

NSW/ACT Bulletin

Diversity and Social Cohesion

Three words, **Diversity** and **Social Cohesion**, continue to grab the attention of Australian media. Certainly, these are relevant issues for ABC Radio and Television.

The ABC Charter mandates it must deliver *'programs that contribute to a sense of national identity ... and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community with a specific focus on Indigenous and multicultural communities'*.

Writing in the Weekend Australian (8/5/26), Julie Szego claims ABC Management is promising to hold 'radical listening sessions' with staff of 'diverse backgrounds'. It is claimed that radical listening explicitly seeks to build connection and understanding, whereas active listening is more focused on just gathering information and planning a response.

Australia doesn't have just one television culture anymore. It has two. On one side sits the ABC where achieving diversity is tantamount to a doctrine, a doctrine encapsulated in its *Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Plan 2023-2026*. Without the ABC, vast parts of Australia—culturally, geographically, socially—would simply not appear on screen.

By comparison, commercial networks are ratings-driven, advertiser-sensitive, instinctively populist, and far less interested in diversity unless it sells. More often than not minority issues get sidelined. This presents a gap the ABC is well-positioned to exploit, as manifested by its recently announced

deal with AAP to share Emergency broadcasts with local/remote outlets. This reflects the inherent potential to partner with community groups to co-create content and amplify impact.

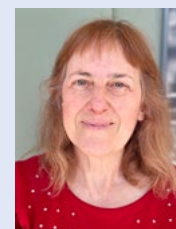
However, there are risks associated with striving for diversity. It could be argued that the ABC may be overly cautious in its approach. Conversely, commercial media risks being accused of under-representation of diversity. Without proactive monitoring there is the danger of a drift towards a passive consensus. Editorial lines may harden and the range of acceptable disagreement subtly contracts. This aspect frequently is referred to as performative diversity, where the stories differ, the faces differ, but the underlying worldview appears strikingly consistent.

Diversity also is a key factor in establishing social cohesion. For example, there is a role for the ABC to be a major player in balancing the disparate interests that exist between metropolitan, regional and rural communities. In addition, the ABC has the wherewithal to minimise growing threats to social cohesion resulting from disinformation. Examples include fact-checking initiatives and culturally attuned reporting on issues like migration or Indigenous rights. These can build trust in an era of fractured media.

The ABC isn't perfect, but its commitment to diversity, backed by charter and public funding, positions

it as a linchpin for social cohesion. In a fractured media world, the ABC's job is to be a unifier—telling Australia's stories, plural, to Australians. That is how it can best serve the nation.

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



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President's Message

Reclaiming the voice of all Australians

I am very concerned about the escalation of the current socio-political-cultural division that is reaching fever pitch. We are polarised politically, arguing left-wing v right-wing positions on a range of topics in ways that often are nonsensical. Much energy is wasted having rights-based arguments with members of our own communities instead of pursuing common interests in a spirit of goodwill, commonality, kindness and respect for each other.

These arguments will never be resolved because they are being fuelled by distrust, fear and concern popularised by people seeking to claim power and advantage by generating discontent. Accusations of ABC bias frequently are promoted by a small but vocal group of anti-ABC commentators. This despite the fact that survey after survey, from the ABC's audience research to independent studies, report that almost 80 per cent of Australians trust and value their public broadcaster. However, the ABC's critics are relentless in arguing that our national broadcaster, established by legislation in 1932, should be defunded, privatised or pushed behind a paywall. Groups like Advance and Allies for a Strong Australia have staged rallies calling to shut the ABC down.

While these groups are entitled to their own minority views, I object strongly to these views being inflicted on us all. Some federal politicians have drawn the Royal Commission into Antisemitism into examining supposed bias at the ABC and SBS. Pauline Hanson pledged to abolish SBS and turn the ABC into a subscription service, an idea that might sound plausible to some until you realise the ABC cannot be split into a "country"

service and a "city" service. We all watch the same programs, rely on the same emergency broadcasts, and need the same children's and Australian drama that a subscription model would compromise.

