

update

incorporating
background briefing
national magazine
friends of the abc

Your Vote on November 10th

There are a number of issues that will determine the way you vote on November 10th. The ABC is only one but it is a very important one. An independent and properly funded ABC is essential to our democracy. Indeed without an independent ABC properly informed voting would itself be under threat.

The Friends of the ABC have never told their members how to vote. We won't be doing so this time, but we do ask you to seriously consider the policies and performances of the major parties before you cast your vote.

In this issue we examine the policies and performance of the Government, the Opposition, the Democrats and the Greens. You will find a couple of pages which can be cut out or photocopied and used as leaflets or increased to A3 size and put in a shop window, etc. Please use them to keep the Friends message about the ABC to the fore. There is more detail inside but here is our report card on the policies and performance of the major parties.

It is based around four key issues: adequate funding, an open and non-partisan process for appointing the ABC Board, prohibition of advertising on all ABC services, and the restoration of Radio Australia's capacity to 1995/96 levels.

FABC REPORT CARD

SATISFACTORY

Australian Democrats A
Consistent hard work and commitment.

Australian Greens B
Steady support.

Australian Labor Party C
*Could do better.
Reluctant to commit.*

UNSATISFACTORY

Liberal & National Parties D
*Disappointing.
Do not take responsibilities seriously.*

REMEMBER THE
ABC
WHEN YOU VOTE

THE BACK COVER
Please photocopy the back cover and post it on bulletin boards, in shop windows, in Shopping Centres, in schools, etc.

NSW 'FRIENDS' ACTIVITIES LEADING UP TO THE FEDERAL ELECTION

For the last six months the Friends of the ABC has had a dedicated Marginal Seats Campaign Sub-Committee which has formed groups in each marginal seat in New South Wales.

The Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc work will continue until all aims and objectives of the Shareholders' Charter are achieved.

In the next few weeks our members are involved in a number of activities leading up to the Federal Election Day, 10th Nov.

Continued on page 2



NSW 'FRIENDS' ACTIVITIES

Continued from page 1

Central Coast Friends of the ABC held a public meeting at Gosford Leagues Club Sunday 7th Oct. This group will hold a public "Meet the Candidate" event at the same venue Sunday, 28th Oct 2pm.

Lower Blue Mountains

Friends of the ABC held a Afternoon Meeting 1-4 at Lawson Public School Grounds addressed by Kerry Obrien Noni Hazelhurst, Michael Craig, Rebecca Gilling Penelope Toltz. It received front page coverage in the local newspaper the Blue Mountains Gazette.

Parramatta Group will hold a Meet the Candidate event Nov. 7th Granville Town Hall. Ross Cameron is the local member

Byron Bay sub branch will hold a "Meet the Candidate" event at "The Rails", Byron Bay 12-2 4th Nov.

Lismore sub branch will hold a "Meet the Candidate" event in conjunction with Lismore Council and has sent questionnaires to all local candidates.

Eden Monaro Friends of the ABC will hold a public meeting to Meet the Candidate 2nd Nov. at Bungendore.

Queanbeyan will hold a public meeting on 4th Nov., to be addressed by Quentin Dempster.

Bathurst sub branch will be holding meet the candidates event 30th Oct. 7 pm at Bathurst Panthers.

Armidale Friends has held meetings with each of the local candidates attending separate meetings.

On the back page of this publication is a copy of the flyer being sent to all our sub-groups in New South Wales. The flyer will also be emailed to our other branches in other states. Contact Penelope Toltz. (02) 9960 5542



Kerry O'Brien speaking at the FABC Blue Mountains Meeting held Sunday, 14 Oct., at the Lawson Public School grounds in the Lower Blue Mountains. Noni Hazelhurst, Michael Craig, Rebecca Gilling and Penelope Toltz also addressed the large group.

Photo Scott Warren,
Courtesy Blue Mountains Gazette

REMEMBER THE
ABC
WHEN YOU VOTE

'NSW Friends' Christmas Party

*Venue: Government Transport Social Club,
19 Regent Street, Chippendale (150 metres from Broadway)*

Friday, 30 November, 2001

6.00 pm to 8.00 pm

Cost: \$15.00 per person (includes finger food and drinks)

RSVP: To Peter Burke (Treasurer), 2 Ayres Road, St Ives
NSW 2075 or email peter@triode.net.au by 23 Nov 2001

Payment by cheque, postal order or credit card (Mastercard, Visa or Bankcard only)

Please Note: Due to construction at ABC Headquarters, we have had to move the venue this year and, of course, disabled parking will not be available. The closest parking stations are in Quay and Thomas Streets (behind the ABC).



President's Report

This has been the most active year for the Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc since I came on board in 1996. I thank all those volunteers who have helped us to work, in a more professional way than ever before.

The most important task we had this year was to get the ABC onto the political agenda and into the heads of politicians. Though there have been many other events which have been extremely serious, the ABC is now firmly on the agenda. When catastrophes occur, as they did on September 11, it is the ABC which gives us the total picture with careful analysis, and a number of different viewpoints.

I would like to thank all those volunteers who have worked tirelessly in many of the Federal electorates all year, bringing the ABC Friends message to local Federal members of parliament.

In another part of this publication you will see the number of public activities in marginal seats that have or will be taking place in the weeks leading up to the Federal Election 10th November.

However, this does not show the amount of quiet work that is needed to make these events happen. A big thank you to Irenie Rennie, our election sub-committee guru and our dedicated team who has been working tirelessly, finding helpers in marginal seats, giving them information, helping them to get the job done.

Members of the Friends of the ABC have seen their local Federal MP at least once in the last few weeks. They have held letter writing days, held stalls, and of course, organised events at which

local candidates for office can be questioned about their attitudes to the ABC and their wish and aim to call for a return to the core funding of the early 1990's, an end to government interference and a new fairer method of Board selection.

