

UPDATE

Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.
quarterly newsletter

September 2012
Vol 20, No. 2

incorporating **Background Briefing** friends of the abc

STAFF- ELECTED DIRECTOR AT LAST!



Special Report From the President

CALL TO ACTION UPDATE

In the dying days of the Federal Parliament prior to the Winter Recess, our CALL TO ACTION by FRIENDS (April Update) produced a long-awaited result – the passage of the Bill which will place at arm's length from Government the process of appointing Board Members to the ABC, and restoring the position of Staff-Elected Director. Thanks to all Friends who wrote to Senator Conroy, Minister for Communications, or contacted their local Federal Member.

Quentin Dempster, the last ABC staffer elected to the position, will

once again be putting his name forward for election, and Friends of the ABC strongly endorses his candidature. Throughout his period as "Staff-Elected Director in Exile," Quentin has consistently and courageously spoken on behalf of ABC staff on many issues, and has been a strong voice against the progressive loss of skills, expertise, experience and culture as the ABC has closed studios outside of Sydney and Melbourne, and continued down the path of outsourcing of production.

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If you prefer this delivery option for future Updates please send an email to the Membership Secretary.

Who to write...

Anyone seeking basic information about writing to persons of influence might find it helpful to go to the FABC NSW website www.fabc.org.au where there are some menu items under "Be Active" leading to pages of information: *Who can I write to? What can I say?*

FABC (NSW) Executive Committee Office Bearers

President - Mal Hewitt
Phone: 02 9637 2900
Email: malandal@optusnet.com.au

Secretary & Treasurer - James Buchanan
Phone: 02 9371 5621
Email: jamesbuc@bigpond.net.au

Membership Secretary - Angela Williamson
Phone: 02 4883 4048
Email: fabcmem@fabcnsw.org.au

Update Editor - Mal Hewitt
PO Box 1391 N. Sydney NSW 2059
Email: malandal@optusnet.com.au

Cartoonist - Phil Somerville
Editorial Cartoonist for The Sun Herald (Sydney)
phil.somerville@somervillecartoons.com

Layout Artist - Paul Martens
paul@martens.name

Membership Line: 02 9990 0600

President's Special Report continued

STATE CONFERENCE of FRIENDS.

The bi-ennial State Conference was held in Gosford on 18th and 19th August, hosted magnificently by our Central Coast Branch and meticulously organized by Klaas Woldring. Attended by up to 50 delegates and observers from NSW branches and the NSW Executive, and a sole representative from South Australia, the conference examined and discussed the pluses and minuses of a rapidly changing ABC, and the ways in which the Friends can best support the ABC as it fights to retain its independence from political and commercial influence in a changing media landscape. We were guided in our discussions by three guest speakers, all of whom will play a very important role in steering the ABC through some very challenging waters ahead:

Michael Millett, Director of Corporate Affairs for the ABC, representing Management, gave us insights into current and future new directions and initiatives, addressing difficult and challenging issues with honesty.

Quentin Dempster, Host of 7.30 NSW, brought the ABC Staff perspective on those Management plans with his usual clarity of thought, wisdom and enormous experience.

Linda Mottram, veteran ABC journalist, Foreign Correspondent, and presenter of Mornings on 702, spoke with passion about her career experiences, and the challenges of working in new technologies without losing the depth and quality of content we expect from the ABC, but also the integrity and concern for the truth which must go with reporting from the world's trouble spots.

All three presentations are included in this Update.

CONFERENCE AGENDA

Delegates and ABC representatives discussed questions such as:

- New technologies and delivery methods, but at what cost?
- Are ratings more important than quality and depth?
- Are older audiences being abandoned in search of a younger demographic?

- Outsourcing – what are we losing?
- How to achieve the elusive “balance” in programming.
- Dumbing down – is it fact or perception?
- Where have the Arts gone on the ABC?
- The Convergence Review – what implications for the ABC?
- Problems of local reception in some areas.

There was also discussion of the current state of the “Friends”, as membership ages and numbers fall.

ACTION PLAN

Five working parties were established to produce action plans and strategies for Friends of the ABC in the following areas:

1. A review of the ABC Charter in the context of new technologies which were not even dreamed of when the Charter was established and amended.
2. How best to support the ABC in future Budget arguments in Canberra, particularly with the possibility of a change of government.
3. Promoting the ABC's role as an educator – access to archive material as well as the ABC's role in primary, secondary, tertiary and community education and the Arts.
4. The local content challenge – the ABC is not required to meet local content quotas which apply to commercial producers – why should it not have to?
5. How does the ABC remain “balanced” and free of bias?

Working parties have one month to produce strategy documents, which will be shared with branches and published in Update.

We are grateful to the Central Coast Branch for hosting an enjoyable and productive conference, to our three ABC representatives for their valued input, and to all delegates for their positive and constructive contributions.