In my view, the constant assertions of ABC bias represent a calculated attempt to apply the fallacy argumentum ad nauseam: if you say something often enough people will believe it to be true. Anti-ABC commentators keep repeating their own subjective opinions of the ABC, including sometimes fabricating or distorting "wrong things" the ABC has done, which speaks volumes about the lack of editorial oversight at these media organisations.

“

A healthy democracy needs a public broadcaster that is independent, protected from political interference...

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Moreover, it inhibits our ability to engage in critical conversations and disagree respectfully and forge a better Australia for our children and grandchildren. It also demonstrates how a well-organised, well-resourced minority view can dominate the public conversation and seduce the silent majority of Australians to believe that the loudest voice must be right. This is not true and it is dangerous.

This matters beyond the ABC, because it is fuelling division across all aspects of our civic life. We are

more divided, more suspicious of institutions, more willing to treat opponents as enemies rather than fellow citizens who happen to hold a different view. Global measures of democratic health and press freedom are falling, and populist movements everywhere share the same playbook: undermine trust in independent media, blur the line between fact and personal grievance, and unite the public in anger, hatred and division.

None of this will be resolved by shouting louder at people who disagree with us. It can only be addressed by defending the ABC so that it can continue to inform, educate, and entertain Australians through independent national and regional broadcasting, and can deliver valued services that reflect and contribute to Australian society, culture and identity. Oversight by one special interest group or group of anti-ABC protestors would compromise the ABC's Charter and independence, to the detriment of all Australians.

As ABC Friends, our task is not to win a shouting match against populist megaphones or tired old, predictable, jaded, anti-ABC commentators. Our task is to keep making the calm, evidence-based case: that independence is important and personal opinion should not be framed as evidence-based criticism. A healthy democracy needs a public broadcaster that is independent, protected from political interference, well-resourced and accessible to us all. That argument, patiently and persistently made, is how the quiet majority can reclaim its voice.

Thank you for standing with us.

Dr Tess Howes

President, ABC Friends (NSW & ACT)

The rural perspective and the ABC



My friends,

When I was asked to share some personal observations about the role the ABC plays in social inclusion, particularly in regional Australia, I happily agreed. Straightaway, my mind went to the influence and importance of our national broadcaster across my own life and that of our community. That is what the ABC signifies to me.

I think the word **community** captures the essence of belonging — of togetherness — much better than the current popular term “social inclusion”. Community is about a neighbourhood, a place, a group, a team — something we all understand. And I think of community as a precious thing that, in these times, needs nurturing.

I am one of those described as “rusted on” — a faintly pejorative term for mature, engaged supporters of the ABC. My attachment goes back some 80 years, to when I was a little girl in Ilfracombe in central western Queensland, where my father managed the wool scour. In those days Australia rode on the sheep’s back. Wool kept our country going, and Ilfracombe was surrounded by some of the great sheep stations of Australia. The ABC was part of our daily life.

My first great ABC memory is **Kindergarten of the Air**. Each morning I sat in front of our radiogram, singing, counting, dancing and playing pretend games, with the wonderful assurance that children just like me, all over Australia, were doing exactly the same thing. “Story Time” was my favourite.

Then came **The Country Hour**. At dinner time my sisters and I had to be quiet while our parents listened. There was world and national news, the economy, and then the issues that mattered locally — wool sales, weather, river heights — finishing with *Blue Hills*. The ABC was not something we simply “consumed”. It was woven into family and community life. We talked about it at home and in the community, including at Miss O’Kane’s Railway Hotel.

For people in the bush, the ABC was a vital connection with the rest of Australia and the world. We trusted it as an authoritative source of information. We depended upon it.

And, importantly, it was a friend in times of loneliness — particularly for women who could spend long periods at home in quiet isolation.

The ABC also connected country Australians with our democracy. The broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings gave people in the bush a direct link with Canberra. Politics has always mattered in country communities, and the ABC helped people understand what was happening in their nation.

As I travelled more widely through Australia, I came to appreciate even more strongly the importance of regional broadcasting. The ABC established regional stations and outback networks, with staff who understood their audiences and became trusted members of their communities.