I also congratulate the new Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc committee members, elected at our AGM 6th October 2001.

To say that this last year has been turbulent for the ABC is an understatement. Changi stands out as a reminder of the glory days of the ABC Drama department, but of course, it was commissioned **well before** this present MD was in power.

In the past 18 months the ABC has spent \$25 million on redundancies alone! How many programs could that money have made? Think about it - \$100,000 for a one hour documentary, \$500,000-\$800,000 per episode for drama, \$80,000 - \$100,000 for a comedy program. (all figures approximate).

Due to the efforts of rural and regional Australians, money was found for regional broadcasting in the last budget - but it was temporary and tied to certain programming. This once again puts unacceptable constraints on the way the ABC works. See our "What's all the fuss about funding" article in this publication. We also pushed for the Senate Enquiry into Board appointments. See the Senate web site for the Report.

You don't always see obvious results from your work, Members, but, believe me persistence counts as we have seen this year.

Penelope Toltz

Candidates Web Sites

This is the web address where you can look up all the candidates standing for election to Federal Parliament 10th November 2001.

<http://www.aec.gov.au/election2001/candidates/index.htm>

REMEMBER THE ABC WHEN YOU VOTE

Please write to:

Mr Donald McDonald,
Chairman ABC, 700 Harris Street, Ultimo and let him know how much you have valued the calm, professional ABC reporting analysis on events which have occurred since the disastrous destruction of the World Trade Centre and the attack on the Pentagon in the USA.

Please say in your letter how much you value the contribution of Australian journalists who often risk their lives by being on the scene and reporting to us what is happening.

Ask that the money be found to keep them in the field. Remind him, they found the money during another funding crisis in 1991 (Gulf War).

News and Current Affairs budgets are already under attack. With the uncertainty of the current period, it is essential that the money be found for ABC reporters to keep up this vital work.

FABC (NSW) Inc. Executive Committee

President- Penelope Toltz Phone: 9960 5542 Fax 9960 5767
Treasurer- Peter Burke Phone 9144 2668 email peter@triode.net.au
Secretary- Lilliane Leroy Phone 9969 5159
Membership Secretary- Dev and Faith Webber Phone 9990 0600

For fans of Phil Somerville's work, our honorary cartoonist's book "I'm Moderately Fond of Australia" is now available from book shops.



Another ABC supporter joins the Friends at the Gardening Australia Live Friends' stall.

Recent Activities of Friends around New South Wales

Gardening Australia Live

Between September 20th and 23rd Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc ran a very successful stall at 'Gardening Australia -Live' held at Homebush area which houses part of the Royal Easter Show. The event brought to ABC viewers, the personalities of Gardening Australia who held classes, spoke to viewers and answered thousands of gardening questions. Peter Cundall was there the first day, at the front door, greeting huge queues of enthusiastic gardeners, "welcome, welcome, come in, have a wonderful time." It was a great beginning.

The exhibition covered several hectares and encompassed tools, plants, potting mixes, new and different knick-knacks, with landscaped areas with different types of terrain, including red earth with desert flowers.

The Friends of the ABC stall was a hive of activity for the full four days. Volunteers ran the stall which was organised by Gary Cook, Vice-President and Chair of the Events sub-committee. I offer a big 'thank you' to Gary and the many volunteers at the stall, 10 am until 6 pm each day, cheerfully explaining our organisation to the many visitors.

If it was a great opportunity to meet ABC devotees, who have never had the chance to join the Friends. It was a terrific time to talk about the ABC and its place in our world. How it has been continually under attack for so long.

We gained close to 100 new members and sold many t-shirts. The ones created specifically for Gardening Australia Live being most popular. We definitely want to return next year.

Central Coast Friends

Central Coast Friends of the ABC is well and truly relaunched. Not only have the members of the committee seen their local members twice, but they held a public meeting, 6th October, to inform local people about the ABC and what is happening to it and to see whether there was enthusiasm for a public "Meet the Candidates" event.

The Central Coast branch of the Friends decided to hold a public meeting at Central Coast Leagues Club 28th October, 2:00 pm, to "Meet the Candidates".

Quentin Dempster and I addressed a meeting of more than 250 people at Central Coast Leagues Club and received an enthusiastic reception.

The most heartening thing that has happened this year with these meetings, is the quality of the questions we are now receiving. The Shareholders of the ABC are far better informed than they used to be.

This is very gratifying as it means that the information we are so keen to give our members, and those fans who would become members, is being understood and accepted and the viewers and listeners are coming forward to be counted.

A great many of the people attending our meetings are already members, but, each time we join more and more people.

It is possible that you may receive this publication after some of the "Meet the Candidates" meetings have been held. I apologise for this, but time to get a pre-election publication printed and out to you has been very tight.

Penelope Toltz

Do The Write Thing

Please write to Kim Beazley Leader of the Opposition c/ Parliament House, Canberra 2600. Tell him you want some commitment to core funding for the ABC, independence from the government of the day and a commitment to find a better way to appoint the ABC Board.

Fax: ACT- (02) 6277 8495
WA- (08) 9592 1361

Please write to John Howard Prime Minister c/ Parliament House, Canberra 2600 and tell him the ABC's core funding needs to be raised to 1995 levels at least, there should be a commitment to one of funding to provide programming for digital broadcasting and that there should be an end to government interference in the running of the ABC.

Fax: ACT - (02) 6273 4100
NSW - (02) 9816 1349

**Blue Mountains FABC
invites you to a
CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON
Wrapps Cafe, Royal Hotel
Macquarie Rd, Springwood**

**NEW MEMBERS, COME ALONG
AND MEET US!**

**Cost: \$20.00
RSVP and payment - 26 th Nov. to:
Ann Fox - Ph: 4758 6096
29 Valley Rd, Hazelbrook 2779
Please make cheques payable to:
FABC Blue Mountains Branch**

Which Parties are ABC Friendly?

