

update

incorporating
background briefing
national magazine
friends of the ab

Extraordinary Rally for Extraordinary Shareholders Meeting



The immense crowd overflowed the Opera House steps



Two of the many signs of support



Pensioners message to the Howard Government

More than 15,000 people gathered on the Sydney Opera House forecourt and steps at the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Shareholders of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on 29 April 2001.

Proclaiming the EGM of the Shareholders of the ABC, by the Friends of the ABC, the meeting emphasised that the ABC belongs to all of us, the citizens of Australia who pay for the ABC with our taxes.

Speakers from many different fields spoke of what the ABC meant to them. Chief Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Simone Young, described how she had developed her love of music through the ABC. "We didn't come from a family who could afford to go to concerts", she said. "It was the ABC which introduced me to music."

Paralympic Triple Gold Medal Winner Priya Cooper spoke of how Paralympians for the first time felt included in the main stream of Australia through the Paralympic Games being televised on the ABC. A more sober note was taken by Quentin Dempster and Jane Connors who described how difficult it was becoming to work within an organisation where the support from ancillary staff had gone and there were only 10 researchers left at Gore Hill.

ABC staffers and others who took buckets through the huge crowd were moved to tears by the generosity of the people there. The money collected helped pay for the rally and there was a great boost in membership.

Shareholders called for a spill of the ABC Board

The Shareholders Charter was adopted unanimously by the huge crowd, as was a motion calling for a spill of the Board. A copy of the Shareholders' Charter, with an accompanying letter, has been sent to all NSW MPs.

Friends of the ABC were delighted with the large turnout for the event and with the amount of media attention. This included stories on Channels 2, 9 and 10 and SBS, articles in The Melbourne Age, Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian, Brisbane Courier Mail and Daily Telegraph.

Scenes of the many thousands of people who attended the monster meeting



John Murphy, Member for Lowe, one of the prominent attendees.



Penelope Toltz, President, Friends of the ABC (NSW), talking to new members at the Opera House Rally



Looking toward the stage from the Opera House

President's Report

Our Extraordinary General Meeting held at the Sydney Opera House on 29th April 2001, was indeed an extraordinary success. Our speakers were absolutely wonderful -- and from enough different life paths, that no-one could have pretended that the ABC wasn't an essential part of our lives.

From young people to old people, sports people to musicians, both rock and classical, church people to politicians, scientists, to concerned parents, young business people, academics all were represented on stage and all spoke passionately about the influence that the ABC had on their lives. How the ABC had informed and educated them, had entertained them from their childhood right throughout their lives-- how the ABC was often the only way that they had learned about drama, music, opera, comedy, because it came into their living rooms, because they didn't have to find the money for expensive tickets, pay baby sitters, or pay for parking.

The ABC was there for all of our speakers as it is for all of us.

Rod Quantock did a marvelous job controlling the meeting and moving it along at a pace which kept up the interest and added enormously to the day. More than 15,000 people were in the forecourt at the Sydney Opera House. The meeting received press in the Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian, The Daily Telegraph, The Age, The Brisbane Courier Mail, The Australian Financial Review, television news on Channel SBS, Channel 2, Channel 9 and Channel 10, radio 2GB, 2SM, Wagga radio (commercial), Newcastle radio, local papers and a number of country papers

including the Illawarra Mercury, papers in Bathurst Orange and Newcastle.

We wanted to move the debate along. We wanted the Board of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the political parties to realise that the ABC is on EVERYONE's agenda for the next election. After the meeting we wrote to all New South Wales politicians from both the Coalition and the ALP.

It is extraordinary that politicians reply like clones when they receive letters from the Friends of the ABC. Politicians from both sides of the fence answer as one. They get head office to draft a reply for all of them.

When are politicians from the two major parties going to realise that the time has finally come to put to the top of their list how they will take the moral high ground and care for the ABC and let its constituents know that they will really do something to rescue this icon of democracy and culture.

We know that politicians have finally noticed that the ABC is an election issue, but rubber stamped replies are simply NOT GOOD ENOUGH.



VISIT ELIZABETH FARM WITH THE FRIENDS

Join the Friends
in a tour
of
Australia's oldest
European building
Elizabeth Farm,
70 Alice Street, Rosehill
Sunday,
23 September.

The tour, which lasts for
1 hour, commences at
11.30 am,
followed by a BYO
Picnic in the
adjoining park.

Elizabeth Farm dates from
1793 and, of course, was
the home of John and
Elizabeth Macarthur,
pioneers of the Australian
wool industry.

Parking is available
in the streets around
Elizabeth Farm or
come by train
to Harris Park station.

Members and their
friends / relatives
are most welcome.

Entry cost is \$7 per person,
\$3 seniors concession
or \$17 family (2 + 2).

Bookings are essential
by phoning
Gary Cook 0404 829 372
Jason Lowe 9489 1420
Frouke de Reuver
9642 6485

What went on at the Seventh Annual Three Day Voice of the Listener and Viewer Conference in London

Penelope Toltz

Dear Friends of the ABC, I was invited to give a speech at the Seventh Annual Voice of the Listener and Viewer Conference in London, Thursday 7th June. The title of the speech was to be "Citizenship and Public Service Broadcasting and the Development of Active Citizenship -- the Scene beyond Europe".

I chose to concentrate on our work leading up to the Extraordinary General Meeting of April 29th, and also talked about our lobbying work for this election year.

Because there were so many papers in the three day conference, I will give you a taste, together with some of the broad principles which came out of the conference.

A common theme throughout the conference was how essential public broadcasting is to the process of citizenship.