Then came television. The arrival of ABC television in 1956 transformed rural life, bringing the country closer to the cultural and sporting life of the cities. I remember my childhood heroines at the Olympics — the “Golden Girls”: Betty Cuthbert, Shirley Strickland, Marjorie Jackson and Marlene Mathews. We wanted to be like them, racing around in our white shorts and tennis sandshoes. Later, in London in the 1960s, television opened another world to me. I followed the extraordinary social changes taking place — the women’s movement, children’s rights and civil liberties.

Back in Brisbane in 1968, teaching at the University of Queensland Law School, my involvement in human rights and social reform grew. The ABC became part of that professional and public life too. I remember with great affection interviews at the old ABC headquarters in Toowong. The ABC provided an important public platform for progressive political action and social reform during some of the great human rights challenges of the time.

Then, in 1978, the National Women’s Advisory Council gave me the opportunity to go “back to the bush” — to Cairns, Winton, Townsville, Mount Isa and other regional communities — listening to women and their families and learning about their hopes and concerns.

Women travelled enormous distances to participate. They spoke about education, employment and health. Many took their first political steps, speaking openly about abortion and domestic violence.

I also had the privilege of hearing stories about the Stolen Generations from much-loved Elders. These meetings were about empowerment, friendship, leadership and confidence. They helped create a new and more diverse leadership in rural communities and contributed to the formation of rural women’s networks. And again, the ABC was there — informing people, sharing the stories and carrying the outcomes across Australia.

I never missed **Coming Out**, the Saturday afternoon radio program that reported on women’s campaigns for equality. At a time of fierce debate about the Sex Discrimination Act, we counted on the ABC to provide a balanced and truthful voice.

Then came **Landline** in 1991. It remains one of my favourite ABC programs. Founding executive producer Kerry Lonergan told me recently that its purpose was to showcase the innovation and cleverness of country people — to take the program into the shearing sheds, meatworks and mines, and tell the stories of people who had

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The rural perspective and the ABC

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to be inventive because of where they lived. That is the ABC at its best: not simply reporting on regional Australia, but respecting it, understanding it and allowing its people to tell their own stories.

Then, in 2015, came **Back Roads** — the country show for city people. I was delighted to be interviewed for the very first program by Heather Ewart, talking about my family's connection with Winton, where my mother had been a teacher and where my parents met. *Back Roads* immediately captured the imagination of Australians. It continues to remind city audiences that regional

Australia is not simply a place on a map. It is communities full of extraordinary people, creativity, humour, resilience and generosity. Today, I worry that the gap between city and country may be widening.

Across my lifetime, the ABC has been a companion, a teacher, a source of trusted information, a connection to democracy, a window on the wider world and, above all, a bridge between Australians. From a little girl sitting beside a radiogram in Ilfracombe, to a woman working for human rights and social reform, to the women I met across regional Australia, the ABC has

been there. It has helped Australians, separated by enormous distances, to feel they belong to one another. That to me is social inclusion. However, I would prefer to call it something simpler, something warmer — namely **Community**. It is the ABC that has helped create and sustain a sense of community across Australia for generations. It is a role that must be sustained and protected.

We city folk have much to learn from regional Australia. The ABC can help us listen and perhaps above all, help us understand that we are part of the same community.

Dame Quentin Bryce
Former Governor-General of
Australia

Diversity at the ABC: What the Numbers Don't Tell You

The ABC's *Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Plan* is, on its own terms, admirable. Targets for Indigenous representation. Tracking of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) voices on and off screen. Gender parity commitments. A Bonner Committee. A standing diversity committee. Annual symposia. The bureaucratic architecture of good intentions is substantial.

And it has worked — in one register. Look at what you see and hear on ABC television and radio today compared with twenty years ago. More Indigenous journalists and more faces that look like the country actually looks.

But here is the problem. Diversity of representation and diversity of institutional culture are not the same thing. They are not even close.

Hiring people from a wide range of backgrounds is the beginning of the project, not the completion of it. What happens after the hire? Does the new voice get to shape editorial culture — or does it get shaped by it? Institutional culture has mass. It has momentum and inertia. It resists. It domesticates. This is the central unresolved paradox of diversity policy everywhere.