Neither the Coalition nor the Labor Party have been friendly to the ABC. Both in the past have cut tens of millions from the ABC budget, and presided over a drastic reduction in ABC staff.

In thirteen years under Hawke and Keating Labor reduced the ABC budget by a little more than the Coalition did in five years. Labor did it bit by bit, small slices each year, amounting to a big slice over thirteen years. Former ABC Managing Director, David Hill, called it 'the death of a thousand cuts'.

The Coalition did it in one king hit, \$66 million dollars in one year, following their 1996 election victory, despite solemn promises to maintain ABC funding. In this election year, recognising the community concern at their savage cuts, they have restored part of that funding. However this has been through a number of special purpose grants, and the funding is not ongoing. Labor has promised to increase ABC funding, but at this point has not come up with a precise figure.

In two areas Labor has a better record than the Coalition. Labor funded the extension of Radio National, Triple J and Classic FM to regional areas. This has given most regional and rural listeners the same choice of ABC radio stations as city listeners. Labor funded the Cox Peninsula transmitters for Radio Australia, greatly improving Radio Australia's signal in Asia. The Coalition sold the transmitters to foreign interests, and crippled Radio Australia.

Both major parties, when in power, have appointed sympathisers to the ABC board, to the point when the board is widely perceived to be politicised. Both major parties have refused to commit themselves to an open, transparent and non-partisan method of appointing the ABC board, although the Labor Party has said that it will give the proposal more thought.

Labor legislated to permit advertising on the SBS, and in doing so increased pressure for the ABC to

accept advertising. Labor legislated to permit advertising on the ABC's Asian television service in the 1990s. In reviving the ABC's Asian TV service this year, the Coalition said it expected the service to be partly funded by advertising. Neither party can therefore be said to support a wholly commercial-free ABC.

The Democrats and the Greens have never been in power, so it is more difficult to judge their record. However in regard to their policies they are much more ABC friendly than the two big parties.

The Democrats have promised to restore ABC funding to a level before the major cuts introduced by both Labor and the Coalition. Both Greens and Democrats have committed themselves to a non-partisan method of appointing the ABC board. Both resolutely oppose advertising or sponsorship on the ABC.

Our friendliness ratings are as follows:

- **Democrats and Greens:** Very ABC friendly. We can find little to criticise in their policy, or in their past record.
- **Labor:** Labor has a poor record in most respects, and its future promises are vague at this stage. However its record in regard to Radio Australia, and with the extension of ABC radio to regional areas, places it a clear step ahead of the Coalition.
- **Coalition:** The Coalition has a very poor record, and their attitude to the ABC is generally hostile. While they have responded to pressure with some small increases in ABC funding, these increases are temporary and go nowhere near making up for the massive cuts that followed their election in 1996.

DARCE CASSIDY, President
Friends of the ABC SA

The Key Issues

from the letter sent to the major political parties:

- Will you restore the ABC's base triennial funding to at least its 1995/96 level in real terms, plus additional funding to permit the ABC to fully participate in the digital environment, including online services?
- will you legislate to change the method of appointing the ABC board to provide for an open, transparent and non-partisan process which ensures that directors are appointed on the basis of merit and strong commitment to independent and comprehensive public broadcasting?
- will you legislate to extend the prohibition on advertising and sponsorship which now applies to ABC radio and TV broadcasts to all ABC services, including ABC Online?
- will you ensure Radio Australia access to transmission facilities which will restore its audience reach prior to the closing of the Cox Peninsula transmitters; and will you restore Radio Australia's ability to provide at least its 1995/96 level of service?

DARCE CASSIDY, President
Friends of the ABC SA

REMEMBER THE
ABC
WHEN YOU VOTE

The national FABC submission to the Senate Enquiry into ABC Board Appointments is available at:
darce@friendsoftheabc.org.

What's All the Fuss About Funding?

Prior to the 1996 election the Coalition promised to maintain ABC funding. On election night, having won the election, Senator Richard Alston repeated the promise in a TV interview. It took only a couple of weeks for him to break it.

The coalition removed \$66 million from the ABC's ongoing funding base in 1996-7. THAT FUNDING HAS NEVER BEEN RESTORED, AND THE ABC'S ONGOING FUNDING BASE HAS NOT IMPROVED SINCE THEN.

It is important to distinguish between the ABC's ongoing funding base, and one-off grants for particular purposes. Under the ABC's triennial funding agreement with the government the ABC's funding is adjusted each year for inflation by applying a pre-arranged formula. Since the \$66 million was removed, the ABC's funding has never recovered.

However, there have been a one-off special grant to pay for digitisation, and a sum of money to compensate the ABC for the privatisation of its transmitters.

Friends of the ABC want the government to maintain the ABC budget at least at its 1995-96 level in real terms (i.e. adjusted for inflation), plus additional funding to permit the ABC to participate fully in the digital and online environment. In 1996-7 the Coalition, in breach of its election promises, cut \$66 million from the ABC funding base. That money has never been returned and those funding cuts have crippled the ABC.

BUT HASN'T THE GOVERNMENT GIVEN THE ABC \$71.2 MILLION DOLLARS FOR REGIONAL SERVICES?

In the budget the government announced a special grant to the ABC to improve its regional services. It is important to note that this is a special grant of \$17.8 million a year for four years. While welcome, it is not an addition to the funding base. At the end of the four years the ABC will either have to abandon the new regional initiatives, or else take money from another area of the ABC to continue them. This kind of stop/go funding is very disruptive to ABC planning. It is important for ABC stability, and true ABC independence, that the ABC funding base is maintained, rather than force the ABC to go cap in hand to the government every now and then pleading for more funds for this venture or that.

There is no way that the grant of \$17.8 million for four years makes up for the loss of \$66 million

ongoing every year. The Friends of the ABC are also concerned that this funding, in practical terms, is tied funding. The Friends of the ABC suggest it is tied to the political agenda of the government of the day which sees as its priority in this election year regional and rural Australia. The fact the funding is for only four years confirms this is not a long-term commitment to this audience or this part of the Australian community.