In the conference overview, Patron of the Voice of the Listener and Viewer organisation, Lord Macintosh, Government Spokesman on the Media in the House of Lords said that "public service broadcasting is essential to the process of citizenship and asked "who will be allowed to speak if every audience is only seen as consumers (especially) when children are seen only as a target market." Public Service Broadcasting is sometimes ridiculed and called old fashioned because its mandate is to inform and educate".

"Peace and prosperity of today are partly a legacy of the work of public broadcasters."

Keynote speaker, President of the European Broadcasting Union and Director General of Finnish Broadcasting Corporation Arne Wessberg, in his address Public Service Broadcasting in e-Europe commented that the "Peace and prosperity of today are partly a legacy of the work of public broadcasters." He went on to say that public service broadcasters had "a distinguished history in balancing the past and the future".

A conference to consider the impact of globalization, digital technology, new European Directives and the new round of negotiations with the World Trade Organisation on public service broadcasting in Europe, the British Commonwealth and elsewhere; the role that non-governmental and civic organisations can play in promoting cultural diversity and active citizenship through the media; how to protect children from commercial exploitation and fund indigenous programming; and the role that public service broadcasting can play in ensuring free access to education and life long learning in the multi-channel age.

In commenting about the differences between public services broadcasting's role regarding television and radio and the new on-line media, he said that the new on-line media made users take an active role rather than the passive role of the past. "On-line participants choose to use," he said. He went on to describe the challenges of the new media, describing the power between the user and the maker of the programs as more level than that between viewer and television..

"In broadcasting, once the program is made and broadcast, the program itself is finished, whereas, in multi media, programs are continually evolving. In broadcasting, one hears or sees the program once whereas with multi-media, the program can be accessed and used many times. The core product is continually developing...it is about interactive dialogue with forward thinking program producers. The convergence of the programs leads to media diversity." Mr Wessberg said. He went on to explain that one

of the most important advantages of e-broadcasting is that more people can articulate their ideas, a huge opportunity exists for participation in programs. "However, he warned, there are problems when economies of scale and synergies come into the equation, as this can lead to the narrowing of opportunities.

A counterbalance to the convergence which is occurring in other parts of the media.

Public Service Broadcasting presents a rare opportunity to invest in a resource which brings a counterbalance to the convergence which is occurring in other parts of the media. He went on to say that public service broadcasting opens portals to a wider contribution from many different groups. Public service broadcasters will continue to play a vital role in keeping up quality, while at the same time removing barriers to more public participation.

Most speakers emphasised four themes which have occurred as a result of the new technology.

1. Digital technology is changing the way content is produced and delivered.
2. There continues to be cultural problems with media, both old and new.
3. Consumer behaviour is changing as audiences become more fragmented and
4. Some countries are suffering from a drop in funding which is making it difficult for them to fulfil their task as educators.

The essential part that public service broadcasters play in the development of a civil society and democracy,

Another theme which emerged strongly in many papers throughout the three day conference was the essential part that public service broadcasters play in the development of a civil society and democracy, especially in developing countries, many of which are just emerging from periods of rule by despots and dictators.

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The first day of the conference, before the formal proceedings began, was a UNESCO sponsored set of workshops which were attended by a number of delegates from Southern African states, Ghana, Namibia, and South Africa. These workshops were run in order that the delegates, all of whom either work in broadcasting or have some other knowledge of broadcasting as academics, could learn how audiences both as citizens and consumers, could be more closely involved in the development of broadcasting services in the public interest. The group formed a steering committee which will report later in the year on progress and will continue to be in touch with each other for mutual support.

The most serious problem is safeguarding the employees from being arrested or killed.

In emerging democracies there are frequently problems with very small budgets, but the most serious one is proving to be the turning of government information services into true public service democracies, and safeguarding the employees from being arrested or killed.

Some areas do not have the money to start fully funded public service broadcasters, and in those areas, money has been put into community radio stations. While being a start, these stations are not really as successful as fully funded public service broadcasters, constrained as they are with weak signals and very tiny budgets.

One of the dangers seen in the rapid uptake of new media is the technological divide. With expensive digital television sets, set top boxes, cost of computers for those who want to access the internet,

Legislation about the new media is concentrating in both Great Britain and Europe, on technology itself and not content. A number of delegates felt that this obsession with the technology and not content was a real problem

Many people will never be able to afford the new technology and there is much conversation in both

Europe and the UK about the need to make new technology available in schools, libraries and other public spaces, to even out the technological divide for the poorer less well educated in society.

Calls were made from a number of speakers for the strengthening of

How BBC Governors Are Chosen

BBC Governors, the equivalent of the Board of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, are appointed by the Queen in Council on the advice of the Prime Minister of the Day.

However, there are steps being put forward to have the positions advertised in the newspapers. At the moment, anyone can put their name forward with their curriculum vitae and it will be looked at.

There must be a representative of an ethnic minority. There must be a representative from the Trade Union Movement and there is a specific governor chosen to represent Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. There is also a specific place for a television member. There are 12 members and a chairman. The managing director is not a part of the Board of Governors.

The Board is chosen for its experience and the Board Member who liaises with the staff is frequently a retired Ambassador.

At the Senior Management Level there is a separate Executive Board of Management committee to which the Managing Director and other senior management executives would belong.

public service broadcasting world wide to protect regional areas and vulnerable members of the community -- especially children. In places such as Sweden, no advertising is allowed during ANY broadcasts for children. Children's programs are broadcast each evening until 7.30 and also on weekend mornings.

BBC Director of Public Policy, Caroline Thomson spoke about the BBC's role in helping the development of engaged citizens -- those who were a part of the community and who learned a lot of what they needed to make informed decisions, through watching and listening to public service broadcasters.