Journalists are, as a group, significantly less religious than the people they cover. The ABC is almost alone among major Australian media organisations in taking religion seriously as a subject — which makes this gap more consequential here than anywhere else. We would think it unremarkable to ask a journalist covering technology or the arts whether they had at least a basic knowledge of the topic. Yet when it comes to religion, the same question is rarely asked. Religious illiteracy is treated not as a deficit but — perversely — as a mark of neutrality.

At its best, the result is curiosity without comprehension. At its worst, prurient voyeurism.

And even so, engaging religiously literate and diverse staff is only a starting point, not the finish line. Take Radio National, where I have worked for more than 25 years. Jewish Australians are significantly represented at RN — on air, in production, in senior leadership. Jewish Australians make up roughly half a per cent of the national population but would exceed that by a factor of five among my colleagues. Moreover, Muslim staff are far more editorially underrepresented than are Jewish staff overrepresented.



(I say this based on my own rough guesstimate, because the ABC's diversity framework tracks gender, Indigenous, CALD, disability and LGBTQIA+, but not religion.)

And yet — post-Bondi — the ABC has been accused of being deaf to the mainstream voices of Australia's Jewish community.

This suggests institutional culture operates by its own gravity. Individual identity does not automatically translate into institutional responsiveness. The culture filters and persists.

Achieving real diversity — diversity of opinion, background and voice — requires something that planning documents can never fully capture. It requires an institution to be genuinely, structurally open to being changed by the people it employs. That is a different and much harder thing. The ABC hasn't cracked it yet. Neither has anyone else.

James Carleton
ABC Journalist

A message from the ABC Chair on progress with ABC renewal

I have over the last twenty-eight months of my tenancy in the role of Chair of the ABC highlighted the importance of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation as a national institution; its role in preserving Australian culture, democracy, and education; and the challenges and opportunities it faces in the digital and AI era.

Personally, I regard the ABC as an essential pillar of Australian democracy and the provider of, for want of a better term, a much cherished 'national campfire'. A special space where Australians come together to share ideas, dreams, friendship and our sense of common purpose to enable our country to face much of the darkness beyond, with confidence and strength. In this way, I see the ABC representing a 'true north' about Australia and what 'being an Australian' means into the future from a renewed sense of confidence in the necessity of contemporary relevance.

Despite the best efforts of many in recent decades, it seems to me that the digital world has caused a fragmentation and dislocation of effort, including at the ABC. At times, this has meant some of our institutions have not achieved the delivery quality we sorely need. This confronting dislocation and fragmentation process has altered primary elements in the personality, chemistry and character of our national debates in sometimes, indeed often, negative ways. Accordingly at the ABC we have aimed to mark the current era as a time for refreshed purpose and performance.

Our community and nation deserve better, renewed performance horizons. We have set about a

program of reform with a focussed enterprise transformation which will secure the ABC in vital ways to make it fit for purpose in responding to the many needs expressed by Australians to interpret and navigate our domestic and international modern settings through distinctive storytelling, independent journalism and promotion of the arts. In short, to renew the never-ending mission in sharing Australia's stories.

Thanking the ABC Friends and the ABC's role

The ABC is a vital institution that Australians support for various reasons, known and well-rehearsed by the 'Friends' frequently. Those reasons start with children's content such as *Playschool* (celebrating its 60th anniversary this year) and *Bluey* (which released five programs in the Yolgnu language this year's Garmaj). Both help foster national identity, pride and confidence for our youngest Australians.

The ABC is the essential showcase for Australian stories, voices, and culture, which is critical in an era dominated by global media offerings and streaming platforms carrying a veritable tsunami of non-Australian content.

Australian cultural identity and global recognition

Australia's cultural achievements are rich and diverse in literature, music, art, and performance, with numerous notable Australians having achieved astonishing things. Australian culture, including our unique Indigenous heritage spanning 60,000 years, is a source of national strength and international recognition. So much of that which has been achieved is originated from, and is promoted and shared in our communities by the



ABC. Which is, without question the nation's biggest cultural and news asset, playing a key role in educating and uniting Australians and fostering regional understanding in the Asia Pacific.