All it does is address some of the impact of the budget cuts which reduced the amount of local programming with an increase into state-based or nationally networked programming. While welcome, ***we need to campaign to ensure this money continues.***

Tied funding affects the independence of the ABC and its programming. The Friends of the ABC also question whether in fact the tied funding would have been given to the ABC without the enormous outcry from regional Australians and representations to local members made by the friends and supporters of the ABC right across the country.

WHAT ABOUT THE FUNDING FOR RADIO AUSTRALIA?

The \$2.8 million for Radio Australia in this financial year was, to quote Senator Alston's press release "in addition to the triennial funding", that is, not part of the ongoing funding base and therefore for one year only.

MONEY FOR DIGITISATION

The government decreed that all broadcasters must broadcast TV in digital format. It was not the ABC's decision, but a government demand. As a result the ABC was given a one off grant to cover the cost of conversion. This grant did not become part of the funding base, and was used purely for the digital conversion.

FUNDING FOR TRANSMITTERS

The ABC has also received funding to lease transmitters, after the government sold the ABC and SBS transmitters to private interests. It is misleading to suggest that this compensation for the loss of transmitters is an increase in ABC funding. It has simply permitted the ABC and the SBS to stay on the air after the loss of their transmitters.

Continued on Page 7

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What's All the Fuss About Funding?

Continued from Page 6

The ABC and the SBS have never owned their radio and TV transmitters. In the past they were owned and operated by the Broadcasting Division of Telecom (later Telstra) and provided free of charge to the ABC and the SBS. At a later point ownership was transferred to another government authority, the National Transmitter Agency (NTA). The NTA owned the transmitters, and the NTA was funded to hire private companies to maintain and operate the transmitters. This money went to the NTA, not the ABC. Later the transmitters were sold, and the NTA abolished. You will recall that Radio Australia's transmitters in the Northern Territory were sold to a fundamentalist Christian broadcaster.

In order to stay on the air, the ABC and the SBS now needed to lease the transmitters from their new owners. Therefore the government added to the ABC and SBS budgets the funds that used to go to the NTA. This was not an increase in the overall cost to the government of the ABC and the SBS – it simply meant that money that used to go to the NTA for the benefit of the ABC and the SBS now went directly to the ABC and the SBS, who in turn used it to lease the transmitters that had been sold.

WHAT ABOUT THE FUNDING FOR AUSTRALIA TELEVISION?

This year the ABC won a tender to supply an international television service, directed towards the Asia Pacific Region. This was effectively a commercial contract between the ABC and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Several companies tendered for the contract, and the ABC won. The ABC will receive approximately \$90 million over five years, to supply the service, with \$18 million of that to be received this year. The ABC will need to meet all its own costs from the contract, plus any money the ABC can get from other sources, including advertising (which will be permitted on this external service, but not on ABC domestic services). Once again, this funding is only for five years, is not part of the triennial funding and does not become part of the funding base.

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT IS SAYING

In addition to its triennial funding which was maintained in real terms (compared to 1999-2000, but not compared to 1995-6) in the 2000-1 Budget and the additional \$17.8 million (but not as part of triennial funding, this expires after four years) per year being provided in this year's Budget, the ABC will also receive in 2001-2 (this year):

* \$46.5 million for digital transmission, distribution and equipment. (This is a one off grant, made necessary by a government direction that all TV should be broadcast in digital. It simply covers the cost of conversion from analogue to digital. None of this money is for programs, it is all for transmission and equipment costs)

* A further \$2.8 million to strengthen Radio Australia services (a one-off grant) - building on the previous additional funding of \$2.5 million in 2000-01.

* a loan of \$20 million for activities including the Sydney accommodation project and digital equipment requirements (if the ABC had been fully funded for conversion to digital, why does it also need a loan for digital equipment? These loans are normally not free - interest is charged, but usually at a slightly lower rate than the commercial market.)

* a further loan of up to \$21 million will be provided to the ABC in 2002-3 to finance new office accommodation and studio facilities in Perth (once again, a loan to be repaid with interest).

* \$18 million this year for an Asia Pacific TV service. This funding will continue at this rate for only five years.

So in essence, these are all in addition to triennial funding i.e. not part of the triennial funding, and therefore either one off or short term grants, or loans.

"With this funding the ABC will receive a total of \$763.3 million in 2001-02 - over three quarters of a billion dollars this year. This is in comparison with the ABC's funding in 1995-6, which in today's dollars equated to \$649.25 million."

WHAT THE FRIENDS OF THE ABC ARE SAYING

To directly compare the \$763.3 with the \$649.25, we need to deduct the following from the \$763.3

Digital transmission grant	\$46.5
Radio Australia	2.8
Loan - accommodation and digital	20.0
Regional initiatives	17.8
Funds for transmitter operation	73.4
(paid to the National Transmitter Agency in 95-6, but to the ABC in 2001-2)	
Asia Pacific TV service	18.0
Total	\$178.5

Thus when the \$178.5 in one off grants and loans is deducted from the total of \$763.3, the ABC's base funding in 2001-2 is **\$584.8, compared to the \$649.25 allocated in 1995-6.**

Coalition Party

Coalition Government Policy

ABC funding will be maintained in line with inflation.

Will review digital TV and databasing rules in 2002.

Will drop cross-media and foreign ownership restrictions on newspapers and television.

Coalition responses to the Senate inquiry into ABC board appointments

Government Senators disagreed with all 11 recommendations of the Chair of the Committee, Sen Lyn Allison, Australian Democrats.

Their position is summed up in the statement: **“Problems with the board - no case to answer.”**

The Coalition must be judged on its record.

