

ANDREW BENT LECTURE

Friends of the ABC, Tasmania

Hobart

20 May, 2026

Many thanks to Roger Joseph and the many members of the ABC Friends, the University of Tasmania and Australian Institute for International Affairs for this invitation – it is a signal honour. One I value personally and on behalf of my board colleagues and all those who work at the ABC in Tasmania.

In doing so, I pay respect to the traditional and original owners of this land the Muwinina people. I pay respect to those that have passed before us and acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal people, the Palawa, who have an uninterrupted continuity as custodians of the magnificent lands and many waterways which comprise Lutruwita, Tasmania.

I also take this moment to acknowledge the diverse peoples and cultures who have been welcomed to this nation, along with the freedoms, rights, and faiths they have brought or represent. Acknowledging this is crucial, given the never-ending assault on difference which too often permeates society today.

THANK YOU, FRIENDS OF THE ABC

It's great to be among friends! I can't think of a better way to finish my tour of the state this week, than in your company.

I've been visiting Tasmania, talking to our staff, to our viewers and listeners, to many decision makers, and to you, our special national band of supporters, to build momentum for a new era of investment in the ABC. The ABC is one of the most important national institutions we have, indeed a unique part of Australia's lived experience, delivering services to all the vast Australian landmass – unrivalled anywhere by any other media organisation for national coverage of its services.

Please bolster the ABC with your feedback, your advocacy, and by recommending it to fellow Australians, far and wide.

The ABC always needs friends and 'The Friends' have been defending and promoting the ABC for fifty years. Importantly, always reminding our leaders of the ABC's unique value to the nation, especially through some dark years when powerful friends have been scarce.

All of us will have our own reasons for supporting the ABC.

Perhaps you grew up with Playschool.

Or as a teenager watched Countdown.

Or ate dinner with your parents every night in front of the 7PM news.

Or now watch Bluey with your children or grandchildren.

My guess is that when all's said and done, our belief in the ABC comes down to a love of Australia and its remarkably diverse culture.

Today we are spoilt for choice in news and entertainment. Where one can get the best of the world, any time we want.

Cheap limited offers mean you can read or watch just about anything for the price of a takeaway coffee per week:

- for as little as \$30 a month, you can subscribe to the *New York Times*
- for \$1 per week you can start a daily selection from the *Financial Times*
- the *Times of London* will cost you 5 pounds, for a year's introduction
- there are international podcasts that can be had for free or comparative peppercorn prices
- and of course, there are all those great streaming platforms we all love which vary on price but deliver handsome foreign choice.

Yes, it's marvellous, mostly. But it isn't about us.

We need and want to see our own culture, know our own stories, hear our own voices and accents, be on top of our own news, and know that that news is accurate and true.

It requires investment. Frankly, it requires the ABC.

I mentioned *Bluey* just now – because it starts with our kids. If they don't hear Australian voices when they are very young, they won't take them seriously when they grow up. They will think important voices come only in American, English, Chinese, or other accents.

That's why in addition to *Bluey*, we have *Bananas in Pyjamas* and shows for older children like *Do Not Watch This Show*, *Knee-High Spies*, *Caper Crew*, and *Tales of Outer Suburbia*.

This is some of our most important programming because it's the starting point for creating respect for Australia, its stories, and culture.

Supporting the ABC is essentially about supporting Australian sovereignty.

Backing national pride and self-respect.

Showing the world what we are capable of.

Our actors, musicians, writers, painters, and artists of all kinds are as good as any on the planet. Standing out in the world of literary prizes, popular music, and of course in Hollywood

Cate, Nicole, Rose, Naomi, and Toni,. . . I could go on. Women so famous, their first names suffice.

Just like Hugh. And Guy. And Rusty. And Sam. And Mel.

And in music, Kylie and Keith. Dame Joan and Olivia.

I have a question for you: Who is the hottest leading man in the world today? And who is the hottest leading lady?

Jacob Elordi and Margot Robbie. Heathcliffe and Cathy in *Wuthering Heights*. Aussies. Top . . . global . . . box office . . . talent.