During the UK elections, the BBC web site contained information about how to vote, what voting meant, and a section entitled "persuade me to vote" (voting is not compulsory in the UK and many younger people are not registering to vote). The BBC and other European public service broadcasters have been instrumental in raising literacy in their countries.

"Public Service Broadcasting exists in part to make the good popular and the popular good."

Ms Thomson emphasised the need for Public Service Broadcasting to be freely available to all, have a high appeal, be of the highest quality with high quality writing, acting, high production values. "Public Service Broadcasting exists in part to make the good popular and the popular good. It is distinctive in that it develops new genres and popularises old ones. Programs about history are watched by three million people, whereas only 150,000 may buy the book which comes from the program," she said.

"In the information age, much of the world suffers from the inability to get information", she said. She cited that, as an example, when the massacre of the Royal Family of Nepal took place, the local government's first reaction was to close down the media. Only short wave radio through the BBC World Service, was able to by-pass the government satellite black out and keep the local people as well as the outside world, informed." she said.

"The BBC has driven digital takeup and has provided programs which have explained how digital technology works. It ran a computer literacy program and provided support for local and regional communities

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and has been fundamental in bringing knowledge and lessons in the use of the new technologies to local people. During the recent crisis on foot and mouth, it was the regional web sites and regional programs over radio and television, which was the quickest and easiest way to keep the people in all communities informed," she said.

The reach of the BBC World Service is almost universal throughout the world. It still broadcasts in short wave as well as through satellite. Short wave is the safest way to ensure that people in areas where there is trouble, will be able to be informed, as it is cheap to receive, needing only a radio set, and does not rely on satellite technology.

Public service broadcasting should be the benchmark against which other broadcasting can be measured.

There appears to be a consensus among broadcasters in Europe and the United Kingdom, that public service broadcasting should be the benchmark against which other broadcasting can be measured. Public service broadcasting fulfils the quality role. Member of the European Parliament, Lord Inglewood, said that public service broadcasting fulfils the quality role, is a benchmark against which other broadcasting can be measured.

Public service broadcasting information on the internet is also a trusted source of truthful information. "It is essential in society, that the integrity of information be maintained."

New laws for broadcasting should be written for a maximum five year period.

The European Parliament has been debating such vexed questions as copyright in the digital age, television without frontiers and partnerships between public service broadcasters and other mechanisms. Lord Inglewood said it was important not

to be "too utopian about the revolution in broadcasting. New laws for broadcasting should be written for a maximum five year period. "Let's get it right for five years, and then we will be in a good position to move forward another five years.

Money or privileges for quality channels whether they be public service or private broadcasters.

One of Lord Inglewood's most interesting propositions was that there should be money or privileges for quality channels whether they be public service or private broadcasters. There has been talk of cheap or free licenses to encourage high quality broadcasting.

The European Parliament sees public service broadcasting as an instrument of diplomacy and believes that the money spent on the BBC World Service and Deutsche Welle is extremely well spent. Cross media ownership is seen as extremely dangerous and is an area of concern.

"It is to the public's advantage for cross media rules to be kept in place. Those who argue AGAINST cross media rules are always arguing for decisions which will be to their monetary advantage.

Non-Government Organisations and Their Role in Public Service Broadcasting

A number of non-government organisations have joined together in Britain and Europe in order to teach NGO's to use the media. Media professionals train staff and volunteers and satellite space is provided. These organisations no longer want to depend only on government, but wish to make their own programs. An example shown was of the campaign against land mines. "Getting Princess Diana to be the patron, was a huge help and made the task much easier. NGO's are also lobbying companies who make soap operas to put important themes, such as AIDS and safe sex into their story lines.

Greenpeace has made an 8 part

series to be shown on German mainstream television. In Great Britain 60 NGO's have joined together to make documentary films not touched by other groups. The money made from selling the documentary is ploughed back into programs.

"Even the Web will become less and less accessible"

"A key issue is access to spectrum," said consultant to Citigate Public Affairs, Carole Tongue. "Even the Web will become less and less accessible as time becomes more and more expensive," she said.

"Of course, there are also community television stations in the UK and Europe. The main challenge for them is to make interesting programs which will attract viewers.

The UK Community Channel can be accessed through www.communitychannel.org

A free market alone cannot bring diversity

The Co-ordinator for the International Network for Cultural Diversity Gary Neil, said that "most governments now realise that a free market alone cannot bring diversity. New trade agreements attack these rights and new legislation must be found to provide for future needs."

"What we view as promoting choice, the United States views as erecting trade barriers for e-commerce, television and film. The International Network for Cultural Diversity was founded in Santorini to represent NGO's of all kinds to push to redress the imbalance between cultural diversity and to make sure that agreements entered into do NOT restrict cultural diversity.

They engage in dialogue with the World Trade Organisation and UNESCO and with the world's cultural ministers and hold their meeting in tandem with the WTO schedule so there can be cross dialogue.

Penelope Toltz paid her own air fare and all conference expenses and accommodation were paid for by the Voice of the Listener

Vice President's Report

On Wednesday, 6 June, at Balgowlah, I joined Democrats Senator for NSW Vicki Bourne, ABC Staffer, John Millard and Senior Lecturer, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at, UTS, Dr. David McKnight to speak at a Democrats Public Meeting regarding the ABC and its future.

In excess of 100 people attended the meeting, again reinforcing that when our ABC is under threat from within (The Board and the Managing Director) and externally (The Government), the people respond and voice their concerns forcefully.

Vicki Bourne has long been a staunch supporter and has been instrumental in highlighting deliberate attempts by the Government of the day to undermine the effectiveness of the ABC.