Record of Coalition Government on its stewardship of the ABC

- Cut \$66m from ABC budget after promising to maintain funding over the life of the Parliament. There has been no restoration of funding to the triennial base funding arrangement.
- Set up Mansfield Review to “narrow the focus” of the ABC and direct areas to be cut.
- Radio Australia funding was reduced from \$12.7m to \$4.7m .
- Cox Peninsula transmitter

switched off, reducing RA’s signal to a whisper in S-E Asia. [The transmitter had been upgraded in 1995 at a cost of \$30m.]

- Sold Australia Television to Channel 7 for a fraction of its value. Subsidised Channel 7 for 3 years.
- Moved to change media-ownership rules to benefit Kerry Packer and Rupert Murdoch. Backed down due partly to Coalition backbench opposition.
- Sold the National Transmission Authority.
- Made digitisation by the ABC obligatory but has refused to fund more than half the cost. ABC obliged to take out more loans.
- Refused any funding for content on digital channels.
- Sold Cox Peninsula transmission equipment to Christian Vision. Leased site for 10 years.
- One-off grant of \$9m over 3 years for RA in 2000.
- Gives back to the ABC contract to provide Australia Television to S-E Asia. Grants \$74m over 5 years. Viability will depend on advertising.
- One-off grant of \$17.8m for 4 years for regional services in 2001.
- Constant (unsubstantiated) attacks over bias.

- Repeated (successful) pressure to outsource.

- Political stacking of the ABC board.

Effects of the actions of the Coalition Government

- Loss of at least 1250 staff.
- Redundancy costs of \$79m over 5 years.
- Loss of many programs in television and radio. Marked reduction in drama and documentaries.
- Cuts to News and Current Affairs budgets in 1997 & 2001.
- More repeats on television and networking on radio.
- Unable to broadcast into Asian region during period of great turmoil in Indonesia and East Timor.
- Very little capacity left to produce television in-house apart from News and Current Affairs.
- Budgets for radio and television cut again in 2000-01 to provide funding for “New Media” and increased management costs.
- Loss of Media Watch and Quantum. Shift to infotainment programs.
- Drive to “change the culture” of the ABC. Loss of many highly respected and dedicated staff.

Australian Labor Party

At the time of going to press the ALP had not launched its policy on the ABC. We do not know their specific commitment on funding nor whether they will be firmer and more specific on their attitude to a more open procedure for ABC board appointments.

We publish a summary of the answers given to a questionnaire sent by the Victorian FABC.

On Funding

Labor will provide additional funding to the ABC, the precise amount to be announced prior to the federal election. Labor is committed to providing adequate funding to the ABC, so that the ABC can properly discharge its responsibilities as a genuinely independent and truly national public broadcaster.

On Funding Arrangements

Labor is committed to providing adequate funding of the ABC through the normal Budgetary processes on at least a triennial basis. Labor has previously stated its preparedness to consult with the Australian community about whether the ABC would benefit from its funding being provided on a quadrennial basis.

On Radio Australia

Labor will ensure that the ABC is adequately funded and has access to the appropriate transmission capacity to ensure the continued services of Radio Australia.

On Privatisation and Advertising

Labor has indicated that it opposes the privatisation of Radio Triple J, ABC On-line and ABC Enterprises. Labor has already proposed amendments to the ABC Act which would have extended the ban on advertising

to the ABC's online and datacasting services.

On the ABC Charter

Labor will not change the ABC Charter in any manner that is detrimental to the ABC. On the contrary, Labor proposes to strengthen the ABC Act by ensuring that the ABC Act and Charter apply to the ABC's datacasting and online services.

On User-pays services

Labor opposes the creation of a two-tiered ABC - that is, with some user-pay services - and supports the right of all Australians to access its broadcasting, datacasting and on-line services for free.

Labor will ensure that the ABC is adequately funded to provide broadcasting, datacasting and on-line services and has access to the necessary transmission capacity. Labor will also legislate to allow the ABC to engage in unrestricted multi-channelling.

On legislating for the Board to operate with greater transparency

Labor has been at the forefront in calling for greater transparency in the operation of the ABC Board. Labor has repeatedly called on the ABC Board to consult with the Australian people about significant decisions and to provide its reasons for them.

Labor has consistently held ABC Board accountable for its decisions through the appropriate forum of Senate Estimates. Labor Senators will continue to do so whether in Government or in Opposition.

On Appointing The ABC Board

Labor is committed to maintaining the independence of the ABC through the appointment to the

Board of people of high standing, merit and demonstrated competence who will faithfully discharge their public interest obligations to the ABC. Labor will also ensure that any appointments reflect the truly national character of the ABC.

Labor believes that consistent with Westminster conventions appointments to the Board, like all other statutory appointments, are appropriately a matter for the Government of the day. Nonetheless, Labor has been willing to examine ways to improve the current appointment process.

Labor supported the recent Inquiry into ABC Board Appointments conducted by the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee. Evidence to the Committee overwhelmingly concluded that a lack of transparency in the appointments process is the most significant factor in undermining the community's perception about the independence of the current Board.

In their Committee report, Labor Senators suggested some ways in which this perception of lack of independence of the Board may be overcome. These include:

- making the selection criteria for Board appointments publicly available; and
- advertising Board vacancies.

Labor is now considering the Committee's recommendations in respect of the ABC and will announce its final policy on this issue prior to the election.

In the meantime, both Kim Beazley and the Shadow Minister for Communications, Stephen Smith, have said publicly that Labor is not averse to considering improving the criteria for appointment to the ABC Board currently included in the ABC Act.

Australian Democrats

- believe 1995/96 FUNDING levels are inadequate and that funding should be restored to at least 1985 levels. Triennial funding arrangements should continue and there should be no tied funding.
- the ABC BOARD should be depoliticised. A Joint Parliamentary Committee should make appointments to the Board.
- call for immediate and full restoration of funding to RADIO AUSTRALIA and amendment to the Broadcasting Services Act to require the leaser of the Cox Peninsula transmitters to carry Radio Australia services.
- want the ABC's restored, regional AUSTRALIA TELEVISION service to be commercial-free and independent and retain a strong news and current affairs component.