For a nation of just 28 million people, this level of international recognition is beyond impressive.

For the nation, it's priceless. You can't buy such publicity, such cachet. Other countries spend small fortunes building brands. We have the creative products of NIDA and the ABC.

Australia used to be known for its sport, beaches and marsupials. Now we're also known for our culture.

All 60,000 years of it. The rock paintings. The dreaming. The longest uninterrupted creative civilisation in the world.

Our novelists like Richard Flanagan, Peter Carey, Alexis Wright and Michelle de Kretser.

Our painters like Sidney Nolan and Ben Quilty, Margaret Preston and Rosalie Gascoigne.

Our popular musicians like Nick Cave, Chrissy Amphlett, INXS, Kylie Minogue and of course, the Bee Gees.

Our dancers like Bangarra. And, the incomparable Australian Chamber Orchestra.

Innovative. Unmissable. Totally Australian. And all number one! Again and again!

Here is real national strength.

It binds us together, tells us who we are, gives us a collective narrative to face the challenges of an increasingly volatile and dangerous world.

All this cultural production starts in our schools, universities, specialist training institutions, theatres, opera houses, dance studios, recording studios, music venues, and bookshops. But much of it finds its first wide audience on the ABC.

The ABC is Australia's biggest cultural asset of them all. The biggest source of news of them all. Often the biggest educator of them all. And an asset that reaches across our region to spread mutual understanding and a genuine true love of democracy through the Asia-Pacific.

WE'RE IN A GOOD STARTING PLACE

We're currently in a good starting place for invigorated action.

The ABC's value is being recognised. And rewarded.

In the 2024-25 Budget the Australian Government stabilised our funding. Last December it announced another \$50 million over 3 years for quality new children's, drama and documentary content, and, this month in the most recent budget, very importantly renewed our vital Indo-Pacific broadcasting program, with its factual programming and essential training of local journalistic talent across the Pacific, PNG and Timor Leste.

Our reputation as the nation's most trusted source of news and serious current affairs is unchallengeable because we are of, and from, and about here!

Properly, we acknowledge the government and Parliament's positive support.

And while we understand the intense fiscal pressures bearing on Canberra right now, we intend to keep pressing our case for increased investment, because that case is overwhelming. In many ways, we can't afford not to make it. There is still catching up to do!

So tonight, I want to explain how our nation can become stronger with refreshed invigorated investment in the ABC.

ANDREW BENT AND THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

The first reason is that we embody the living principle of freedom of the press.

The ABC is increasingly indispensable to our democracy.

The great Enlightenment concept that underpins democracy – freedom of the press – is increasingly under threat.

In some places it has already been eliminated. The recent *Four Corners* episode "*The Zero Line*" detailed the destruction of freedom of speech in Putin's Russia.

If you haven't watched it yet, I urge you to do so on ABC iView.

Here, thankfully, freedom of the press stands strong.

It has a long and colourful history. It wasn't handed to us by our British forebears. It had to be fought for. And still does.

And what better to remind us of this than the title of this annual lecture: Andrew Bent.

Many of you will know his story. I want to tell you briefly what it means to me.

On the second of February 1812 Andrew Bent, an orphan arrested for burglary, sentenced to seven-years transportation to the colonies, arrived in Hobart Town via Port Jackson, on the ship *Ruby*.

He made a lifetime of defying all authority and Charles Dickens would certainly have made him a memorable character.

Like many Dickens' characters, Bent was a thief – but a **literate** one, as well as a trained printer. Two skills he used to bring to Australia the great Enlightenment principle of freedom of the press.

Instead of quarrying rocks, he became a newspaperman at the colony's only newspaper: the *Derwent Star and Van Diemen's Land Intelligencer*, Australia's first published newspaper, commencing in 1810.

The *Times of London* it definitely was not!

In *The Fatal Shore*, Robert Hughes called *The Derwent Star* and the other early Tasmanian newspapers “rough, choleric and short”, little more than pungent dirt sheets that “tried to win their petty circulation wars with stilted, lurid rhetoric.”