John Millard is renowned for "blowing the whistle" on attempts to commercialise the ABC. He spoke with first hand experience off the low morale amongst staff and the struggle to continue as a quality broadcaster in the face of shrinking resources.

Questions flowed freely from the audience who were obviously well informed and passionate in their feelings for the ABC.

On Sunday, 10 June, I was invited to speak at a Conference held by the NSW Greens. The purpose of the invitation to the Friends was to permit the Greens to move a detailed resolution on Public Broadcasting for presentation their National Body.

Approximately 25 delegates unanimously adopted the principles of the Shareholders' Charter as being appropriate to their resolution.

Gary Cook

Ode to the ABC

This was sent to us by FABC Member Lesley Allen

When I turn on the switch I'm beginning to twitch
With excitement and high expectation,
To hear weather and news and political views
On the state and the fate of the nation.

No ludicrous ads for market force fads
Or things that I never will need,
No late model cars or mixtures in jars,
Unless overtaken by greed.

No Yankee sit-coms with crass, plastic Moms
And scripts full of juvenile jollity.
I span the world from my chair, ABC's on the Air!
With programs of infinite quality.

I love music and drama, the whole panorama
Presented by staff ever tireless,
Whose work hours are long and pay -- a mere song!
Long live ABC TV and Wireless!!

The Friends Stall at Blacktown City Festival in June Attracted Lots of Interest



**Bathurst Friends are holding a Street Stall
Friday 29th June to raise awareness of the
Friends, sell t-shirts, cakes, stickers, etc .**

friends
of the abc

STOP PRESS

**Meet
Quentin
Dempster**



Author, Presenter of Stateline and outspoken
advocate for an independent ABC and
**Tim Bowden, intrepid explorer
Forster Bowling Club
Sunday 29 July
10:30 am**

Please contact Audrey Semon or Denis
Wallis of FABC Great Lakes Branch for details

You can find out about other events
which may be happening in your electorate
and add your help and/or suggestions

**FABC Stalls • FABC meetings
FABC Fun!**

Audrey Semon 6554 8507
Denis Wallis 6554 2286

A better way to choose the directors of the ABC National Conference of FABC determined to make this a public issue

On the weekend of May 5/6 delegates from all state Friends met in Adelaide for a conference of sharing and planning for our election campaign.

We were buoyed by the huge success of the Canberra rally - since followed by the amazing Extraordinary General Meeting at the Opera House. We are confident that the crisis at the ABC will be a major issue in the federal election and that we will be able to alert our supporters and the public to the parties which offer the best hope for rebuilding the ABC.

It was a time for sharing each other's strengths and skills, determining what we will seek from political parties, and setting up an action group to coordinate our election campaign.

Two informative guest speakers addressed the conference: Stewart Fist, technology and communications writer in *The Australian*, and Graeme Thomson from the Community and Public Sector Union.

Among several decisions taken at the conference was our determination to bring the issue of the politicisation of the Board into the public arena. From it's beginnings in

1932 governments have appointed, among others, political allies to the ABC Board, but never before has it been brought to such a crisis. This is due to its current extreme politicisation.

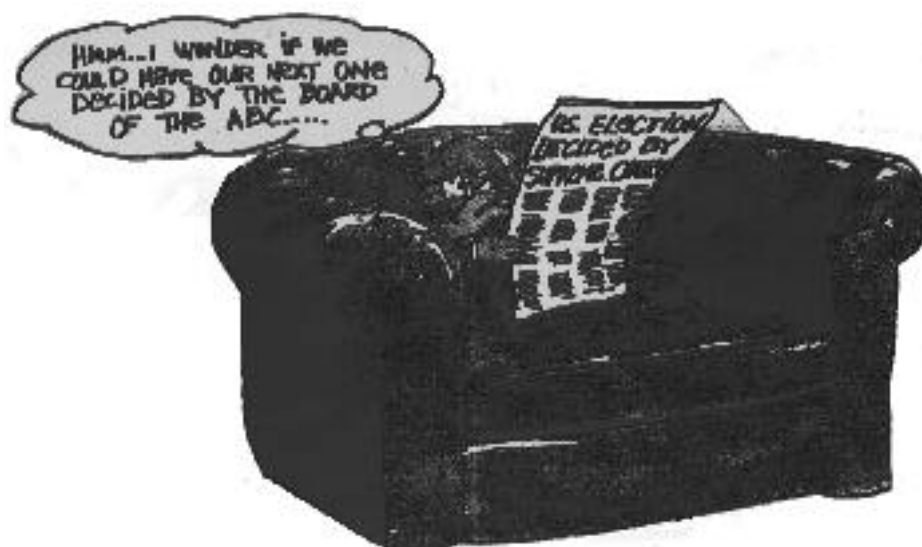
The Labor Party might privately agree with this but are reluctant to give up their own right to appoint to the Board.

Stephen Smith, Labor's shadow minister for communications has said: "Unlike the Howard Government, Labor is committed to the ABC as an adequately funded, genuinely independent and truly national public broadcaster."

If the ABC is to be 'genuinely independent' there must be another way of choosing its Board.

An alternative system of appointing the Board should be based on genuine merit instead of party mateship. In our meetings with Stephen Smith he has shown a willingness to listen to our suggestions. We look forward to further discussion.

FABC's intention is to propose options for an alternative way of appointing the Board and to make this the subject of public debate.



Cartoon courtesy Bill Leak

The Dangers of Politicisation

Most people now accept as inevitable the politicisation or privatisation of any organisation capable of exerting power or generating revenues. It doesn't matter which party governs; each will load up the boards with roughly the same people, and each will flog off whatever they can - all to keep the other from benefiting from asset sales or appointments after a change in government.