ABC's approach to AI and public education

The ABC commits to responsible AI adoption, ensuring editorial control remains with human staff focusing on quality, accuracy, and public trust. We also prioritise educating Australians about AI, its benefits, and risks through great recent programming like *The Matter of Facts*, *If You're Listening*, and various *Four Corners* investigations, as well as providing educational resources for teachers and students to foster better media literacy and democratic engagement.

Renewed commitment to documentaries and drama

The ABC has always committed to informing Australians about their democracy, history, and culture through documentaries seen in recent programs such as *Civic Duty*, *Judgement: Cases That Changed Australia*, and *When the War is Over*.

We also have renewed a strong focus on Australian drama, supporting independent producers and delivering popular series including *Goolagong*, *Treasure and Dirt*, and the forthcoming *Dustfall*, and *Shakedown*. The recent funding boost enables more Australian children's content, including

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A message from the ABC Chair on progress with ABC renewal

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adaptations of *Bananas in Pyjamas* and the fabulous *Treehouse* books. There has been a wholesale renewal in the quality and diversity of initiatives in both these core ABC content commitments.

ABC's service to regional Australia

The ABC has also emphasised our commitment to local regional culture through programs like *Landline* and *Backroads*, and over 800 hours of original audio programming every week on our extensive regional networks. Partnerships with several state governments have grounded

those regional initiatives and their creative and employment impacts firmly.

The need for a strong ABC

The ABC has a crucial role in addressing various national challenges such as, for example, adult literacy and educational initiatives vital to an informed society.

Our call for renewed investment to enable the ABC to continue educating young Australians, telling Australian stories, and fostering national identity while reinforcing

social cohesion has never been more vital. Notwithstanding recent welcome appropriation 'restitution increases', operational funding has declined significantly in real terms since 2013/14.

The case for renewed investment to secure the ABC's future to the benefit of all Australians is strong. I urge your continued support and advocacy, recognising the ABC's indispensable contribution to Australian democracy, culture, and society.

Kim Williams
Chair ABC Board

Deloitte statistics about the ABC

The ABCF Blue Mountains branch recently published some findings from Deloitte Access Economics about screen productions commissioned by the ABC, in its report: *The Economic and Social Contribution of ABC-Commissioned Screen Productions*. A summary is here:



Key findings



\$772 million



ABC-commissioned screen productions contributed \$772 million in value added to the Australian economy between 2022-23 and 2024-25

7,700 FTE roles



ABC-commissioned screen productions in Australia supported over 7,700 FTE roles cumulatively between 2022-23 and 2024-25

315 productions



Between 2022-23 and 2024-25, the ABC supported 315 screen productions, delivering over 1,526 hours of locally produced programming

\$1.31 for every ABC dollar



For every dollar spent by the ABC on external commissions, a further \$1.31 was leveraged from other sources on average between 2022-23 and 2024-25

\$2.4 billion audience value



The audience value of ABC-commissioned content that was broadcast is estimated at \$2.4 billion in 2024-25

5.4 million weekly viewers



ABC-commissioned content on broadcast television had a reach of 5.4 million weekly viewers in 2024-25

1,526 hours produced



From 2022-23 to 2024-25, the ABC-commissioned 1,526 hours of content

1:3 supported FTE jobs



For every ABC employee working on screen productions, three additional jobs were supported over 2022-23 to 2024-25

79% of Australians



79% of Australians see the ABC as distinctly Australian and contributing to national identity

86 hours of children's content



The ABC produced 86 hours of high-quality children's content in 2024-25, supporting children's cognitive, language, and social-emotional development

Is the world ready for digital journalism?

A view from our Macquarie University interns



Macquarie University interns - Erycka Dogma, Isabelle Siasat, Laura Han and Ben Huenerbein

This article is based on an address given by the four Macquarie University interns at a recent meeting of the NSoS (Northern Suburbs of Sydney) ABCF branch. The theme was: The digital era is at its peak: should we be afraid?

In recent years, images generated by AI have become increasingly difficult to differentiate from reality.

Which of these two dogs is real, and which is AI?



(Answer at the end of the article)

It can be scary to witness AI creating nearly perfect replications of life, Laura Han stated, emphasising the idea that artificial intelligence should be used as a tool rather than potentially replacing jobs.