The Democrats also believe that

- the ABC should be funded appropriately to enable it to provide audiences with a diverse range of programs of cultural value and intellectual integrity.
- the ABC should be funded to maintain a viable in-house production capacity to own and market its own product, to provide industry training and to continue to provide audiences with innovative programming.

- do not support the sacking or casualisation of production, research, journalists, library or archival staff.
- the ABC should have additional funding for conversion of all equipment and archives into digital formats.
- the ABC should remain commercial-free. Programs should be made on the basis of merit, not on commercial gains, sales, ratings or because they have attracted sponsorship or other third party funding. The ABC's editorial independence should be upheld at all times.
- the ABC should continue to operate without fear of government interference in its daily operations. Management should remain mindful of the ABC responsibilities to its audiences and its accountability to Parliament.

The Australian Democrats chaired the Inquiry into Methods of appointment to the ABC Board. Here are the most significant recommendations of the Chair's Report.

The Chair recommends that:

- 1 the method of Board appointments be altered to embrace a system characterised by the principles of merit and transparency, in order to deal with the widespread public perception that appointments to the ABC Board are made on the

basis of political affiliation rather than on merit alone.

3 appointees to the ABC Board should have a demonstrated commitment to the principles of public broadcasting.

5 formal selection criteria be developed for positions on the ABC Board and reflect criteria already established under the ABC Act. The selection criteria should be drafted by an independent agency, such as the Public Service Merit Protection Commission.

6 vacancies on the ABC Board should be advertised through the national press, and through ABC services, including radio, television and online.

8 all applicants, as part of their formal application, make clear their political affiliations.

9 an independent selection panel short list applications, and forward a list of at least two candidates to the Minister, that the short list be public, and that the Minister should not be obliged to select any of the candidates recommended by the selection panel. However the Minister must not select a candidate who has not first been scrutinised by the independent selection panel.

Australian Greens

"I am replying to the Friends of the ABC questionnaire on behalf of all Australian Greens candidates, including Senator Brown.

"The Greens are completely supportive of the ABC and the need to ensure it is well-resourced and independent, and able to offer a comprehensive service.

THE ANSWER TO ALL FOUR OF YOUR QUESTIONS IS 'YES'.

"We do not have specific proposals for how the Board should be

appointed, but both appointments and funding should be beyond political interference."

Response from: Margaret Blakers

"The ABC is time honoured, it is loved and it is wanted for what it is. In the past years of this government, the Australian people have seen an accelerated dismantling of the intellectual capital, the faithful service and the wanted performance of the ABC. It is a process that we have to stand up against.

It is time to stand with the people in the ABC who have given their service to this country against these second-rate corporate people - some of whom are corporate failures - now being injected into the ABC to do a hatchet job for this government."

SENATOR BOB BROWN
Hansard 6 December 2000

Promises, promises

The Coalition will maintain existing levels of Commonwealth funding to the ABC.

The Coalition is strongly supportive of Radio Australia's existing services and will ensure they are not prejudiced or downgraded in any way.

Coalition policy document 1996

ABC 'fair game for the chop under a Coalition government'

Pam Williams in *The Victory*, the award-winning book on John Howard's 1996 election campaign, wrote:

'Federal Liberal Party leaders, including Mr Howard, suppressed policies they knew would be unpopular - including big cuts to public sector programs and the ABC's budget - before the election, to maximise their chances of winning.'

'After a quick discussion, the meeting [which included Howard, Costello, Alston, Hill, the National Party's Fischer and Anderson and Andrew Robb, director of the campaign] decided to spare the ABC from the knife for now. In 1993 a proposed \$50 million funding cut had whipped the organisation and its highly vocal supporters into a frenzy. The Liberals would have liked to cut its budget, for there was a general view that the ABC was always out to get the conservatives.'

'But it was too dangerous to provoke the broadcaster during an election campaign when every minute of good news counted. The ABC would be quarantined until its current funding ran out. After that it would be fair game for the chop under a Coalition government.'

In July 1996 Sen. Alston announced an immediate cut of 2% in the ABC budget - with a further 10% to be cut in 1997-98, to be preceded by a review to ascertain how ABC activities could be 'narrowed' to accommodate the cuts. The consequent Mansfield Review

reported that all areas of domestic broadcasting had received very strong support and should be maintained, and that necessary savings could come from closing down Radio Australia, selling Australia Television (the Asia Pacific service), selling property and out-sourcing TV production. The cuts of 12%, a total of \$66m, would continue over the triennium from May '97.

Senator Alston had a total strategy involving the cuts to ensure he got the influence and the results he wanted. He told the Cabinet:

'As the Government has no power to direct the ABC in the way in which it fulfils its functions, the Government could not impose a management review. The ABC would need to agree to commission such a review itself.'

'The position of ABC chair becomes vacant on July 23 1996. The new chair could be asked to support a review including terms of reference agreed by the Government and a short-list of suitably qualified consultants.'

'The review would recommend changes to the ABC's enabling legislation. Because the ABC's mandate is very broad, the ABC could continue to operate with a narrower, more clearly defined focus under current legislation until there are opportunities to amend the ABC Act.'

Cabinet submission No. JH96/0260, 2/7/96, signed by Sen. Alston

The new chairman - Donald McDonald, a close friend of Mr Howard - was appointed, the cuts of \$66m were announced and the Mansfield Review was set up.

Decline in ABC funding under Labor and Coalition governments

Since 1987 ABC funding has been constantly eroded under the funding formula imposed by the Labor governments of Hawke and Keating. This reduced the real level of funding (as measured in 1996/97 dollars) by \$60 million between 1987-88 and 1995-96.

