident at the moment. Sadly, many First Nations high achievers in both the media and sport have been racially abused for years. Not only is it racism but tall poppy syndrome, where the high achievers are put down simply because they have worked hard to achieve their goals. **Robyn Lewis, Raglan**

The ABC is responding: last year Suzanne Dredge became the Head, Indigenous News and leads a stand-alone Indigenous Reporting Team. This year Laura Tingle became the staff-appointed member of the ABC Board. The Minister for Communications nominates other ABC Board appointments for five-year terms. Those selected by the previous government may not reflect the notion that the ABC belongs to all of us.

Diana Wyndham, North Sydney

I fail to understand in what universe the ABC can claim a political editor is not needed and how it can sack a world-class journalist like Andrew Probyn. If indeed the concern is to "chase a youth audience" the youth I know are very politically engaged. They want big questions asked and they want accountability. Particularly of our leaders. They also want showcased music and the arts, dance and the environment. It's not an either/or dilemma. What the youth I know and the people I know want is a properly funded public broadcaster that truly represents the people of this country. We aren't interested in lightweight confection. We want a true alternative that celebrates our country and invests in truth, a sense of self and all we can be proud of. We don't want a \$2 shop version. The ABC we love is world-class, and it's the ABC we deserve.

Francesca Stahlut, Armidale

Francesca Stahlut of Armidale could not have put it better as she speaks up against yet another attempt to make our ABC lightweight and irrelevant. But will the management listen? Over the past few decades, we have watched the ABC being continually attacked as biased, had funding stripped from it, producing no more Australian films and now this. The silent minority are intelligent people whether young or old and deserve better. Are we to be reduced to listening to continual sound bites and to have no more sensible and responsible journalism? Maybe best to just switch off completely and read books all the time instead. **Christine Stewart, Glebe**

The ABC is focusing on digital output and will no longer need savvy political reporters. This seems to be reinforcing the trend that so many of us already fear. That people will only be fed what they already know and look for – a trend well served by social media. The main benefit that I've found from broadcasters such as those on Radio National is their wide array of ideas and topics. RN makes interesting subjects I might never have thought of otherwise, and I can listen to it on an old-fashioned radio. **Ariel Johnson, Eastgardens**

To be brief, minister, all you need to do is check the ABC's financial history ("Communications minister seeks briefing from ABC management on cuts", June 19). Years of assaults, funding cuts and slow bleeds under Coalition governments have weakened the ABC and reduced it to the desperate measures we are seeing now. Questioning the manner in which economies are applied is one thing, but if the ABC was properly funded, they would not be needed and our national broadcaster could focus on excellence rather than on base survival. **Meredith Williams, Northmead**

The Age

I am at a loss as to what direction the ABC is heading in news and current affairs. A move to long-form, on-demand video and in-depth digital content is overdue as the shallow end of "informing" discussion on multiple platforms of the ABC television channels has been apparent for years. But to discard Andrew Probyn's skills doesn't augur well for the in-depth content. And while there is an intellectual frisson around long-form journalism it can be elaborated emptiness. It's necessary for the ABC as the national broadcaster to go past the cliché of "speaking truth to power", a promo for one current affairs show, and provide thoroughly researched content on a range of issues and go well past an insular staff fascinated with the Canberra bubble. Probyn always showed a critical view of the sincerity of the nation's political class and should not have been let go. **Des Files, Brunswick**

I am struggling to understand and in what universe ABC overlords do not see a role for a chief political correspondent. Wait. It must be the one in which replacing a respected, master communicator with the less experienced is seen as good value. Budget pressures are clearly coming home to roost for management. And we listeners and viewers are poorer for their deficient judgement. Those of who use digital platforms to catch up, still look to the broadcast news for deeper analysis and daily wrap-ups. Is the ABC truly prepared to sacrifice its position as political news breaker and exemplar in this way? **Sally Holdsworth, Malvern East**

How very sad and concerning that the ABC is cutting its news staff numbers including the role of political editor held by Andrew Probyn. Democracy needs good journalist to survive. The ABC is one of few journalism outlets that provide this. We must keep the ABC strong. **Marguerite Marshall, Eltham**

The West Australian

As an avid ABC listener and viewer all my 64 years, I was shocked at last Sunday's 7pm news and thought I was on the wrong channel, as I couldn't make sense of what I was viewing. I will now switch to the commercial stations on Sunday night to view WA and other national and international news. You have lost me, Aunty, after a lifetime of enjoying the 7pm news on Sunday. And the sacking of Andrew Probyn is an absolute travesty. He is an excellent journalist who I have always respected immensely. What on earth is the ABC doing? **Lisa Telford, Claremont, WA**

We should no longer foot bill for the ABC. Having lived in the country, I appreciated the ABC with its coverage throughout the regions – valuable, and in emergencies, lifesaving. I also believed that, being government-funded, it remained free of commercial pressures, and was an independent counterfoil to mass media owned by a few wealthy individuals. The faith in its independence has been eroded over the last few decades by the increasing focus on Eastern States inner-city news and issues. Accusations of ABC bias, in the past scoffed at as driven by conservatives, can no longer be so condescendingly dismissed. The report in Saturday's West Australian details the latest in a long list of decisions by ABC management destroying the very fabric of the service. Abandoning WA is the end. No longer can funding by the taxpayer be justified. **Enzo Leone, Marangaroo, WA**

The rudderless National Broadcaster has truly lost ideal navigation with its latest redundancies and belt-tightening program cutbacks. Yet the recent junket of the corporation's board from Sydney to Perth and return by air, plus accommodation, and fancy, spare-no-expense visuals reveals to all taxpayers where the ABC's budget is being seriously misdirected. The timing of the announcement regarding job losses and program pruning indicates that the Ita Buttrose-led body had already made up its mind during the Perth visit. Therefore, the ABC will either eventually sink or spin out of control entirely of its own volition. **Harvey Pearce, Queens Park, WA**

For the ABC board and management, it is possible they think "the west" means Bathurst in NSW. **Ron Edwards, Trigg, WA**

State News

NSW & ACT

The Winter Dinner and ABCF Planning

The ABC Friends' NSW & ACT Winter Dinner was held on 20 July in the heritage-listed building at 238 Castlereagh Street Sydney which was an excellent choice, given its radical and literary connections, which are outlined in a separate article.