Today they would be more Kyle and Jackie O on Sydney breakfast radio than David Spears and the *Insiders*. But it beat breaking rocks under the lash at Port Arthur.

Bent soon became the official government printer and proprietor of his own newspaper: the *Hobart Town Gazette*.

No politician could tell him what to publish or provide lessons in taste.

Let's call him the very first “Dirty Digger”.

To Lieutenant-Governor Arthur, Bent was “an unrestrained seditious”. To his own lawyers, though, he was “Australia's Benjamin Franklin”.

When Lieutenant-Governor Arthur tried to introduce newspaper licensing to control what was published, Bent defied him, successfully appealed over Arthur's head, and became the first publisher of an uncensored newspaper in Australia.

But it came at a high cost. In 1825 Bent was sued for libel, fined, and gaoled. And again in 1828, 1830, and 1836.

The use of libel as we all know, has a long and nasty Australian history.

This happened to other Tasmanian publishers too. One gaoled publisher from Bent's days recalled sharing a cell with Tassie's infamous escapee serial killer and cannibal Alexander Pearce.

Bent eventually had enough and chose a more respectable profession – publican – before dying, sadly, as a defeated pauper.

But his defiance established the principle that made our democracy possible. Freedom of the press.

We owe him and others like him a great deal. They deserve to be remembered. In this city – Hobart, a formally endorsed City of Literature, as your Lord Mayor reminded me yesterday - we should recall the literary first that Bent was part of, apart from his legal stoushes. He published the first set of essays *The Hermit in van Dieman's Land* in 1829. Written by Henry Savery who went on to write Australia's first novel- Quintus Serviton of 1829. We have so much to absorb from that early history.

THE LUDDITES – PROVIDING LESSONS IN THE AGE OF A.I.

Some 200 years later, Bent's hard established principle of freedom of the press is still alive.

But is it safe? Does it have a future?

In a legal sense, yes, it is safe. Sort of! Our legal protections for press freedom remain, notwithstanding the never to be forgotten AFP raids on the ABC as recently as in 2019.

However, the main threats today, are practical. And come from technology.

The hand-assembled type of Bent's day has long been superseded and today the internet and social media are making it diabolically difficult for newspapers to monetize their journalism.

The flow of advertising revenues to Google, Meta, X and others has been relentless and devastating in its consequences, ripping the heart out of commercial newsrooms. It is the very subject of energetic legislative discussion now.

Artificial Intelligence is predicted to make this damage worse.

It threatens not just to replace journalists with machines. It threatens the very existence of the concept of the truth by flooding the airwaves with misinformation and disinformation. Which makes the exercise of democracy that much harder.

If you're a betting person, put your money on the Oxford English Dictionary's word of the year for 2026 to be: *slopaganda*.

The question for Andrew Bent in 1826 was: *How do we protect the truth by defeating censorship?*

The question for us in 2026 is: *How do we protect the truth by ensuring A.I. is harnessed intelligently?*

It's a question the ABC is working hard to address.

We immediately run into a conceptual problem: *We can't hold back technology.*

Like the Atomic Bomb, once it was theoretically possible to build A.I., it would inevitably be built. Only in time traveling science fiction novels, might A.I. be un-invented.

The point is not to try to uninvent it, but to make it work for the common good.

History shows that people have tried.

Interestingly, this also includes the early history of Tasmania.

In 1812 and again in the early 1830s waves of English labourers were transported to Tasmania for destroying the steam powered machinery displacing their jobs in the weaving and agricultural industries.

Today we call these disparate rebels “Luddites”.

The new technology of their day had cut their wages, made their centuries old skills redundant, created mass unemployment, and condemned their families to starvation and destitution.

Their battles against technology were mostly lost, and their history was written by the victors. As a result, “Luddite” is now a pejorative term, referring to someone opposed to technological advances that boost productivity and benefit everyone in the long run.