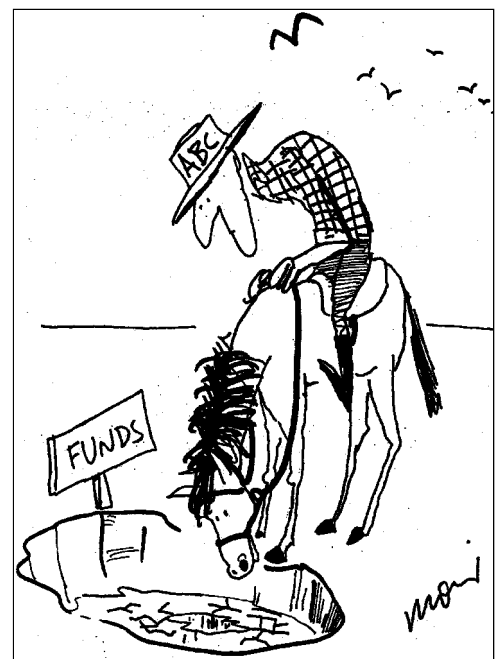
The Coalition government made a cut of 12% to the ABC's budget: \$11m (2%) in 1996/97, and \$55m (10%) in 1997/98.

Compared with 1985/86, the peak year for ABC funding, the real decline in ABC appropriations to 1995/96 was 25.3%.

In fact, the economies imposed on the ABC have been even greater than the figures suggest. In those years the ABC extended the number, reach and transmission hours of its broadcasting services. It had already done substantially more with much less funding.

With the cut in ABC appropriations of \$66m under the Coalition government, this represents a decline of a massive 31.2% in real terms from 1985-86.

DR ALLAN BROWN
Griffith University QLD
Australian Financial Review
29/8/96



Report on the Communications Minister's stewardship of the ABC

"Traditionally, ministers responsible for the ABC have done their best to uphold the broadcasters' independence, but Richard Alston is a notable exception," wrote Ken Inglis in February 2000.

The most egregious example in the early years of the Howard government was a letter from Senator Alston to Brian Johns demanding a detailed explanation of bias in reporting the waterfront dispute. To bypass the board and berate the Managing Director in this way was virtually unprecedented. (And, moreover, an independent study showed that speakers on the government side of the dispute on television and radio had outnumbered those on the union side.)

However, this attempt at battering the ABC into submission was insignificant compared with a letter in late December 1999 to Board Chairman Donald McDonald. Ken Inglis continues:

"That letter, as I noted, was not the first case of Alston's breaching the tradition that a minister communicates with the ABC through the chair and the board. More generally, I suggested, Alston was the first minister to behave as if the ABC is a government department, not a statutory authority charged with responsibility for conducting, within limits set out in legislation, its own affairs."

The minister's intrusions have become more numerous and more flagrant. The Australian's Errol Simper, the one journalist with a standing brief to write coherently about the ABC, has been keeping a tally of them. Last July, he counted six public attacks over previous weeks to which neither the chair, Donald McDonald, nor the managing director, Brian Johns, had responded.

"Two things are wrong here," Simper wrote. "Alston is regularly overstepping his ministerial responsibilities. And the broadcaster's upper echelons may not recognise where their territory begins. Wild, ill-informed, unanswered attacks on

the fragile broadcaster are contemptuous of its role, destructive of staff morale, a threat to its independence."

The century ended with the most stinging intrusion of all, on 23 December 1999, which we know about thanks to Simper and whichever mole in the ABC (they proliferate in hard times) gave him a month later the minister's remarkable letter.

"Dear Mr McDonald," it began, "I am writing following our meeting of 20 December 1999 to address some of the issues which require further attention with respect to the current triennial funding process."

He attached a draft agreement in which these issues were specified. They make a breathtaking list.

The ABC's corporate plan and annual report need to include "...more - performance indicators which use quantifiable targets wherever possible." These are to include 'targets for achieving appropriate ratings'. There is to be an annual meeting between the minister and the board to review progress and consider directions, an annual statement of commitment to audiences which details program priorities (examples follow), rolling reviews of all program genres. Independent experts are to be involved in these reviews. Moreover, an editorial policies unit, independent of program makers, with direct access to the board, will monitor and review editorial policy. This device is to "ensure speedy, high-level responses to alleged breaches of editorial policies and guidelines".

Here and elsewhere, the minister expresses a menacing lack of confidence in the ABC's own procedures. He also prescribes program policy more specifically than ever before. More television production is to be outsourced. A nightly state-based current affairs program should be restored [the 7.30 Report, had gone national in 1995 in order to save money]. Simper described the letter as "uncomfortably close to blackmail". The board,

he suggested, should tell the minister to put his proposals in a recycling bin. But would it, when so many of its members were by now coalition appointees? And could it afford to?

KEN INGLIS is the author of "This is the ABC". Quotations are from an article in the Walkley Magazine in February 2000.

During the time of Brian Johns' managing directorship the Minister for Communications, Senator Alston, continually interfered in the affairs of the ABC.

With the appointment of a majority of the board by the Howard government and the board's appointment of Jonathan Shier, this overt interference ceased.

To understand the "...reform of the ABC" in the absence of a coherent vision statement from Mr Shier or the board, we need only refer to Senator Alston's most explicit and helpful letter of December '99.

ABC Comments Line

The ABC has a Corporate Affairs Comment line. You can leave a message on their tape about the ABC or your feelings about news and current affairs or Jonathan Shier. Simply ring 9333 1500 and ask to be put through to the ABC Comments Line. Please do this, it's one of the ways the ABC can know what we the shareholders are thinking.

Does Shier's job hang in the balance?

"Jonathan Shier's position as ABC managing director hangs in the balance after he was told by chairman Donald McDonald that he no longer had the support of most of the board or his own executives.

"Senior ABC sources said last night that Mr McDonald cited a number of incidents of erratic behaviour and Mr Shier's style of management as not acceptable for a chief executive officer of the ABC."