No-one really pretends any more that the best people are being selected for their expertise, or that what they are doing is really important.

But the idea of using multiple sources of selection to insulate important committees from one-sided political influence still deserves further consideration. And if ever we needed such a process it is with the ABC Board.

In May 1999, to their great credit, the Democrats moved a private member's bill to reform 'this blatant board-stacking exercise [that] endangers the independence and integrity of the ABC and has the potential to do grave danger to Australia's international reputation'. But the bill is still sitting on the table of the Senate; it can't find support from either side of the main political divide.

Yet clearly, "it is absolutely critical that the ABC is not compromised in its work and that it does have a genuine and impartial board". The quote is from Alston, back in 1994 when he was in Opposition. What's more, Alston predicted it would be "a great disappointment to all those who are looking to the Government to take this opportunity to make appointments to the board on the basis of merit".

Unquestionably, he was right in his judgment. The Coalition gave us Liberal political lackeys to replace the Labor ones, and merit didn't get a look in.

STEWART FIST
The Australian, 24/4/0

The ABC and the federal budget - a curate's egg

There were a couple of positives in the federal budget for the ABC. After bullying and bad-mouthing the ABC for so long, the Coalition felt compelled to increase the ABC budget. The penny had finally dropped with the government - the ABC is an election issue.

The \$17.8 million a year, for four years, is well short of the \$40 million a year ongoing that the ABC asked for. It is nowhere near the \$66 million the Coalition took out of the ABC funding base after the 1996 election. Despite that, it's better to have \$17.8 million than nothing.

On the negative side this is stop/go economics. With one hand the Government takes away \$66 million, and with the other hand it gives back \$17.8 million, but only for four years. The ABC can implement some new program initiatives, but it will have to cut them off again in four year's time, or else abandon some other activity.

This was the very reason that triennial funding was introduced. It is very hard for the ABC to plan effectively if it can't predict its income from one year to another. This kind of see-saw funding does

not assist the efficient use of taxpayers' money. After all the turmoil of the last year or so the ABC needs stability, not another ride on the big dipper.

There's another problem that comes with chronic under-funding. It has been suggested that this money is a tied grant. Strictly speaking it isn't. The ABC Board can legally spend the money for any legitimate ABC purpose it chooses. But having told the Government that the money was being sought primarily for regional initiatives, the ABC would be foolish to spend it on something completely different. If they did so, their chances of more funding in the future would be slim.

Chronic underfunding exposes the ABC to temptation in a number of ways. It's pretty obvious that if you just say 'give us more money', without saying what for, that you're not going to get very far. It must be tempting for an ABC Board, in an election year, to seek more funds for an area where the government feels vulnerable - like in rural and regional Australia. (Given the Government's concern to win the votes of the retirees, it's surprising that the ABC hasn't come up with a plan for an old people's version of Triple J - they

could call it Grey Radio or maybe the Nostalgia Network.)

Similar temptations can happen with ABC enterprises. Do we have yet another cooking program because research indicates this is what viewers want, or do we have yet another cooking program because ABC Shop takings suggest that we'll sell a lot of cookbooks?

Do we program Bananas in Pyjamas because the kids love them, or do we program the Bananas because we'll sell a lot of merchandise?

Without adequate and stable funding forthcoming temptations such as this will continue to eat away at the margins of the ABC's fragile independence.

The ABC staff should not be under this kind of pressure. Triennial funding should be maintained. The \$66 million (indexed for inflation) should be restored to the ABC's funding base, and there should be additional funds for the ABC's magnificent web site, and other forms of new media.

DARCE CASSIDY

ABC Supporters Bus to Travel Victoria to Canberra

Victoria held its Melbourne rally in Treasury Gardens on 17 June. The rally farewelled a busload of supporters who will tour through Victoria on their way to Canberra to talk to politicians on both sides of Parliament.



Cartoon courtesy Pryor

Investigation into the ABC by the Australian National Audit Office

Operation of the board and management under review

The ABC's managing director, Jonathan Shier, is under attack on many sides. Among his detractors are the usual suspects, including the Community and Public Sector Union and the Friends of the ABC. A less likely antagonist is the Screen Producers Association of Australia, which is critical of the ABC's commercial dealings with the independent film-making sector.

But Shier's nemesis (if he is to have one) may well come in the form of that innocuous and little known organisation - the Australian National Audit Office. The ANAO is investigating the ABC. A team of four audit staff is wading through documents and interviews with ABC managers. The broadcaster might have reason to worry because the inquiry is being done by the Performance Audit Service Group of the ANAO. It's not about the financial books, it's about corporate governance. It's about how the board sets direction; how management produces programs; how the management reports back and how the board reports to Parliament.

One objective is to determine if the ABC adequately reflects its charter. But it will not just restrict itself to management systems, it will also look into issues such as programming and scheduling.

The chains of command at the ABC have never been renowned for their tautness and the turmoil in the organisation is largely about a program commissioning system that has not properly got off the ground in 10 months.

Word from inside the ANAO is that a lot of new systems at the ABC have made the audit job more difficult, hardly an auspicious sign.

The Parliamentary Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audits ordered the inquiry. Unlike some inquiries, it was not triggered by an automatic performance review process but deliberately chosen for

investigation. The ABC will get a chance to respond to a draft report before it goes to the committee. Depending on the findings, the committee may order a public hearing.

ROBERT BOLTON
Australian Financial Review
3/5/01

Intention to change the culture of the ABC came from the Board

How credible is the assertion by British television executive Stephen Claypole, shortlisted for the managing director's position in late 1999, that "some of the ABC board members who chose Jonathan Shier as their new managing director wanted a candidate who would remove a list of Labor Party 'sympathisers' from the broadcaster"?