In presenting the students' joint submission, Erycka Dogma spoke of how decaying computer platforms can potentially affect how the public consumes news in the modern era. The term **enshittification** (see right) was created by Canadian writer Cory Doctorow in 2022 to describe how platforms deteriorate in quality over time and become vehicles for boosting profits rather than providing function. Social media platforms have become manipulative to keep users on them for

as long as possible, and there are concerns that this can adversely affect brain function, sometimes known as brainrot, especially in vulnerable young people. Consequently, it is becoming more difficult for consumers to gain access to quality information when trying to understand the world around them.

The ABC has been consumed by scandals in regards to tampering of social media in the last three years: the Facebook hijacking and the video depicting tampered visuals of Senator Hume and the Coalition. The ABC currently invests \$1.5 million into digital marketing, and Dogma is adamant that change will happen when the ABC directs higher funds towards increased cybersecurity and reliable upcoming journalists who can maintain **quality over quantity**. But can we really blame social media as a whole?

Today, we see people at cafes glued to their phones, snapping photos whenever they get a chance. Many would argue social media is at fault for

the current epidemic of smartphone addiction. Ben Huenerbein disagrees, saying social media is only a small factor and that humanity is responsible for the choices they make. Platforms can be used to connect people with one another rather than divide them. Equally, Ben argues that social media can be used to nurture relationships if used moderately and we should simply take a step back, put our phones down and talk directly to each other.

Many may argue that youth have no concerns about the future of media. But a small handful, like intern Isabelle Siasat, grew up with ABC programs such as *Behind the News*, and *Triple J*, and she is an example of the important role the ABC has in nurturing youth for many years. Both the young and elderly can do their part in ensuring this: talk to your children and friends about the ABC. Watch programs together on television, or even on the widely-accessible platform ABC iView: don't restrict your knowledge to short-form videos. As Laura Han argues, this is why ABC Friends are so important in supporting the ABC. At a time when misinformation can spread within seconds, trustworthy journalism, human judgement and public discussion matter more than ever.

Answer: Dog B is AI-generated.

Erycka Dogma, Laura Han, Isabelle Siasat and Ben Huenerbein

Macquarie University interns
for ABCF NSoS

Enshittification

[noun]

The phenomenon of **online platforms gradually degrading the quality of their services**, often by promoting advertisements and sponsored content, in order to increase profits.

Branch updates

ACT/South East NSW

ChatABC

ABC Friends ACT's trial discussion group, ChatABC, run as part of Canberra's extensive U3A network, has proven a great vehicle for attracting those who enjoy discussing ABC programs. It's great to report that after a successful rollout in the first half of the year, we've now launched a new series of chats which will run to the end of the year.

Similar to a book club, we've had interesting discussions of selected ABC TV and radio programs and ABC online articles. ACT branch secretary Peter Lindenmayer generally leads the sessions, with able assistance from committee members Jan Febey and Sue Tregeagle. As with our first semester, the second is fully subscribed, with 18 to 20 participants meeting for a couple of hours once a month.

As an example of programs up for discussion, in September the group will focus on ABC TV's rural noir serial *Treasure & Dirt* and the controversial *Race Around the World*, as well as a general take on *Late Night Live* — apparently the second-most popular ABC radio program — with emphasis on a particular episode.

50 for our 50th

An autumn lunch to celebrate ABC Friends 50th Anniversary, with Radio National's *Saturday Extra* host Nick Bryant as a special guest, proved a highlight of the ACT calendar. Fifty members and supporters were present at La Cantina restaurant in Narrabundah to hear Nick discuss his career as a BBC foreign correspondent and draw on his deep knowledge of, and experience reporting on, US politics.



Nick Bryant

ABCF national president Cassandra Parkinson joined us from Sydney for the lunch and outlined issues facing the ABC and the work that ABC Friends is undertaking to support the national broadcaster. Thanks to committee members Jane Smyth and Margie Salmon for helping to organise a very pleasant and stimulating occasion.

And also

Closer to Christmas we'll be holding our usual market stalls with lots of ABC Friends goodies for sale. If you'd like to help, do get in touch.