The Australian 16/10

When you read this, the subject of Mr Shier and his possible departure from the ABC may have been resolved. As we go to press we still await the outcome of the ABC board meeting on 31 October which should decide the issue.

A report in The Australian of 19 October says it all. In one article are juxtaposed these comments:

That "...the understanding of the paper is that despite political pressure ABC Chairman Donald McDonald and the majority of the board still plan to remove Mr Shier because he has lost their confidence and that of most of his executive".

'ABC sources said the broadcaster's annual report, which is yet to be tabled in Parliament, will reveal that a sum of about \$600,000 has been paid in the last financial year to Mr Shier in salary and other expenses. This is more than double his base salary, which is close to \$270,000.' It includes the \$20,000 performance bonus granted by the board two months ago.

That the managing director cost the ABC more than \$600,000 last

financial year, about \$300,000 above his salary package. And that Treasurer Peter Costello...has joined the Prime Minister and Communications Minister Richard Alston in saying he had done a good job in the past 18 months."

"The move against Mr Shier came before the revelation last week in The Australian that a young female employee of the ABC had lodged a sexual harassment claim against Mr Shier at the Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission."

We applaud Mr McDonald for taking this step against what must be great pressure from the Government.

A number of Incidents

The move against Mr Shier was a reaction to a number of troubling incidents. These included the abusive treatment of Gail Jarvis, the former director of television appointed by Shier; a public attack on a 4 Corners producer whom he called "a stupid Pom"; a sexual harassment claim by a young female employee; and a ferocious verbal attack on head of news and current affairs Max Uechtritz.

"Mr McDonald's move against Mr Shier was galvanised by the fall-out from an explosive meeting last month at which five executives witnessed a lengthy fight between Mr Shier and news and current affairs director Max Uechtritz.

"Mr Shier and Mr Uechtritz argued over the ABC's coverage of the September 11 terrorist attacks, which Mr Shier had not seen because he was overseas. Among other things, Mr Shier was angry

the Nine network had out-rated the ABC. Several present say they were "sickened and distressed" by the ferocity of the attack.

"After consulting board members, Mr McDonald met Mr Shier. The managing director was told his abusive treatment of ABC managers and staff, including former director of television Gail Jarvis, who quit 10 months after being appointed by Mr Shier, were of grave concern to the board.

"The board has had growing reservations about Mr Shier as incident upon incident piled up, in particular his widely reported public attack on a Four Corners producer in August.

The Australian 16/10/01

The political nexus

The Coalition has never hidden its appreciation for Shier, a former Liberal staffer who is widely regarded as a political appointment. Back in the May Budget, the Government rewarded Shier with what amounted to a tied grant - extra money for regional programming. Three months later, a remarkable series of ads for new rural jobs at the ABC appeared in the national press.

They read like a press release from Howard's office: "Additional funding made available to the ABC in the federal Budget ... is great news for the country."

The Australian 20/10 /01

In other words: ABC funding for regional services, granted for a limited time outside the triennial arrangement, not only bolsters Mr Shier's position but also plays a useful part in the Government's election campaign in the regions.

What His 'Mates' Said About Mr Shier

The Prime Minister said of Mr Shier that: "My experience is that he is doing a good job."

Treasurer Peter Costello said of Mr Shier on Radio 3AW: "I think he's done a good job and I think he deserves support, yes, and I

hope he's going to stay."

"Communications Minister Richard Alston continued to support Mr Shier, attributing the chaos to a difficult reform process. "You get a lot of internal resistance, there is resistance at every stage, and I can understand the chal-

lenges facing Mr Shier, and I think he has embarked upon a reform agenda which is very important for the long term future of one of Australia's great cultural institutions."

The Australian,
17/10/01

Shier Storm

"The commotion building around the managing director of the ABC, Jonathan Shier, calls for responses transcending politics. In the wake of the strong and credible indications this week that the board that appointed Mr Shier has lost confidence in him, there has been a confusion of assertions and denials. There is also a telling silence. Mr Shier has received expressions of support - though not always fervent and direct - from figures in the Government, including the Prime Minister, John Howard, the Treasurer, Peter Costello, and the Minister for Communications, Richard Alston. But the board, including the chairman, Donald McDonald, has been all but silent.

In normal circumstances in a normal corporation such loss of board support would mean the end for a managing director so cast adrift. But the ABC has never been a normal corporation, not even since its corporatisation in 1983. The instinctive response, to look to the board to take responsibility and resolve doubts over Mr

Shier's position, is inadequate. Previous managing directors, when they have lost the confidence of the board, have gone more or less quietly. Mr Shier shows no sign of that. And, even if the board is determined he should go it has no simple power to force him. And he, it appears, seems inclined to resist departing for as long as possible.

Mr Shier was appointed to oversee much-needed organisational changes in the ABC. In a little less than two years he has certainly shaken the organisation up, but hardly with the results hoped for when he was appointed. Even among new executives hand-picked by Mr Shier, there is discontent. Some, brought in to remake the ABC, have already resigned. Despite Mr Shier's confident assertions of executive support, it is apparent that he lacks not only the unqualified support of the board but also of many of his own executives. The situation cannot be allowed to continue. It will do nothing to further the laudable and necessary aim of reform-

ing the ABC but is more likely to put it into further decline and threaten its relevance altogether.

Just how Mr Shier's personal saga now plays out is not clear. But its lessons are. There must be a complete change in attitude by the political parties to public broadcasting. The Labor Party is no less inclined than the Liberal Party to regard appointments to the ABC board as prizes of office. Governments will always be required to make appointments to the board. But there is a deep need for the political parties to reach back to the convention observed in the early days of public broadcasting in Britain and Australia of making appointments on merit and in consultation. The first concern must be the long-term health of a professionally strong, impartial national broadcaster."

Alan Revell
SMH Weekend Edition
20-21/10/01

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ABC
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