Mr Claypole is reported as saying that during interviews and talks with ABC board members in Sydney he was surprised to hear some directors start talking about pro-Labor Party "on-screen personalities and senior executives" in the national broadcaster. "It was clear they had a list of people they wanted to get rid of," he said. "Clearly there was an agenda for a very radical overhaul of the ABC." *

Two members of the board, Michael Kroger and Judith Sloan, said that there had been no such discussions. But the sackings of ABC staff that have occurred under the appointed managing director, Jonathan Shier, are consistent with the allegation.

'Shier said, via his corporate spokesman, that no board director ever told him to remove ABC Labor supporters, or large numbers of managers.

'Yet one defining feature of Shier's first year at the ABC is the systematic departure of dozens of upper-level managers,

particularly those in charge of editorial content.'

'..before starting work, Shier got special permission [from Donald McDonald] to spend more than \$253,000 with two executive search firms to help him find new managers.' *

*C BANHAM & P CLARK,
SMH 12/3/01

We should not be surprised at Shier's expressed determination to change the culture of the ABC, which he is achieving with wholesale sackings and the appointment of many with a strong commercial background and little or no public broadcasting experience. After all, this was one of a list of 'essential attributes' for a new managing director as required by the ABC board. These included:

"A change manager, able to lead an organisation through significant cultural transformation."

We, the shareholders of the ABC, would have appreciated some transparency on this requirement from the chairman of the board. What did the board mean by this?

Whence had come the pressures to transform the culture of the ABC?

Pressure had certainly not come from the shareholders.

Turmoil at the ABC

The great restructure self-destructs

Exactly a year ago Mr Shier upended the management and program making structure of the ABC with the creation of the content development division.

Mr Shier has announced yet another restructure of the corporation. This was 'a tacit admission that the grand restructure he put in place last June, the key to revitalising the ABC, has failed.' *

'The intervening hiatus has damaged the national broadcaster. Replacements for flagship programs such as Quantum and Media Watch are barely off the ground and the stock of locally made drama is running low. A string of senior man-

agers has been sacked and the bill for redundancies is eating into budgets elsewhere.'

'The inaugural director of program and content development, Guy Dunstan, was appointed in a blaze of publicity in June. His job was to wrangle 21 'genre heads' who would develop program ideas. His position was considered so important he was ranked with the head of news and current affairs.

'But Dunstan found the genre arrangement unwieldy and warned Shier it wouldn't work. It drew valuable people away from production areas and did not sit comfortably across radio, TV and online as

intended. He was sacked in February.

'His replacement, Sandra Levy, also quickly realised the system was cumbersome. The full 21 appointments were never made and Levy has persuaded Shier to jettison the arrangement. The genre heads will return to their jobs as executive producers of programs and will report to the director of development or the heads of factual or non-factual programming [two new positions.] As one staff member who declined to be identified said: "The genre system is dead." *

* ROBERT BOLTON
Australian Financial Review

Report Card

Mr Shier has been at the ABC for 15 months and we are only now beginning to see the impact of his new regime on the television programming.

Littlemore has gone and seems unlikely to return; it has been replaced for a limited period with the studio-based Law Matters. Head of television Gail Jarvis has promised a revamped Media Watch - and the union ban on a replacement for Paul Barry has been lifted - but it seems nothing is actually in preparation. Quantum has been replaced with AfterShock, a science infotainment program produced by Jigsaw Entertainment.

Something in the Air has gone from 4 half hour episodes to one hour in prime-time on Saturday. Its slot before the News is being filled by antique repeats of As time goes by and Yes, Prime Minister. Stateline has replaced The 7.30 Report on Fridays, followed by the venerable Fawlt Towers. And on Sunday we can enjoy the BBC's Top of the Pops. Two new programs from the UK have so far received underwhelming reviews: *My Family* on Mondays, and on Tuesdays *Can You Live Without?*

ABC managing director Jonathan Shier made it clear when he took over from Brian Johns 14 months ago that ratings would be a priority. At his first staff address he said it was a "disgrace" the national broadcaster's ratings weren't higher. A year after that comment they are far worse.

Amanda Meade
The Australian 22/5/01

The national broadcaster's 'five capital city' ratings share fell from 16.8 at the beginning of the new OzTAM ratings system in February to just 13 for the period May 7-21.

Cartoon courtesy Pryor



What is FABClist?

The NSW Branch of the Friends has set-up an e-mail list for use by members with e-mail. FABClist is like a community notice board. Anyone can pin-up a notice (e-mail) and everybody in the Friends community (e-mailers who 'subscribe' to the list) can read the notice (by e-mail). PS: The 'subscription' is free! This is a great forum for late breaking news, information, opinions and debate amongst like minds i.e., lovers of the ABC.

To join the list, send an e-mail to fabclist@optusnet.com.au with SUBSCRIBE as the only entry in the Subject line and your full name and phone number in the body of the e-mail. Of course, you can 'unsubscribe' from the list at anytime. If you want more detail call the FABClist Moderator Chris. Cartledge on 02) 4226 2323.

Asset stripping at the ABC

Underfunding cuts to the heart of the national broadcaster

The ABC is one of our greatest cultural and democratic assets. But, at the rate of asset-stripping at the national broadcaster, for how much longer can we expect it to survive?

Money and resources have been stripped from program-making in both television and radio.

Researchers and infrastructure have been removed and it is said program makers are now despairing about declining quality.