Mal Hewitt

President, NSW FABC 

A Pictorial Account FABC Bi-ennial State Conference



1. Klaas Woldring, Conference organiser
2. Central Coast Branch participants – John and Margaret Lund and Audrey McDonald
3. Quentin Dempster with Alison Brisbane, Central Coast branch
4. Michael Millett with Angela Williamson (Membership Secretary)
5. Our youngest Friend, Jeremy Hewitt
6. Linda Mottram with James Buchanan (Secretary/Treasurer)



Michael Millett

FABC Bi-ennial State Conference Speaker

Michael Millett joined the ABC as Director of Communications in February 2009, just in time to help deliver the biggest funding increase in the ABC's corporate history. While he would like to claim the credit, the tri-funding boost to the ABC was the result of years of hard work and lobbying by key people inside the ABC and by stakeholders like the Friends of the ABC. Michael's Division, now called Corporate Affairs, is responsible for public affairs, governance, corporate strategy, internal and external communications, the state and territory directors and management of the MD's Office and Board Secretariat.

Michael's shift to the national broadcaster came after a long career in print journalism. For the previous two years he was deputy editor of the Sydney Morning Herald. In a 20-year stint with the Herald, Michael served as a political correspondent, Canberra bureau chief, North Asia correspondent based in Tokyo, senior writer and news editor.

Michael said he was aware of passion friends have for the ABC and specific components, and knows that some of this strategy and its implementation won't win universal acclaim, but he will try to explain the framework in which we are mapping out our future in pursuit of the overriding charter principle – relevance.

Without relevance, the ABC cannot make a case in Canberra for increased funding.

We are in a new media world, with the constant impact of new technology and convergence – fragmentation, globalisation and a drift to online & mobile. Traditional commercial models are under strain, with consumers, not publishers, in control. Competition is more acute & global, with many new players competing for eyeballs.

Implications for ABC - Our funding model provides a degree of comfort and protection

but the recent Fairfax experience exposes the danger of complacency and inertia.

ABC checklist - ABC is relatively well-positioned, and has dramatically increased its content offerings. Under Mark Scott this has been a key strategic goal – “reach more Australians, in more ways, more often” and “at a time they want, on a device they want, in a format they want”. This has led to new content funded by Canberra : drama, ABC3, ABC open, the education portal, digital radio, as well as services funded by the ABC: news24, iView and iPhone apps, ABC online.

Why? Is the ABC over-stretching? Going too fast in pursuit of younger audiences? Sacrificing quality for ratings? The answer is no. ABC, like everyone else in the media sector, has had to develop new audience strategies, in response to competition from new competitors – spotify, 600 radio channels on iTunes.

The pressure – yes, we have the over 65s. The ABC has 73% combined reach - 35% only watch ABC TV, 9% only listen to ABC radio, 29% access both. But there is a hole in the middle, and we are missing an entire generation. The board and executive are negligent if they do not address that problem.

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How can friends help? By developing a narrative based on the importance of the ABC in new media environment.

New eyeballs - The imperative if we are to maintain relevance is to reach out to new audiences. iView is up almost 50% to 900k monthly visitors 2011. Podcasts are up 27% to 60m downloads 2011. ABC news 24 – 4m tuned in during the week of the leadership change. There were 800k iPad iView apps, 2m iPhone apps.

Charter - How does this fit in with the charter? It fits perfectly.



A convergence report quote: “One of the key objectives of the two public broadcasters is to provide all Australians with broadcasting services regardless of where they live. Traditionally, radio and then television carried out this function. Online delivery of content provides far greater convenience for users. It also allows for the development of local content that is more closely tailored to the needs of individual Australians. Significantly, online content can also provide Australians with opportunities for greater interaction with content and a forum to exchange views.” The ABC is derelict in charter responsibilities if does not pursue online opportunities wherever possible.

ABC Funding for the next triennium

The whole industry is at a tipping point – ABC is a safe harbour for quality news & local content. A capital case can be made for sustainability for ABC in digital world, as well as more funding for radio & television, and the capacity to beef up its emergency broadcasting role.



How can friends help? By developing a narrative based on the importance of the ABC in new media environment. As the commercial models struggle to deliver quality, and return to the 19th century era of narrow business agendas, a well-funded ABC boosts diversity & democracy. Friends can support the need to bolster a news presence in regional and outer-metropolitan areas, and expand programming in those areas, and stress

the importance of international operations.

Response to questions on Radio National

There are no cuts to the budget, and savings from 2012 changes have been reinvested in content. It is a truly national network: more programming out of Brisbane now & production & staffing in Adelaide & Perth unchanged. There are 5 new weekly programs: religion, media,

creative instinct, common knowledge & drive, and fewer repeats. There is only one outsourced program, and that is produced under supervision.

Ratings show that the audience is receptive to the changes – overall numbers are up and social media engagement suggests younger people are joining in. Podcasting figures are impressive : Jan-June 2012, close to 2 million programs downloaded a month. 



Linda Mottram FABC Bi-ennial State Conference Speaker

During more than 25 years as a journalist, Linda Mottram has travelled with Australian Prime Ministers, covered peace and war, reported on assassinations and elections, and created radio on issues as diverse as Crusader archaeology, the modern Liberal party, Afghan women's art and sheep dog trials. She's worked in many of the world's hotspots for the ABC, including the Middle East and the Balkans, striving to explain stories through the eyes of those least able to influence their fate. She's a Walkley Award winner, taking out the Radio Current Affairs category in 1999 for her coverage of the Meja massacre during the conflict in Kosovo. She also spent several years as ABC Foreign Correspondent in Moscow.