Yvonne Weldon AM gave the Welcome to Country. Auntie Yvonne is a City of Sydney Councillor and a proud Wiradjuri woman, born and raised in Sydney while keeping strong ties to her homelands in Cowra and the Riverina. She is also a published author; her novel *Sixty-Seven Days* was published in 2022. Auntie Yvonne is a much-admired leader and educator among the community and the first Aboriginal person to be elected to the City of Sydney Council.



Councillor Yvonne Weldon AM, Tess Howes and Alice Ossowski with Yvonne's novel

The Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications, was our Guest Speaker. I argued, in my reply to the Minister, that although the establishment of Five-Year Funding is very welcome, it does not address the fact that the ABC has been forced to endure \$526m in cuts since 2014 presided over by successive Coalition governments, with significant consequences that are well-known to us all. I applied the Aristotle rhetoric framework of logos, pathos and ethos in my response, appropriate in this venue as it was formerly the Hellenic Club. I assured the Minister that ABC Friends intend to maintain a productive dialogue with her, and

the Minister for Arts, supported by ABC Alumni, to help chart a more positive way forward for the ABC.

Special guests at the event included **Cassandra Parkinson**, President of ABC Friends National; **Dr Michael Henry**, President of ABC Friends, Victoria; **Jonathan Holmes**, Chair, ABC Alumni; **Helen Grasswill**, Deputy Chair and co-founder of ABC Alumni as well as one of our much-loved ABC journalists; and **Geraldine Doogue**. Members

of the ABC Executive were invited but tendered their apologies.

The raffle was a resounding success. This year it was organised by Jenny Trowse to celebrate the ABCF NSW & ACT 2023 theme 'connecting the branches', and offered 20 fabulous gifts generously donated by the branches and individual members of the NSW & ACT Committee. The raffle was drawn by Jenny Trowse and Paul Reid.



Jenny Trowse and Paul Reid drawing the raffle

Many thanks to all the raffle contributors, the NSW & ACT Events Committee and the events team at Beta for helping to successfully organise and deliver our major event of 2023.

ABC Friends Planning

At the Dinner, the Minister emphasised her support for both national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, and announced the commencement of a formal review of the ABC and SBS centred on funding and governance. The Minister's positive, hopeful outlook for the ABC was premised on the decision by the **Albanese Government** to establish Five-Year Funding terms for the ABC and SBS, which will deliver greater certainty to both our national broadcasters. Friends at the Dinner were pleased to learn that the review will critically examine current funding and governance arrangements of both public broadcasters. At the conclusion of the Review, recommendations will be presented that will seek to protect the ABC and SBS from arbitrary funding cuts, threats of privatisation and government interference. **I would like to encourage all our members and supporters to lodge a submission before end of August 2023.** Please look at the instructions and supporting documentation at the following web page and lodge your submission for the Review here: [Review submission portal](#)

ABC Friends NSW & ACT is continuing to consult with branch members to finalise our **Strategic Plan**, due to be released at the end of this year. The Strategic Priorities and project leaders are summarised in the April issue of Update on page 21. There is much work to be done, so please let the project leaders know if you are keen to assist.

Our 2023 theme is 'connecting with the branches'. Over the last few months, I have been fortunate to be able to meet with Friends from the Northern Rivers, Blue Mountains and Northern Suburbs of Sydney and hope to visit more branches later this year. Please let us know if you would like us to attend and speak at a branch event – remember we are all working together for our marvellous ABC.

Dr Tess Howes
President, ABC Friends NSW & ACT

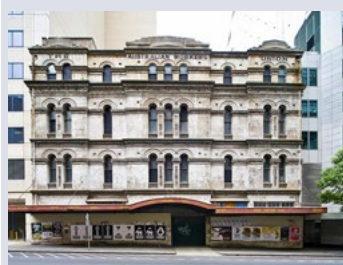


The Hon Michelle Rowland, MP and Dr Tess Howes

ABC Friends NSW & ACT Winter Dinner

The event was held on 20 July at the Beta Restaurant, 238 Castlereagh Street Sydney - a building with an interesting past:

In 1878 it was built for the **NSW Protestant Hall Company Ltd** and run by the Loyal Orange Institute



The Australian Workers Union between 1920 and 1970

In 1893 it became **William McNamara's** socialist bookshop. He was the stepfather of **Bertha** (who married **Henry Lawson**) and **Hilda** (who married **Jack Lang**)

In September 1895 the 2000-seat auditorium was full when **Mark Twain** told his stories

In 1938 it became the headquarters of the **Australian Workers Union**, which published *The Australian Worker* - the oldest continuously produced labour newspaper in the world

The fourth story was designed by the architect, **John Burcham Clamp**, and added between 1924-27

In 1979 it was bought by the **Hellenic Club** and meticulously restored as the **Alpha Restaurant** on the ground floor and **Beta Events** on two upper levels.

The Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications, was the special guest speaker, as referenced in the ABC Friends NSW & ACT Report.



The audience

Victoria – Local Groups

The latest ABC announcements – the **Five-Year Plan**, the sacking of **Andrew Probyn** and the loss of yet another 120 positions – have energised our volunteers to get out where the people are to spread our message.