There has been a 10% staff cut in television in NSW, the major production centre. Almost half of the producers working outside news and current affairs have been sacked.

TV has moved out of documentary and feature making, with the exception of the Natural History Unit which survives for now, and Australian Story. The energy is gone and morale is at rock bottom.

All programs now have lower research component

The ABC inventory of programs has dwindled. This has contributed to the ABC reducing the lead time for making programs - ie the time between commissioning and the programs going to air - simply to fill the air time. There has been a move to studio based productions as these tend to be cheaper and have a shorter turn around time - all programs have to be made within two months and have a lower research component. The scenery workshops are being closed as ABC management have said there is nothing on the production schedule for them to do.

The latest blow is the cuts to library and archives. [See page 13] The planned cuts will make even less of the archives accessible. While new technologies have helped, and can help more in the future, they are not a magic solution; information does not catalogue itself, and if it is not properly catalogued,

by trained people who know what they are doing, then it is difficult to retrieve.

We believe the only training available at the ABC now is in performance management, ironically, and financial management; there is little or no technical training. As the ABC has been the only trainer in television the effect of this will go right through the television industry.

Younger people are leaving, demoralised

Younger people are leaving, demoralised by the lack of opportunity. Some cross-media trainees were taken on four years ago; out of 700 applicants seven people were employed. These were the best and brightest. In May they were given their redundancy notices. There were no jobs for them, even with the focus on 'new media'.

It has been Hobson's Choice for the ABC. Without proper funding the ABC could confine itself to radio and television, and ignore new and interactive communication media like the Internet. This would tend to condemn the ABC to an 'old media' ghetto, and lay it open to the charge that it is old fashioned, out of touch and set in its ways. Alternatively, if the ABC is to be an active player in the new media, it has to fund this activity by robbing radio and television. Either way, the ABC loses.

But the need to fund new media is only part of the story. There are also questions about how the ABC Board and Managing Director have used the limited funds at their disposal.

Why were so many of Brian Johns Managers sacked?

How much money has gone into restructuring, redundancies, marketing, consultancies and increased management salaries? Why was it necessary to sack so many of the managers appointed by Brian Johns? Why have so many of the

new managers, hand picked by Jonathan Shier, also jumped ship? Why was Jonathan Shier's new structure abandoned after just over a year?

The ABC needs an independent Board committed to public service broadcasting

Yes, the ABC needs more money. The \$66 million taken away by the Coalition needs to be restored, and the ABC needs additional funding to participate effectively in new media like the Internet. But something also has to be done about the Board and the Managing Director. The practice of filling the Board with political cronies of the government of the day has to stop. The ABC needs an independent Board committed to public service broadcasting, and a Board capable of exercising effective corporate governance.

The Story of Australian Story

Australian Story is one of the ABC's few remaining fully funded documentary program series produced in-house. This is a documentary series that fits the ABC Charter like a glove, a program that brings inspiration and unity to our community with its uplifting stories of real people - with no funding compromise or bought-in programs.

Cuts to staff in ABC library and archives

An ABC memo announced in early April that 101 positions in areas such as the sound and videotape libraries and document archives would be cut to 71.

Management says that the restructure is to streamline the archives and library as part of the transfer of television studios from Gore Hill to Ultimo.

"We're ensuring the library is set up as effectively and efficiently as possible for a converging media environment going forward." ABC's director of content rights management, Robyn Watts.

But staff remained unconvinced. Dr Jane Connors, executive producer of the social history unit at Radio National, said there had been no consultation with staff who worked in the archives or those who referred to them. "The archives are so significant to the ABC one would expect views to be widely canvassed before this announcement was made," she said.

Dr Connors said the ABC's archives dated back to the 19th century. "We have the rarest and most valuable material about every aspect of Australian life and there are gems and treasures all the way through it. There is the sound of Australia in the 20th century in that archive. I am horrified this decision will jeopardise the access of the public to this collection."

The national preservation coordinator for ABC TV, Ms Caitlin Hickie, said the changes were severe.

"There will be no preservation section as such in the new structure, there will be a couple of positions responsible for the collection's development and selection."

CYNTHIA BANHAM
SMH 16/4/01

Telling our stories

At the end of our invigorating national conference in Adelaide, chairperson Penny Wright suggested an activity which was to remind us why we have, most of us, spent so many years of our lives fighting for the integrity of this unique organisation. Penny asked everyone to spend a few minutes sharing with the group why they felt so strongly.

Everyone had their own story of programs that had closely touched their own lives. One of us came close to tears as she described Radio National as part of her family.

It seemed we have all been with the ABC since childhood or arriving in Australia, but no-one could match Peter Shorne who recalls listening in 1932 and credits his education to the ABC. Adam praised JJJ with Heywire and Unearthed and spoke of how they connect with people of his generation.

'Constant friend and companion', 'deeply moving story': these words came up time and time again. Some recollections were of stories heard years before. Our chairperson confessed to having no less than 13 radios around the house, all tuned to the ABC.

If our representatives in Parliament could have listened in to this session they might begin to understand the passion that people feel for the organisation they, the MPs, have no compunction in running down.

The ABC tells our stories. It unites and defines us as a people. As the Charter puts it: its function is [to broadcast] programs that contribute to a sense of national identity, to inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community.

Which it does, when it is allowed to, brilliantly.

We love our Radio National Overwhelming Response of 7,600 in two weeks

In the limited space of just two weeks, Radio National received 7,600 responses to its invitation to comment on the network's programs. Recently appointed RN head Mark Collier was reportedly overwhelmed by the response.