Put in this crude way, those calling for the regulation or pausing of A.I., might be labelled 21st Century Luddites.

Perhaps, though, there are positive lessons from the Luddites’ defeat.

Many historians believe the Luddites received a bad press. They argue their Leader – the fictional Ned Ludd – was a man of principle and conviction. And that the Luddites weren’t opposed to technology per se, but how it was imposed without considering its broad social consequences.

While the great steam-powered technological advances of the Nineteenth Century did eventually raise living standards for millions of people, in the short run it was catastrophic, producing the Dickensian horrors of the early unregulated factory system, including child labour.

For this reason, many consider Luddism a rational response to indiscriminate, unregulated change.

The Luddites transported here to Tasmania remind us of the long history of human struggle to make technology work for the benefit of society.

Their example gives us something to think about as we face another all-embracing technological revolution – one even more profound than the Industrial Revolution.

At the very least, it tells us we can do better than just let it rip.

Twenty-five years ago, the internet was regarded as an escape from the real world. Today, the real world allows us to escape the vice-like grip of the internet.

I am determinedly for change. I’ve long been an early adopter of all things digital. I use A.I. regularly myself and am excited by its potential, especially in the fields to which I have devoted my life: the arts, the media, entertainment, and education.

I’m definitely no Luddite.

But I do believe that we have an active duty to ensure AI’s boundless potential is put to use in the name of democracy, freedom, happiness, and human decency. And that the potential benefits don’t take generations to reach the communities whose livelihoods it is rapidly affecting.

Technological change can’t be held back, but its benefits must be spread widely. Not concentrated in a handful of “Tech Bros”.

EDUCATING THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC ABOUT A.I.

Restraining A.I. from harming our society will take new policy, new regulations, public education campaigns, and strong democratic leadership.

The ABC is once again offering thoughtful leadership, making itself a voice for sanity and relevant application of A.I. in the service of Australian citizens.

AI use across the ABC will be adopted where it strengthens the services we provide to audiences, supports content creation, improves research and reporting, makes ABC content more accessible, and helps teams work more effectively. This will be done through carefully managed training, and experimentation aimed always to enhance quality, accuracy, reliability and public value.

ABC staff will remain responsible and accountable for any ABC content created or assisted by AI. AI may support content-making, operational and internal work, but it will not replace human creativity, expertise or editorial judgement. Editorial control and approval will remain with appropriately authorised ABC staff with a primary focus on integrity, public trust and respect for the rights of creators and rights-holders. We will always be aiming to put the public interest in first rate work, first.

Crucially, we're alerting Australians to the realities of A.I. How it works. What the benefits and dangers are. And encouraging them to think it through for themselves.

The ABC has an unwavering commitment to asking necessary questions about new technology and the purveyors of it. A.I. and other crucial issues demand that we follow the facts, look to real world examples, and explain the processes helpfully.

This has been the theme of our current *Keep Asking* advertising campaign, which you saw at the start of this evening's event.

Some of our most innovative recent programming has involved helping Australians understand the profound dangers posed by manipulation of information technologies, including AI, on an industrial scale.

Some of you may have seen Hamish McDonald's marvellous three-part examination of many tech and other issues in *The Matter of Facts*.

The issue has also been the subject of another winner for us – Matt Bevan's *If You're Listening*.

You may also have seen some excellent recent *Four Corners*' acquisitions on the issue – "*Inside the Rage Machine*" and "*Trump and the Tech Titans*".

As always, we invite teachers across the country to use these programs freely in their classrooms to get young people thinking deeply about what is at stake in the way they adopt new technology.

The secondary students of today need to be across these big issues if they are to lead responses capably, a decade from now.

ABC Education has been a leader in the media literacy space and continues to develop contemporary and timely resources for teachers and students such as the recent *Media Explained* series to complement its already extensive range of media literacy resources.

These programs and others constitute high quality curriculum materials that will help our teachers inform, engage, and challenge the thinkers and leaders of tomorrow.

A NEW ERA OF ABC DOCUMENTARIES

This broad educative role is one of our major charter responsibilities.