At their local farmers' market the **Northern Melbourne group** garnered over 200 signatures on a letter to the Treasurer requesting that ABC funding be restored. They engaged the youngsters with an ABC for Kids quiz that was very popular. (Do you know what sort of animal Fergus from *Playschool*, is?) And they spoke to hundreds of people about the critical role of ABC Friends.

The **Western Melbourne group** sponsored a session at the **Williamstown Literary Festival** where **Matthew Ricketson**, co-author of *Who Needs the ABC?*, powerfully demonstrated the threats faced by the ABC. He was joined by ex-ABC presenter **Sami Shah** who spoke about his experiences working at the ABC. This event was held shortly after the release of the **Five-Year Plan**, and many festival attendees were incensed about the restructure and potential cuts within the Arts section of the ABC – and they promptly signed up to join ABC Friends. Our two new flyers were also popular: one focused on the importance of the ABC to the culture of Australia and the other explained why the ABC is critical and how ABC Friends ensures its survival.



Gaye Whitney, Jenny Dwyer, Anne-Maree Newbold and Phil Corser at the Williamstown Literary Festival.

In July, veteran ABC reporter **Dr Gael Jennings** will be the guest speaker for **ABC Friends Ballarat**. The Ballarat group is also assisting at a panel discussion on the importance of radio and the future of broadcasting to mark 100 years of radio in Australia. This event has been organised by ABC Friends members **Dr Jennifer Bowen** and **Marion Croke** in conjunction with the **Eureka Centre in Ballarat**. It will be held at The Eureka Centre at 6:00pm on Thursday 23 November 2023 – 100 years after the first Australian radio broadcast.

State News

ABC Friends **Southern Bayside** are hosting an evening with **Zoe Daniel MP**, and ex-ABC presenter **John Faine**, in August at the **Brighton Town Hall**. They are also finalising the ABC Friends fundraising calendar for 2024. This is the fourth year that Southern Bayside has helped other local groups raise much-needed funds.

Our local group members continue to be active in keeping pressure on our politicians to adequately fund the ABC and to address the threats it faces. **Eastern group** members are very active, writing to their local members and Ministers. And three of the **Western local group** will be visiting their local representative, The Hon **Bill Shorten**, to let him know there are many constituents who care that the ABC delivers on its charter by being an independent and properly funded national broadcaster. Staunch **Eastern group** members also continue to display our banner along major roads at peak hours.

The **Geelong local group** continues to work with other local grassroots organisations to push for a better ABC presence to and representation for the residents of the area. Currently Geelong news is more likely to be broadcast if it is of interest to Melburnians rather than those from Geelong, despite a population of almost 300,000 in the Geelong area. Geelong members have been handing out flyers at local events to educate people about ABC Friends and encourage them to get involved.

In September convenors of all the local groups in Victoria will be meeting in Melbourne to liaise, share and learn from each other. Over the past few months we have been working on Goals and Strategies for Local Groups and are developing resources to help local group office bearers. The face-to-face meeting will allow us to celebrate our successes and prepare us for the year ahead.

In other Victorian news, **Jennifer Bowen** has embarked on the preparation of a history of ABC friends in Victoria, with some interesting discoveries already. Our organisation has had a lively history of activism, and the article on logos of the ABC and ABC Friends in this edition of Update gives something of a sense of it.

Gai Mooney
Secretary and Groups Convenor, ABC Friends Victoria

Western Australia

In the last edition of Update we were planning a forum on ABC broadcasting in regional WA. We had a number of speakers interested but not enough lined up to set a date before I went overseas for four weeks. We will look at this again when all of our Committee are back from various locations.

We held a stall at the **May Day Festival** in **Fremantle** on 30 April. The weather was fine and the crowd friendly. **David**

Templeman, MLA, Member for Mandurah, and Minister for Culture and the Arts, came along and asked for a photo with us. **Stephen Dawson, MLC**, joined in. We sold a lot of our old merchandise at reduced rates. Kids loved the free buttons, and Bananas in Pyjamas T-shirts in kids' size 14 were popular with girls.



L to R: Front: Politicians - David Templeman, MLA; Stephen Dawson, MLC. Rear: ABC Friends - Liz Millward, Treasurer; Terri Brown, Assistant Treasurer; Jenny Meyrick, Vice President

The ABC's decision to axe state 7pm news bulletins on Sunday nights has caused a lot of anger in WA. We sent an email to our members and supporters headed "**ABC or EABC?**" (Eastern Australian Broadcasting Corporation, folks). We had a big response – 40 people emailed us with their opinions and we enrolled 16 new members. We are talking to WA MPs to encourage them to contact the ABC's Sydney management. Why should we gripe more than any other state outside NSW (or Victoria)? Well, there's the two- or three-hour time difference. There's the fact that WA state news is not adequately covered in national bulletins already. And the local ABC has been told not to put more than five local stories in its own bulletins, and in fact has apparently been averaging only two. Many of our members are not digital natives and therefore are unable to input their stories to programs like **Life Matters**. WA is a very large and prosperous state and should be known for more than bushfires, beaches, shark attacks and iron ore.

Cathy Bardon
President, ABC Friends (WA) Inc

South Australia/Northern Territory

The diary is pretty full of political activity and one of our key projects is engaging with political organisations. The following is a snapshot of the activity in June, July and August.

Firstly, ABC Friends SA/NT was invited to give a presentation to the **Hagar Luncheon Group** who meet once a month.

The membership is currently 78 and members include three current ALP members of the Federal Parliament, four current ALP members of SA State Parliament, three former Ministers in the Hawke and Keating Governments (the highest-ranked being **John Dawkins**, former Treasurer), members who were in Unions or long-term members of the ALP, and the current Lord Mayor of Adelaide. The luncheon was held days after the ABC **Five-Year Plan** was released and the position of Political Editor was abolished. There was lively debate and concern expressed for the future of the ABC, which all members present (32) connected with.