"The passion of listeners has really bowled me over," he said. "We are still reading and analysing responses, but it seems a large proportion is from rural and regional areas and letters came from truck drivers, prisoners, people living in caravan parks, people in their 20s, retirees, solicitors, dentists, school teachers. That is significant as we are often accused of catering to an elite audience."

Programs that were singled out for mention were: *Background Briefing*, *Australia Talks Back*, *Life Matters*, *The Science Show*, *Late Night Live*, *The Comfort Zone* and the newly introduced *Saturday Night Drama*.

Gladys apologises for the absence of her column in this issue. It isn't just that she can't find much humour in the news at present - She will return!



Cartoon courtesy Tandberg

STOP PRESS

Director of Television, Gail Jarvis, has resigned after just 9 months in the job. Ms Jarvis is the fifth of Jonathan Shier's senior hand-picked appointments, to resign suddenly.

Darce Cassidy in his press release said: "The responsibility for this turmoil lies with the Managing Director and the ABC Board. The ABC Board should urgently investigate whether or not the Managing Director is capable of selecting and maintaining an effective management team." 3/6/01

Dramatic departure

The ABC has confirmed the departure of Tony Virgo as its head of drama. Virgo replaced Sue Masters when she left for Ten last year. Virgo is reported as saying "It has been a delightful experience working with the ABC developing quality drama."

Daily Telegraph 19/4/01

Attempts to Control ABC to Become More Ruthless

As the existing political system comes under pressure the attempts to control the role of the ABC will become more ruthless.

In my view the strategic importance of the ABC to developing Australia's representative democracy is so high that I would be comfortable with the role of the ABC being the only issue at the next Federal election.

PETER BRAIN,
Deakin Lecture, 15/5/01



WRITE TO THE ABC NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

The role of the Council, under Section 11 of the ABC Act, is to 'either on its own initiative or at the request of the Board, to furnish advice to the Board on matters relating to broadcasting programs and television programs of the Corporation.'

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<http://www.abc.net.au/corp/nac/default.htm>

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Visit us at **www.fabc.org.au/nsw** or **www.fabc.org.au**

Current and past Update incorporating Background Briefing can be accessed at our website along with other current information. Links on this website will take you to all state sites.

update

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Update is also supplied to journalists, politicians and libraries across Australia. It is produced and edited in Sydney but contributions are welcome from NSW country and interstate branches.

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FABC Update

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Friends Campaign Committees up and running

Targeting 27 second preference vulnerable electorates

The FABC have been trying to establish a Campaign Committee in each of the 27 Federal Electorates in NSW which have, up to now, depended on second preference votes.

So far, we have found one or more members in each of these electorates (except Greenway) who are willing to initiate a Campaign Committee. Our next step was to write to every one of our members in the electorate and ask those members to give their contact details to the volunteer Campaign Committee Initiators.

The first task we are asking these c'tees to undertake, is to organise a deputation to their local member of Parliament to lobby for the independence and funding, etc., of the ABC.

So far, there has been a good response from members who have made themselves known.

A special Kit has been prepared to help with the organisation of the deputation and subsequent tasks, such as publicising the MPs response, and further lobbying of all significant candidates in the electorates.

The Kit will be sent shortly. The preparation of this Kit has been delayed while we gather the best arguments, information and nationally agreed upon demands.

The electorates we have chosen to target at this stage are; Banks, Barton, Charlton, Hume, Hughes, Gwydir, Cowper, Calare, Bennelong,

Greenway, Parramatta, Gilmore, Page, Robertson, Lowe, Paterson, Dobell, Eden-Monaro, Wentworth, Newcastle, Macarthur, Richmond, Parkes, New England, and .Lindsay

An Electoral Campaign Sub-committee has been formed of people who have volunteered to act as liaison between the activists in each electorate and the FABC Management Committee.

They will act as mentors and look after their electorates by being available for help and information, etc.

Overall, we feel that the FABC is having a very powerful impact on the political situation and has put the ABC on the agenda as an electoral issue, which it most certainly was not early this year. However much remains to be done and everybody's effort counts enormously.

Irenie Rennie.



Cartoon courtesy Tandberg

Gov't. insider reveals relentless attacks to wear down the ABC

The ABC was a frequent target for funding cuts because it was regarded as 'troublesome', a former government insider has revealed. Greg Barnes, former chief of staff for Finance Minister John Fahey, said governments 'did over' the ABC because of its forthright reporting. The result was self-censoring.

"It's not because they regard them as being left wing or right wing, they simply regard them as being troublesome. I sat in the Expenditure Review Committee. Why do governments cut the ABC? Because they don't think they self censor enough. They think that this is our big chance, we've been waiting to do over this organisation, unlike Australia Post it actually says something and has views, and let's do it." Mr Barnes was speaking on a Late Night Live forum on bias in the ABC.

"And I think that's the real issue here. The issue about self-censorship is to some extent right but everybody does that in news organisations. So I don't think the ABC is immune from that. But I think the real issue is the fact that you do get a little bit of cowering and you're currently getting it because relentless attacks by Ministers in the Government and Board members of the ABC eventually wears you down. That's the real issue."

Rick Wallace
Herald Sun 15/5/01

Perhaps the ABC should consider a new reality TV show - a kind of Survivor meets Media Watch. Viewers could vote in who next should leave the executive ranks of the national broadcaster and in what manner they should be drummed out of the Ultimo headquarters. It would not lack dramatic edge.

Anne Davies
SMH 22/2./01

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ABC Comments Line An easy way to send your brickbats and bouquets to ABC Management is to telephone (02) 9333 5566 and have your thoughts recorded. Comments are monitored daily and referred to management.

Membership form

Please fill out the form below and return it with your payment to:
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PO Box 1391, North Sydney NSW 2059.

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