Educating Australians in our envied system of self-government will make our democracy stronger.

For this reason, we have an abiding – and renewed – commitment to documentary and related programming to inform Australians about their society, history, institutions and outstanding achievers.

Our current and recent line-up is quite exceptional in this regard. It's all there on iView.

I personally loved Annabel Crabb's series *Civic Duty*, about our electoral system. The highlight for me being opening the doors on that great Aussie invention, the Australian Electoral Commission. Annabel is a true star.

Larissa Behrendt's and Victoria Midwinter Pitt's *Judgement: Cases That Changed Australia* is an excellent examination of the great modern decisions of the High Court and how it has enhanced the rights and freedoms we all enjoy.

There is also Rachel Griffith's *When the War is Over* about our amazing war artists, including describing the indelible impact which iconic songs like Cold Chisel's *Khe Sanh* and Redgum's *I was only nineteen* have had on Australian sensibility.

And Mark Fennell's *Stuff the British Stole* about – yes – all that stuff the British stole, from us and other countries.

And we must not forget the important body of work that the education unit produces for students and teachers such as the recent series *Journeys of Hope* which uncover moving and important immigration stories of Holocaust survivors and Vietnamese refugees.

In the coming year ABC Education will be working on a suite of resources to engage and educate teenagers on the rich history and importance of our democracy.

And on top of all this, we remain the reliable broadcaster of record for the big unifying events that celebrate our nation's democracy and history and bring us together. Pillar events like state and federal elections, ANZAC Day, Australia Day, and New Year's Eve.

No other media organisation in Australia performs anything approaching these outstanding foundation stones to public service broadcasting. Personally, I think we should all be extremely proud of it.

A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO AUSTRALIAN DRAMA

We're raising standards, and nowhere is this more important than in Australian drama production.

Nothing unites us more, gets us thinking more, discovers more acting and production talent than serious drama, and the national broadcaster must create more of it.

We have an unmatched commitment to the great independent production sector in Australia, which demonstrates, time and again, what it is capable of creating.

The ABC is deeply committed to the independent production sector and that level of commitment will only grow as we go forward – across the board.

There's more to come, made possible by the recent investment from the Commonwealth Government.

You've already seen *Goolagong* which Australians loved.

Now look out for *Treasure and Dirt!* A superb adaptation from a Chris Hammer thriller set in an opal mining community.

I encourage you all to wait for *Dustfall* – it will be the premium topical crime offering this year with a razor-sharp, nail biting focus on predatory behaviour.

And then there is *Shakedown* – a dramatic explosion that takes us all on the harrowing journey of Robodebt. A story that very much demands to be told. In the national interest.

The additional funding I mentioned earlier will also enable us to create more distinctly Australian children's content. We have already announced a new adaptation of the much-loved *Bananas in Pyjamas*, and a series based on Andy Griffiths and Terry Denton's bestselling *Treehouse* books. And there are comedies that keep on coming but more of that in a moment.

THE ABC SERVING TASMANIA

Perhaps the most important of our missions is bringing our regions and cities together. In few nations is the population so far flung geographically and yet so united culturally.

Bridging these vast distances is one of the ABC's most profound responsibilities, which it does through national news programming and other dedicated regional programs.

These evergreen and new programs are the backbone of our radio and television offerings – shows like *Landline*, *The Country Hour*, *Backroads*, *Muster Dogs*, as well as the 800-plus hours of original broadcasting we put out across regional audio each and every week.

Not only does all this display the virtues and generosity of hundreds of otherwise overlooked communities to the nation, it brings in very welcome economic activity through considerable production expenditure. Much of every dollar we spend on regional programming stays in the regions. Much of the work generated is done by regional workers.

Tasmanians especially know the importance of the work we do. According to our research:

- Nine-in-ten Tasmanian ABC digital users believe the quality and relevance of our content as "good" or better.
- 53% of people in Launceston and Hobart use an ABC radio station every week.
- 54% of people in Tasmania watch an ABC TV channel or stream ABC iView each and every week.