The next invitation was from the **ALP Boothby Federal Electorate Council**, which also meets monthly and, by chance, it was also the same day the Premier sent an open letter to the ABC Chair and Managing Director lamenting the loss of SA Sunday night news. There was strong support for the retention of local news and for the open letter from the Premier. There was strong support for ABC Friends from the 50 Boothby FEC members present.

On 5 July a community forum of 156 people was held at Belair Hotel with guest speakers, the Premier **Peter Malinauskas** and the Treasurer **Stephen Mulligan**. During question time ABC Friends SA/NT was given the opportunity to address the Premier about the Premier's open letter to the ABC. The audience was strongly in support of the letter. The Premier wishes to have further contact with ABC Friends and we have been given access to the Premier through the Adviser of Community Engagement in the Office of the Premier.

On 12 July, with the Waite ALP sub branch at Belair Hotel, **Peter Vandeleur** (Vice-President) and **Judy Gonda** (Secretary) gave a presentation about ABC Friends to about 25 members. The invitation came as a result of the Hagar Luncheon presentation. However, the agenda is sent to 125 members who will see that ABC Friends are attending the meeting. Waite has the largest membership in the Boothby electorate.



Daryl Regan with Premier Peter Malinauskas

ABC Friends SA/NT will be meeting **Rebekha Sharkie** on 29 August at the Mayo electoral office in Mt Barker. We will also contact the Member for Sturt, **James Stevens** to arrange a meeting, in addition to the Greens and more Liberal politicians.

Daryl Regan
President ABC Friends SA/NT



ABC Friends at the 12 July meeting

JOB VACANCY

Volunteer for Treasurer ABC Friends SA/NT

Members and Supporters are invited to apply for the volunteer position of Treasurer who will be a member of the SA/NT Executive Committee which meets at the Mitcham Library on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 7pm. It is an exciting time for ABC Friends around Australia as a national approach to programs, membership and interaction with the community is evolving. Although the ABC has gained support from the Government much more needs to be done and you can contribute by joining this very productive team.

Role

The Treasurer provides financial planning advice to the Executive Committee which is an integral part of the budgetary and business planning process

The Treasurer keeps an account of all monies received and disbursed by and on behalf of ABC Friends SA/NT

The position is a primary Signatory to the online Bank SA account and on line pay pal account

The position has access to a national membership and financial data base

Responsibilities

- Financial reporting to Executive Committee and membership
- Monthly PayPal reconciliation
- Petty cash management and reconciliation

Skills

- Knowledge of on-line spreadsheets
- Basic Fluency with word processing software
- Knowledge of customer relationship management software
- Knowledge of basic accounting practices
- Knowledge of statutory and financial reporting
- Preparing the Annual Budget and report to the AGM

This position will not require extensive accounting knowledge but as a member of the Executive committee, will provide an excellent opportunity to contribute to the Business and Operational plans of ABC Friends SA/NT who are part of ABC National. Join a committee that has business and operational plans in place and contribute to the strategic direction of ABC Friends SA/NT.

For more information or to apply for the position please contact:
Daryl Regan, President ABC Friends SA/NT

email: darylregan@hotmail.com

Adelaide Writers Week

2-7 March 2024

Expressions of Interest

ABC Friends SA/NT are very excited to announce that along with ABC Friends Victoria we will be participating in the six-day **Adelaide Writers Week** (AWW) 2024.

The Director, **Louise Adler** has offered ABC Friends (gratis) a quarter-page ad in the AWW printed program of which 25,000 copies are distributed. AWW would also be happy for the book tent to include a Friends bookmark in any book purchased.

Sonya Feldhoff, who presents ABC local radio's weekday afternoon program broadcasts, has organised for ABC Friends signage on the North Stage and ABC Friends will produce a corflute to also be displayed on the stage.

Further work is needed to organise this event which attracts thousands of people, local, international and from interstate attend. ABC Friends SA/NT members and Supporters are invited to submit an Expression of Interest in joining the working party being established to make this great opportunity a resounding success.

Please send your Expression of Interest to **Daryl Regan**, President ABC Friends SA /NT via the following email:
sa@abcfriends.net.au

Tasmania

On 21 May 2023 **ABC Friends Tasmania** and the **University of Tasmania's Media School** jointly hosted a public discussion on the future of the ABC in Tasmania. The timing of the forum was to mark the 199th anniversary of the birth of independent journalism in Australia when, in 1824, **Andrew Bent** published articles in his *Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser* in defiance of the Colonial Government's censorship regime.

The topic of discussion was: in a period of rapid social, economic and technological change, how might the national public broadcaster evolve to ensure:

- it meets the public's need for reliable and objective news and information vital for a healthy democracy;
- it contributes to the Tasmanian community's self-identification and resilience by informing, entertaining and reflecting that community; and
- it contributes to respectful and reasoned discussion and debate about pressing and emerging issues confronting Tasmanian society.

The discussion was chaired by **Professor Alana Mann**, Head of the Media School at UTAS. Presenters were:

Martin Flanagan – a Tasmanian journalist and author of 16 books, who has written extensively on Australian culture, sport and the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Deborah Fleming – who worked in newspapers and with the BBC in the UK before joining the ABC. She was Executive

Producer of the *7:30 Report* in both Brisbane and Sydney and founding Executive Producer of *Australian Story*. She won a Walkley Award in 2005 for her 'outstanding contribution to journalism'.

Peter George – now retired after a career in journalism and broadcasting spanning 40 years, Peter is one of Australia's most experienced and respected international journalists. The ABC's first Middle East correspondent, Peter was a foundation reporter with *Foreign Correspondent* and an investigative journalist with *Four Corners*.