Gia Metherell

Convenor ABC Friends ACT & South-East NSW

Central Coast

Celebrating 50 years of advocacy and looking forward to the next 50 years

We held our 50th Anniversary celebrations on July 28. Our event was fully booked with a positive audience of 70 members and non-members. A Conversation with Corin, the documentary celebrating the ABCF founding story, engaged the audience which was delighted to meet Corin Fairburn Bass. Many reported afterwards that they were inspired by Corin's story of 50 years of continuing advocacy and her strong encouragement to continue the fight for the ABC.

Dr Michael Ward, Chair of ABC Alumni, shared his media expertise with us, his deep knowledge of Australia's changing media landscape and how change has affected the ABC and Australian audiences. The revealing visual data had a powerful impact on the audience. Michael turned our vision to the facts and the challenges of the next 50 years.

We are thrilled to announce that we did achieve our target of 50 celebratory messages to mark each of the 50 years of our role of friendship with the ABC. These share

joyful memories of the ABC, covering decades past, and positive expressions of appreciation about the ongoing importance of the role played by today's ABC in the contemporary media landscape — its independence, its trustworthiness, its free access for all Australians and its wealth of 'favourite' presenters, programs and platforms.

Thanks to all who helped to make our event a very successful day!

On August 28 we remembered James Valentine, much-loved ABC presenter who publicly shared his journey with cancer, his life lived gratefully and his "good death". We honoured his advocacy for Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) with a panel of four sharing their expertise and experience and answering audience questions about VAD.

We will 'wrap up' the year with our annual Christmas lunch on Friday, November 27. We are thrilled that Michael Fine, a 'fine musician' from Central Coast Troubadour Folk Club, will share the joy and power of music with us.

Nell Knight (on behalf of the full committee)

Convenor, ABC Friends Central Coast

Blue Mountains

Our branch, with an official membership of 133, continues to have well-attended meetings and enthusiastic participation at outreach events. Meetings are being held every two months, with a coffee morning at the Springwood Sports Club in the month between.

At the recent, re-launched Winter Magic Festival in Katoomba many of the massive crowd on the day approached our stall to voice support for the ABC. They expressed dissatisfaction with the content of an address given days earlier at the National Press Club by a politician renowned for their disaffection for accountability in general and the national broadcaster in particular. The level of public engagement was something we had not experienced previously. We will continue to attend markets (e.g., Clarendon and Lawson), festivals and other opportunities for outreach and will be seeking new ABC Friends merchandise to sell in the future. Next major outing is the Springwood Spring Festival.

We have a resident media monitor in Ian Bate, who trawls the press for evidence of bias and outright attacks on the ABC, keeping us informed. Blue Mountains Branch now has a portable projector for AV enhancement and an enviable library of relevant works to choose from. Our raffles are really good too!

Coming up, our AGM on 14 November will feature Bill Wyman speaking about events in the world that present challenges for public broadcasters. Bill, a member of ABC Friends, is a lecturer in Journalism in the Media and Communications Discipline at the University of Sydney and is a regular contributor to the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He is also the former Assistant Managing Editor of National Public Radio in Washington. Should be a fascinating gathering – all welcome.

Our future energies will be spent finding new avenues for face-to-face outreach in the area west of Sydney, and improving our online presence. (Our Facebook page has 859 followers, but somewhat fewer in engagement figures.)

Carole Dent

President ABC Friends Blue Mountains



ABCF stall at "Winter Magic" festival in Katoomba. Sue Noske, Ian Bate, Bob Thomas, Toni Thomas

Northern Suburbs of Sydney (NSoS)

This year so far

Earlier this year we enjoyed listening to photographic artist David Starr; music educator Dr Michael Atherton; environmentalist Dr Mark Diesendorf; Macquarie University Semester 1 Media Interns Erycka Dogma, Benjamin Huenerbein, Isabelle Siasat and Laura Han; former ABC cameraman David Collins; author and journalist Nathan Dunne and ABC Advisory Chair Anita Planchon.

We held our first 'Writers Festival' with Dr Vicki Oliveri (PhD in art crime), in conversation with R.G.G. (Rebecca) de Winter, Kyra Geddes and Sophie Stern.

Coming up

NSoS' Caterer Tim Prescott will host a conversation with proprietors of four local bread shops on **Thursday 8th October**.