And it's not surprising why.

My very dear and close friend the late Peter Sculthorpe – one of Tasmania's most distinguished creative sons was known across the length and breadth of Australia because of ABC Classic and its predecessors.

In this the 50th anniversary of ABC Classic, let's remember the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra will be heard regularly connecting Australians with that vital energetic band of players. And in 2029 you can count on Sculthorpe's centenary matching similar celebrations for the 250th anniversary of Beethoven next year. After all we live and work in Australia – and Sculthorpe is ours.

Some of our best and most experienced talent works here in Tassie.

Like Sabra Lane, our wonderful 7pm Weekend News presenter, who also contributes to *Stateline* stories and is known and adored from her previous work for 730 and as the presenter of *AM* and her work "*On the bright side*".

And like Paddy Manning, one of Australia's top investigative reporters, based in our Hobart Newsroom who has done some remarkable pieces since he moved to Tasmania last year.

Our news coverage and general production capacity outstrips any other media organisation here by a country mile, with:

- 140 staff
- spread across three offices in Hobart, Launceston, and Burnie
- making 28 unique local radio programs every week
- producing over 900 unique Online articles that have real impact
- including *TassieCAst*, our state-based News podcast that provides the issues of the week in the state.

Crucially, last year our Tasmanian teams covered 24 emergency events – certainly the most urgent, work we do. Helping Tasmanians in time of emergency is one of our top tasks. We now cover some 700 emergency events nation-wide each year. The thought of facing a major bushfire or storm without the ABC relaying vital information seems unimaginable. We will always be there when you need us most. And now we share it openly with other media as required – in the national interest. In the community interest!

So, we are great believers in the importance of local media. Without it, maintaining cohesive communities and local democracy becomes much more difficult. Almost impossible. Trusted local information is the lifeblood of any community.

And yet, it's under threat.

As I have mentioned, news across the world is ours for a few dollars these days. And yet, local newspapers are disappearing rapidly.

Lacking the objectivity provided by professional journalists and editors, social media can't be trusted to replace it, if at all.

If we have no understanding of what is happening locally, what hope does local democracy – that vital tier of our democratic system – have?

Our remit at the ABC therefore isn't limited to the big global and national stories, but the small local ones too.

Our top news hounds, spread across the major Tasmanian cities, have a remit to get around the outer suburbs and towns and find the local news that matters. Including an obligation to fill their bulletins with more Tasmanian and locally generated stories.

In March, we even embedded a news team in Bridgewater, operating out of the local library to cover local issues in depth.

Just recently, we covered the bikie and money laundering claims which tainted, or should I say haunted, the Hellyer mine as government considered a shut down.

We also investigated the warnings of Labor Party elders that Tasmanian Labor is in danger of becoming the state's 'permanent opposition'.

Big picture stories crucial to Tasmania's future.

We are proudly part of the Tasmanian community in so many other ways too.

Last year our *ABC Giving Tree* broke all records, raising over \$400,000, kick started as usual by a generous donation on behalf of Tasmanians by Premier Rockliff. *The ABC Giving Tree* is Tasmania's largest Christmas charity and has been running since 1988. And every dollar stays in Tasmania.

And we of course have broadcast rights to the games of the Tasmanian Devils – something which we kicked off by covering their first VFL game at North Hobart Oval on March 21st.

This state is a truly amazing place. It brings home to me the common observation that it's often the peripheries whose ideas come to transform the centre.

You'd expect the big cities of Melbourne and Sydney to be the initiators of our most outstanding art and culture.

But it took our off-shore state with the smallest population to give us two of our most internationally celebrated artistic creators: the Booker Prize winner Richard Flanagan and the creator of the Museum of Old and New Art, David Walsh. As well some of our top writers like Amanda Lohrey, Danielle Wood, Heather Rose, and Robbie Arnott, all based here and featured regularly on the ABC.

As Richard Flanagan has written, Tasmania's unfortunate history has always bred extremes and revolt. From such places unique and challenging cultures and ideas invariably follow.