All three presenters pointed to serious current inadequacies in how the ABC meets the needs of the Tasmanian community, with all of them pointing in particular to shortcomings in current affairs coverage. You can listen to their presentations by copying this link: https://www.abcfriends.net.au/andrew_bent_panel_discussion_2023

Deborah Fleming argued that, despite the best efforts of ABC Tasmania radio presenter Leon Compton and some good recent work, particularly by its Regional Investigative Team, ABC coverage of critical issues in Tasmania was not up to scratch. She noted that even a well-resourced ABC would struggle to adequately cover the current convergence of critical social, political and environmental issues in Tasmania. Local ABC is inadequately resourced and the complexities of important issues are not being investigated adequately. Meanwhile, Tasmanian ABC audiences are decreasing and getting older. As the quality and relevance of current affairs coverage diminishes, Ministers and power brokers are increasingly confident that they can ignore the ABC, either by not appearing on its programs or by providing little more than sound bites when they do. Deborah believes current affairs



From left to right: Peter George, Deborah Fleming, Martin Flanagan and Professor Alana Mann

State News

coverage has to be both reactive and proactive. Reactive coverage entails daily detailed interrogation of the events of the day. Proactive coverage entails investigative work that “digs deeper, shifts the dial, breaks and makes news, and, where warranted, results in inquiries”. She briefly outlined the history of the diminution of TV current affairs coverage from when Tasmania had its own 7:30 Report equivalent (30 minutes per weeknight) to now, when local issues are covered cursorily in local bulletins and in Leon Compton’s morning ‘variety’ radio program.

Deborah drew the audience’s attention to former ABC News Director **Alan Sunderland’s** *States of Neglect* essay (<https://abcalumni.net/2022/10/31/states-of-neglect/>) and argued that there must be innovative, low-cost ways, utilising recent advances in technology, to restore capacity for scrutiny to the ‘regional states’ – i.e. areas outside the Sydney-Canberra-Melbourne triangle. Tasmanian current affairs must be made ‘meaty’ again so that it can’t be ignored by politicians and other powerful interests and so that issues that are currently ignored or glossed over, receive the attention they warrant. She suggested a small collaborative team of local journalists, led by someone like Leon Compton, to delve deeper into state issues on a daily basis.

Peter George declared that he is a believer in “free, fair and fearless journalism.” He acknowledged that today’s journalists face challenges his generation of journalists didn’t. They confront a 24/7 news cycle with rolling deadlines, multiple outlets to feed, demands to produce more content with fewer staff on lower pay, while someone in the background constantly monitors ‘click bait’ to assess ‘how good a journalist’ they are. Peter suggested that, although today’s journalists might be just as well-trained and just as committed as the journalists of his generation, their journalism is more tepid, less aggressive and less dogged in character. When he arrived in the ABC’s Hobart newsroom in the 1970s, the ABC had an aggressive management that revelled in holding power to account. The ABC in Tasmania had a reputation for hard-hitting news and current affairs and as a result was ‘must-watch’ media with a faithful audience who regarded ABC current affairs as relevant, impactful and engaging. He referred to some recent TV news ratings which paint a very different and disturbing picture, with audience numbers for ABC TV nightly news lagging far behind the commercials. Peter argued that loss of audience was due in part to increasing workloads and decreasing resources at the ABC. However, he suggested it is due mainly to a change in management – ‘perhaps more cowed, perhaps too cautious, perhaps co-opted, perhaps simply too close to the Tasmanian oligarchy’.

Peter returned to Tasmania seven years ago and said he was surprised at how ‘tepid’ and ‘sparse’ ABC reporting of controversial issues was – particularly of environmental issues. Both Peter and Deborah stated that in their opinion Channel

7 News usually covers environmental issues more adequately than does the ABC, a view echoed by several members of the audience. He concluded:

At a time of great change and many threats, the public broadcaster, which I’ve always seen as the jewel in the crown of our democracy, is best served by “blood and guts reporting” – sleeves rolled up, digging into the entrails, aggressive, incisive, dogged reporting that unsettles the status quo, challenges the orthodoxy of Tasmanian power structures and clings on like a terrier. That is a sea change that can only come about from independent and courageous leadership by management. It will piss off complacent politicians but it will bring back the loyalty of Tasmanians.

Martin Flanagan identifies himself as “someone who believes in journalism. To me, journalism is about the fact that the world is never as I imagine it to be. The story starts where my preconception ends.” Although the profession includes “some of the shallowest and most cynical people you’ll ever meet,” journalism also encompasses “true believers” – truly honourable people determined to discover and report the truth. Martin reminded us that globally, around 70 journalists are murdered every year and that currently more than 500 are in prison. Globally, journalism is in crisis – journalistic forms are under enormous pressure and undergoing rapid change. Martin opined that Scott Morrison gaining the highest political office in the land without ever being realistically assessed or examined is illustrative of the crisis in journalism.

Despite having cogent criticisms of the ABC, Martin says his support for it stems from the great deal of good work it has done over his lifetime and because it “does things the commercials won’t do - and will never do”. He says that while we might argue about what constitutes good journalism, most people know when they’re in its vicinity and the fact that the ABC is Australia’s most trusted institution really does mean something. Based on 32 years working in the media industry (at Fairfax), Martin has observed that media organisations are very easy to subvert, to muzzle, to be robbed of their enthusiasm, of their desire and hunger to do their job. This can be achieved through Board and CEO appointments. But he suggests that perhaps the most effective way to do it is by un-nerving middle management. This is because in media organisations, it is invariably middle management that defines the note and ambit of journalistic enquiry. Martin concluded by urging those who care about good journalism to engage in explaining its importance within their social circles, within the community at large and particularly to the young.