Loosely Woven will perform on **Thursday 12th November** and we'll be able to thank them for their generous donation of \$1,500 to ABC Friends from a previous concert.

Dr Michael Ward, ABC Alumni Chair, will hold a conversation with Macquarie University Semester 2

Interns - Georgia Elias, Manya Barot, Benjamin Orr and Isaac Billington - on **Thursday 10th December**.

Corin Fairburn Bass, founding member of ABC Friends, is organising a professional recording of the Willoughby Symphony Choir singing *It's Our ABC*.

Helpers

We welcome our talented new volunteers - caterer Mark Lillico-Thompson; author Rebecca de Winter, who is helping us with communications; Helen Crouch, who brings enormous experience as the former General Manager of the Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Community Transport; Magda Dabrowa, an experienced events coordinator; and Erycka Dogma, former media intern who wants to return and help us with our events.

If you are interested in getting more involved, we need help with unfinished business – calling for a NSW Parliamentary Friends of the ABC Friends Group, organising a commemorative plaque at the former ABC Studios at Gore Hill, and calling on the NSW Government to screen ABC in their hospitals and other NSW Department waiting rooms.

NSoS holds monthly meetings on the second Thursday of each month (except January) from 11.30am-1pm at the Roseville Uniting Church, 7a Lord Street, Roseville.

Janine Kitson

Convenor ABC Friends NSoS



Authors say: we love the ABC

Branch updates

Launch of Newcastle/Hunter branch

ABC Friends has opened a new branch in Newcastle/Hunter.

The new branch was launched in a meeting in August, with around 40 people attending. Janine Kitson, Convenor of the ABC Friends Northern Suburbs of Sydney (NSoS) branch, came up to Newcastle to give the inaugural talk for the new branch.

Janine gave a spirited rundown of some of the history and valuable roles of the ABC under the title of its Achievements and Challenges. Janine also gave an overview of ABC Friends; its amazing blossoming



over 50 years, and how the Friends seek to strengthen support for the ABC by reminding us all of its many-faceted role in our society, its democratic processes and how important it is to safeguard its funding.

Having attended a number of meetings of the NSoS branch, I have seen how ABC Friends branches can bring people of different opinions together for a common good. I believe that the ABC Friends is strengthening our democracy and is encouraging social cohesion.

This is why I am proud to start the ABC Friends branch in Newcastle and the Hunter.

Paula Morrow

Convenor, ABC Friends Newcastle/Hunter



Launch of Newcastle/Hunter branch: Richard Boulton (attendee), Paula Morrow (Convenor), Yvonne Piddington (committee member), Sue Kingsley (committee member), Janine Kitson (speaker and convenor NSoS branch)

ABCF on social media

 facebook.com/FriendsOfTheAbc/

 instagram.com/abcfriends.au/

 youtube.com/channel/UC-grALr8MIHvvbmqGfp-Qw

 bsky.app/profile/abcfriends.bsky.social

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



Reasons to become an ABC Friend

1. Former Nationals Leader, Tim Fisher, said: 'regional Australia would be Siberia without the ABC'. (Courtesy Stephanie S via Central Coast Branch)
2. The NSW Retired Teachers' Association expresses alarm at the growing threats to the independence of the ABC and offer our support to any action being taken to support this vital element of our democracy. (Retired Teachers' Association)
3. The 2026 Reuters Digital News Report finds 49% of Australians believe public service media has a positive effect on life in Australia. The report also identified growing engagement with public service media among younger audiences, with usage increasing from 43% to 54% among 18- to 24-year-olds and from 47% to 51% among 25- to 34-year-olds from 2022 to 2026. (TV Tonight (www.tvtonight.com.au) – David Knox)

Become an ABC Friend

ABC Friends welcomes new members. To learn more about ABC Friends, or to sign up, please visit this page:

abcfriends.au/nsw-act/

To join, click the button "Become a Member".

Book about history of the ABC

A heads-up that a new book about the history of the ABC will be published later this year. The book is entitled *Our ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission and Its Audiences*, and is edited by Prof Bridget Griffen-Foley and Dr Kylie Andrews. More information will appear in the Bulletin in 2027.



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