We have a very human attraction to what's going on at the edges. Places with a certain darkness and uneasy history, but also a certain warmth, charm and community spirit.

That's why so much interesting drama and comedy is coming from the island state.

Like *Bay of Fires* – the two-series, eight-part crime thriller drama series set on the west coast.

The whimsical *Rosehaven* – that wonderfully likeable and popular show about nothing in particular and yet about everything human. It really caught on – for no fewer than five series.

Teenage Boss: Next Level, which had its fourth series last year.

And wonderful and uniquely Tasmanian documentaries *The Platypus Guardian* and *Living With Devils*.

Right now, we're loving *Tonight at the Museum*, set at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, giving Australians insights into its amazing collection and the state's fascinating history.

And soon you will be able to watch a new comedy *Ground Up*, with Sam Pang.

Allow me to read you the official synopsis:

"Set in Tasmania, the series follows AFL administrator Hugh Shen, despatched from Melbourne to establish the island's first ever AFL team. But there's a catch: the locals must build a brand-new stadium and not everyone's happy about the \$1.13 billion taxpayer-funded spend."

It's completely fictional, of course! Let us know what you think!

Add to this our regular program visits – *Gardening Australia*, *Grand Designs*, *Back Roads* and *Landline* – and the overall boost to the Tasmanian economy and the state's 4,000-strong arts workforce from all this is considerable.

It is helping create a true sense of place and personality, which is a precious thing indeed in the face of a never-ending tsunami of global content. The ABC's best productions remind us that Australia is different in so many ways!

Over the past five years, the ABC has commissioned 7 shows where **majority** production was in Tasmania with total budgets at \$43 million.

Some 50 per cent of the cast and over 40 per cent of the crew *Bay of Fires* originated from here. Queenstown, where it was filmed, benefited enormously.

Across its five seasons, *Rosehaven* contributed approximately \$10 million to Tasmanian wages, goods and services, with 80 to 100 Tasmanian jobs per season.

We of course acknowledge the strong support of the State Government through its Island Screen Incentive program and other support that makes programs like these so much more affordable.

CONCLUSION

Friends, Tasmania and our nation need a strong ABC as never before.

There are challenges before our nation which Tasmanians understand better than most – like adult literacy where there are numerous signifiers of something approaching a national emergency. Not just here but nationwide.

Similarly, we are seeing distressing signs of serial neglect in core educational fundamentals such as school libraries which are now treated as optional, and discretionary to the judgement of school principals. School librarians' skills and knowledge in managing information and media literacy is essential to all students' learning, understanding and navigating the information terrain in the modern world.

If we don't see action on matters like this from the ABC then where will we see it?

We are aiming always to have a real impact across a breadth of content matched by no one else. But in areas such as children's programming, educational programming, documentary production, current affairs output, and longitudinal investigative work, which tests public policy effectiveness, Australians rely primarily on the ABC.

Friends, there is serious work to be done to get our nation and its people on the right track in an increasingly challenging world.

To do it more effectively will require investment.

Telling our stories; providing people with that priceless ineffable matter core to living – the truth; educating the young about the world they are inheriting; getting us all laughing and crying; and keeping us thinking about that all-important idea: what it means to be an Australian in a pressured and often perplexing and dangerous world.

We are fortunate to have a Parliament and Government that supports this crucial work. Around the world public broadcasters are meeting governmental hostility. We, by contrast, have held our ground and in places gone forward with so much further to go to maintain contemporary relevance and meet avowed audience needs.

Now imagine what we could achieve with a serious uplift in investment. Notwithstanding truly welcome increases since 2022, ABC operational funding has fallen by 12% in real terms since 2013/14 and more than 30% since the mid 1980s.

Time for some Andrew Bent style spirit and a real investment uplift.

After all the Australian people and our sense of identity, social cohesion and national confidence are the true net beneficiaries. And never have they been more needed.

Keep supporting and fighting hard for your ABC.

KLW
20 May 2026

[ENDS.]