ABC Friends Tasmania wants the ABC to be the best it can be in serving the Tasmanian community. We will continue to engage with our members and with local ABC to this end. If you have ideas or views about what the ABC does well, where it needs to improve and how that improvement might come about, please contact us by email: tas@abcfriends.net.au.

Rowan Wylie
Secretary-Treasurer, ABC Friends Tasmania

NSW Branch News

Blue Mountains

We were recently privileged to welcome **Susan Templeman**, our Federal MP, to our monthly branch meeting.



Sue Bate, Jill Hogwood, Sue Noske and Susan Templeman
Federal MP for Macquarie, holding *Bluey*.

Susan explained her position as **Special Envoy for the Arts** as bringing people together and fixing practical things that might not be the Minister's job; to bring people together to make sure the Arts is being supported by the Government, in whatever way possible. As **Special Envoy for the Arts**, Susan reports to the Arts Minister. Although she is not on the Executive, she works very closely with the Arts Minister's office to make sure that issues are discussed by the Caucus as they need to be, with support. Her role intersects with the Communications Minister **Michelle Rowland**, where some issues overlap. She reaches out to non-Labor Party MPs and forums around the country with Independents like **Helen Haines**, National Party MPs, Liberal MPs, as well as some Labor colleagues, because the government wants everyone to be talking about the Arts and what is really key in our national culture. To quote Susan, "I describe my job as Special Envoy for the Arts as being basically able to nag any Minister, and, as Member for Macquarie, I get to nag any Minister about any disaster relief given what we have all been through up here!"

Susan spoke about Labor's delivery of **Five-Year Funding** to the ABC, with annual funding of \$1.1 billion, plus extra funding for ABC and SBS specifically to continue programs which

were due to be terminated by the previous government. Now, funding for ABC Enhanced News Gathering, which supports regional viewers and journalists, will continue. To preface Susan Templeman's comments below, on the **Parliamentary ABC Friends Group (PFG)**, the website states that:

The aim of the Group is to provide a forum for raising awareness and support for the vital services the ABC provides to the Australian community. It will also facilitate initiatives and events to promote and enhance the ABC.

Susan stated that while the Parliamentary Friends Group is non-partisan, she thought it was fair to say that not a lot of Liberals came to the last meeting. The challenge is that the PFG tries to meet in the middle of a really busy time (in the middle of a three or four-day sitting week). Hence it might be 30 MPs and Senators around a big table, or just a few. Key guests are invited in as part of the group, to share their experience, analysis or insight. Staffers line the walls, while MPs come and go, creating a sense of chaos at times! Sometimes, the meetings are more leisurely.

Susan spoke about one of the biggest nights for Parliamentarians: the **ABC Showcase**, which is very well attended by MPs and Senators right across the parties:

You get as many National Party MPs wanting to be photographed with the characters as you do famous people. *Bluey* is such a drawcard. It is good to know that the ABC gets that type of recognition and support right across the Parliament. It also is a chance to remind people of things they might not themselves watch.

Susan also spoke about her position as **Chair of the Parliamentary Petitions Committee**. She has seen some people maximise it beautifully, for example, **Grandmothers for Refugees**, who had a paper-based petition that did not comply and was therefore not able to be accepted. The group's second petition was compliant. As Susan is the first speaker on the Monday of a Parliamentary Sitting (after Welcome to Country and Prayers), she is required to talk about Petitions, which are treated very seriously. Susan stated that Petitions must be thought through strategically: how do you use it? What are the outcomes you want from it? Do you want something that gets the attention of every member of Parliament or do you just want it to be for the Minister? It is worth thinking about all those questions to make it as effective as possible. (**The Australian Parliament Petitions** page lists the rules and guidelines in presenting a petition.) Petitions will only be accepted where Parliament has the power to make a decision about the petition's content. There is the written paper-based petition, which is an effective face-to-face conversation starter. At market stalls and other ABC Friends events, we can encourage people to sign our petition. The real

NSW Branch News

benefit here is the engagement we have with the community. The alternative type of petition is the e-petition, which will potentially reach volumes of people, right around the country.

(ABC appreciators often approach our market stalls, expecting to sign a petition to protect and/or enhance our national broadcaster. We are therefore keen to "get one going!")

Susan shared this reflection with us:

I think one of the real strengths of ABC Friends is your presence at events such as the Winter Magic Festival: it's so important, and it reminds people why the ABC matters. We are a weaker society when the ABC does not have strong and independent reporting capacity. That is fundamental.

After a **Q&A** session, Susan joined us for lunch. **Tess Howes**, our NSW/ACT President, and Blue Mountains Friend, was present at our meeting and also stayed for lunch to continue the conversation and fellowship.

Branch Book Library: Our portable and expanding Book Library has proven to be a popular feature of our monthly meetings. It is an expanding resource, with upwards of 50 titles, with members frequently donating books. Unifying themes are modern politics and media in Australia and abroad. We hold many back issues of the *Quarterly Essay*, and a number of books that analyse the **Murdoch** media empire and its effects on politics and standards of journalism. Books specifically on the ABC include recent publications like **David Anderson's** *Now More Than Ever – Australia's ABC* (2022), and for an historical perspective, **K S Inglis's** *This is the ABC* (1983). Our branch is forever grateful to our Friend Vice-President (and Newsletter Editor) **Ian Bate**, for his Book Library Initiative, and the muscles required to carry the heavy boxes of books to our gatherings! Visit our website: <http://fabcnswbm.org.au/>

Sue Noske
President
Blue Mountains Branch ABCF

Northern Rivers

On 15 May ABC Friends Northern Rivers held a dinner at **Wollongbar TAFE** celebrating ABC Friends and TAFE.

It was a very enjoyable night with excellent food and service from the Cookery and Hospitality students as well as teachers and other staff from Wollongbar TAFE College. **Kerry O'Brien** spoke at the dinner and it was a privilege to hear such a passionate account from him about the history of the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the government of Australia and its states and territories.



Kerry O'Brien speaking at the dinner

Kerry mentioned the book he and **Thomas Mayo** have written (with cartoons by **Cathy Wilcox**) about the upcoming referendum to consider an amendment to the constitution to give a Voice to Parliament for indigenous people: *The Voice to Parliament Handbook: All the detail you need*. It is on sale from bookshops and Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com.au/Voice-Parliament-Handbook-Detail-Need/dp/174117886X>

Tim Mulroy
President, ABCF Northern Rivers

Editor's Note: Update Production Manager **Raul Arregui** is one of the Shoalhaven Alliance for Yes which is campaigning for the Yes vote. Their email is: info@say23.au and the website is: <https://say23.au>

Northern Suburbs of Sydney (NSoS)

2023-2024 NSoS Guest Speaker Program - held at the Roseville Club, 64 Pacific Highway, Roseville, from 11:45am-1pm. Stay afterwards and meet other ABC Friends at lunch at the Roseville Club Bistro (reasonably priced).

10 August: Angela Williamson - Why the ABC Friends Matter

14 September: Mal Hewitt OAM - Why the ABC Friends' Update Newsletter is the ABC's Best Friend

12 October: Paddy Manning - The Successor: The High-Stakes Life of Lachlan Murdoch

9 November: Gavin Fang, Pandemia; and NSoS AGM

8 February 2024: Dr Phil Kafcaloudes *Australia Calling, The ABC Radio Australia Story*

14 March 2024: A Panel of Poets Celebrating World Poetry Day

11 April 2024: Lynne Malcolm, All in the Mind

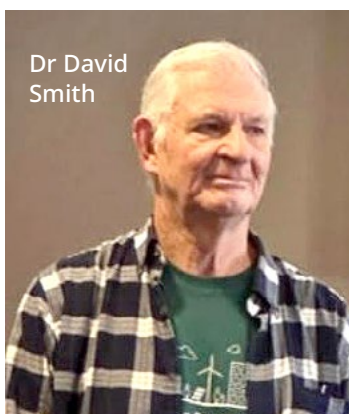
Recent NSoS Talks

Professor Emerita Robyn Ewing OAM, Why Creativity and The Arts are so important

Professor Emerita Robyn Ewing OAM, Co-Director of the Creativity in Research, Engaging the Arts, Transforming Education ([CREATE](#)) Centre at the University of Sydney gave an inspiring talk at our April 2023 meeting on why every Australian needs creativity and the Arts.



Dr David Smith, Environmental Educator, explained why the ABC is necessary for climate action. Dr Smith's talk at our May 2023 meeting highlighted the ABC's [Australian Story](#) - [The Transformer Saul Griffith](#) (2023), which inspired him to start electrifying his own community with renewable energy.



Jan Latta, Wildlife Photographer celebrating World Environment Day

Jan's steely determination to photograph rare and endangered animals enthralled ABC friends attending its June 2023 meeting. Jan's memoir *Doing it my Way* would make a great ABC program!



Ross McGowan, a well-known advocate for the ABC as the Convenor of the ABC Friends Central Coast Branch, inspired the audience on 13 July when he shared his strategies on building community for our ABC.

Inspiring Community Engagement

The well-known **Loosely Woven** musicians are somewhat of an ABC Friends 'social outreach' hub for the Northern Beaches, thanks to their generous fundraising concerts for ABC Friends. Please support them, wearing your ABCF T-shirts and encouraging others to join ABC Friends - over a cuppa tea and chat!

Loosely Woven 'Waltz for Jill' concerts (dedicated to **Jill Stubington**, a former member who recently died) are at:

The Lakes Parish, Narrabeen Saturday 12 August, 2-4:30pm

Wentworthville Sunday 13 August, 2-4:30pm)

Avalon Sunday 20 August, 4-6:30pm

South Turramurra Friday 25 August, 7-9:30pm

Eastwood Uniting Church Saturday 26 August, 7-9:30pm

Humph Hall, Allambie Heights Saturday 2 September, 1-3:30pm and 5-7:30pm

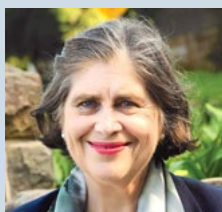
St Davids, Dee Why Sunday 3 September 2-4:30pm

For more information contact **Wayne Richmond** wayne@humphhall.org 0400 803 804 - a great ABC friend!

Or visit NSoS webpage https://www.abcfriends.net.au/nsw_act_northern_suburbs_of_sydney_branch

Janine Kitson
Convenor, Northern Suburbs of Sydney (NSoS)

We must never get tired of defending the ABC



By
Janine Kitson

Friends of the ABC began in Sydney's Northern Suburbs - in the Turrumurra home of **Walter** and **Corin Bass**. Walter was so concerned about the future of the ABC that in 1976 he invited friends (including **Faith and Hans Bandler** who were leaders in the 1967 Referendum) to discuss ways of reversing the funding cuts that

were destroying radio and television programs.

Today **ABC Friends** has **71,000 supporters** around Australia who are committed to ensuring a strong, independent and well-funded ABC. Yet governments fail to provide ABC with adequate funds to fulfil its Charter to provide quality programs to inform, entertain and educate Australians. There seems to be an ongoing expectation that the national broadcaster will do more with less funding. The ABC's business model appears to be based on sacking staff to fund programs or adopt new technologies.

The ABC is attacked by a barrage of 'Murdochian memes' that seek to create doubts about the ABC. Yet this hostile commercial media outlet is not subjected to similar scrutiny. Nor does the commercial media have the ABC's breadth, depth and range of programs - music, science, health, religion, philosophy, children's programs, the

arts, education, news and public interest investigative journalism - all across Australia - nor does it provide international broadcasting services.

ABC Friends has expressed concerns about the axing of the political editor **Andrew Probyn**. Many fear that the removal of the political editor role will adversely impact the ABC's critical role in holding our national political leaders to account. Many fear that removing the stand-alone Arts team will downgrade the importance of the Arts, a key function of the ABC as outlined in its Charter. At the core of the recent controversial release of the ABC's **Five-Year Plan** is that it is based on the sacking of over 100 professionals who have given their professional lives to the ABC. ABC Managing Director, **David Anderson**, says that financial pressures are one of the major factors driving the restructure. The ABC's indexation allowance is still lower than the inflation rate. There is not enough money in the budget to pay for scheduled salary increases or maintain current staffing levels. Yet what is most concerning is that the ABC's new digital direction is alienating its most loyal supporters - older Australians - and isolating them from access to the ABC.

The battle to ensure a well-funded ABC budget continues. As **Quentin Dempster** said in his book *Death Struggle: How political malice and boardroom power plays are killing the ABC* (2000): "We must never get tired of defending the ABC".

Central Coast

ABC Friends on the Central Coast are currently reaching out to other community groups and organisations to raise the profile of our organisation and examine ways in which we can collaborate with like-minded groups and assist one another. In the first of these initiatives for the year, we visited the **East Gosford Rotary Garden** on 8 July. This project was commenced several years ago, and the gardeners have transformed a local park into a thriving community hub, producing a bountiful harvest of fresh vegetables annually. The garden is part of a growing network of community gardens that have been established by enthusiastic volunteers across the Central Coast. During our visit we explained the purpose of our organisation and discussed the events we have undertaken and those that are currently being planned for the remainder of the year. We also discussed our hopes for organising events involving *Gardening Australia* personalities and having ABC local radio assist with



East Gosford
community
garden

publicity or coverage. Our hosts welcomed us warmly and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the garden, delicious food, and hospitality. We all felt it was a very worthwhile initiative and look forward to socialising again in the future.



Save the Date

**Thursday 17 August
12:30pm to 2:30pm**

at the **Green Point Community Centre**,
96 Koolang Road, Green Point NSW

Helen Grasswill, an award-winning journalist and ABC Alumni Deputy Chair, will be the special guest at an information afternoon hosted by the **Central Coast branch of ABC Friends**. Helen's talk will be followed by a Q&A session. Finger food (provided by *Two Turkeys Catering*) will be served after the event. Admission \$20.

Email: ross.mcgowen61@gmail.com or ring 0400 213 514 for further information. This is a pre-booked event with limited seating. Please book at: <https://events.humanitix.com/abc-friends-central-coast-event-abc-international>

Helen Grasswill will talk about ABC International which not only produces and presents international reports, but also works with local media organisations in international communities to enable them to report on the issues that directly concern them. Helen is a Walkley, Logie and Human Rights award-winning journalist and a founding member and 22-year veteran of the beloved ABC program, Australian Story. Green Point-Terrigal Community Services, which manages the venue, provides support services to local community groups including Central Coast residents from diverse cultural backgrounds. We hope to have some of these communities represented in the audience. This should assist our branch, increasing interest in our organisation and possibly support from community members across cultures.

In July we met the Waite ALP Sub branch at Belair Hotel. **Peter Vandeleur** (Vice-President SA/NT Branch) and **Judy Gonda** (Secretary SA/NT Branch) gave a presentation about ABC Friends to about 25 members (they have about 125 members in total). The invitation came as a result of the Hagar Luncheon presentation. Waite has the largest ALP membership in the Boothby electorate.

ABC Friends SA/NT will be meeting **Rebekha Sharkie** on 29 August at the Mayo electoral office in Mt Barker. We will also contact the Member for Sturt, **James Stevens** to arrange a meeting, in addition to the Greens and more Liberal Politicians.

ABC Five-Year Plan

Thank you to the members who replied to our last email regarding the structural changes to the ABC which were

announced when the Plan was released. Overwhelming concern was expressed, particularly with the redundancy of the position held by **Andrew Probyn**, the restructuring of the Arts Departments, the loss of local production of the Sunday night TV news and job losses. Some members felt so aggrieved by these decisions their continued support of the ABC was in doubt and consequently their support for ABC Friends was also in doubt.

The Executive Committee are working hard to connect with our members and supporters, our community and community leaders. This includes meeting with the Premier to acknowledge that the current situation is far from perfect. However, ABC Friends does have a voice with our meetings with the ABC Managing Director David Anderson. The strength of that voice is because ABC Friends is a national identity with thousands of members and supporters and numbers do count when decisions are made. ABC Friends needs members and supporters to stay united because the demise of the ABC is too horrible to contemplate. We can make a difference and future generations will look back and say thank you for literally saving our democracy.

Finally, some preliminary work has been undertaken for our end-of-year function. We hope to be able to create an event featuring a local community choir, *Verve*, along with a presentation from its leader and conductor, **Elizabeth Scott**. Elizabeth has had a stellar career, including a position at the Lincoln Centre in New York, so we are all excited about the possibility of bringing this event together in early December.

Ross McGowen
Convenor ABC Friends, Central Coast

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 abcfriends.net.au or phone your local contact below.

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Victorian Groups

Like to join a local group or be on their mailing list? To find out more about one in your area: →

Not in these areas?

Contact Gai Mooney
Groups Convenor
0407 050 937
gaimooney@gmail.com as we are setting up new groups.

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