More recently she has worked as Executive Producer of PM, and on ABC 702 Afternoons, and has taken a strong interest in editorial training at the ABC, and in 2012 has moved into the chair on 702 Mornings, unable, as she says, to resist the pull of "the wireless."

She addressed the conference after Saturday evening dinner.

Before I reflect on the almost quarter of a century that I've been mostly with the ABC, I want to thank you for your commitment to the organisation, warts and all. A free media is the backbone of our democracy. And without vigilance, it is always at risk. The culture wars of recent times demonstrated that particularly in regard to the ABC. And at the time I was the presenter of the AM radio current affairs program, I was among a number of ABC figures targeted in a campaign to weaken the ABC and, I believe, to ultimately tame its coverage of news and current affairs. The Alston complaints over AM's Iraq war coverage were of course one manifestation of this. And I believe there was lasting timidity at the ABC as a result of that particular attack, timidity that only relatively recently began to lift.

Before I leave this subject and move to

some more thrilling anecdotes, I want to add that I believe this won't have been the last threat to the ABC. Australia's public debate is rightly dynamic. But that dynamism can catch the ABC unawares. Take for example, the weakening over the past decade and a half of the bipartisan consensus on the treatment of those arriving on our shores to seek asylum. The ABC rightly spends a lot of time covering this issue. If there is one thing the ABC "believes in" it is democracy -- and I think this extends to the democratic right of all humans to seek freedom. I think if we believe in democracy, we should see the asylum debate through that lens.

As public attitudes have hardened, fuelled by political rhetoric the use of language in the debate has changed, often being manipulated for political ends. The ABC must be sure that it doesn't adopt language that has been loaded for particular meaning. This undermines its responsibility to be impartial. It undermines, I think, the commitment to democracy. Think for example about the way the term border security is used when discussing boat arrivals. I am not saying there are not security issues related to these arrivals. But talk of the need to secure our borders in the face of increasing boat arrivals sends has for a long time been sending a distinct signal that all those arriving by boat are a security threat when they are not.

Nowadays even the term "asylum seeker" is loaded, often used as it is alongside ideas like "queue jumpers" and the word "illegal". Once terms like asylum

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There was the occasion when an Israeli jet bombed a south Lebanon road, splitting the UN convoy we were traveling in.. that was a lesson in how rules get broken.



seeker were beyond politics, now they are arguably the opposite. Yet these terms are routinely adopted in our coverage of this story. I think there is a legitimate question to ask about this. Have we at the ABC done enough to ensure our stories are shaped to avoid a political slant on this question? Have we become peddlers of politically loaded language in this debate, thus failing to live up to your expectations that your ABC will provide impartial coverage, cutting through the agendas? I highly recommend the work of Tim Soutphommasane on the asylum question, particularly his writing for the St James Ethics Centre and that Centre's work more broadly on the asylum seeker topic.

On the ABC, I am not saying that we have necessarily fallen into the trap I describe above. But a failure of vigilance will weaken us. And when the politics of the issue changes again, then where is the impartiality of the ABC? If we cannot be sure that we have fulfilled our mission, those arguing for our de-funding, to use that clumsy term, are empowered .. and they lurk in all political corners.

So making the link back to my rant

about our coverage of asylum issues, I and others remain wary that we are not having the nuanced discussions about our coverage because we are too obsessed with the sparkly new things. I am a huge supporter of change and I love some of the great new things the ABC is doing with its news and radio content. We are reaching new and different audiences, but there's a lot else besides to think about and discuss.

There've been a couple of moments in my life when I thought I wouldn't be attending any more pleasant dinners like this ..

Like the time a Turkish soldier held me and a Danish colleague at gunpoint in eastern Turkey in 1995 .. We'd used our sat telephone to call our respective offices during a pause in a particularly fraught journey out of Northern Iraq .. Eastern Turkey, it turned out, wasn't the place to pull out the sat phone it. And this was a classic lesson in how others don't necessarily interpret your actions in the same way you do.

Eastern Turkey has long suffered turmoil as Turkey has continued its campaign against Kurdish national self-expression.

Thus it is illegal to send pictures out of the region without official permission. We weren't sending pictures. We were making a phone call. But the local plain clothes Turkish intelligence agents saw the phone as something quite different and swooped on us. A local English speaking teacher intervened on our behalf .. And eventually we were let go. But the situation was full of menace and lasted some hours .. and we were a long way from anyone who could really help us. To this day, I guiltily wonder what the implications might have been for that teacher who interceded for us, a constant reminder that the presence of western reporters wading into any country can fundamentally change the lives of locals in they encounter. This includes those we employ as drivers, fixers and translators most notably. And for some of those, the price has been death .. especially in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan.

There was the occasion when an Israeli jet bombed a south Lebanon road, splitting the UN convoy we were traveling in .. that was a lesson in how rules get broken. The Israelis were supposed to call into the UN ahead of time if an attack was likely to be nearby. The Israeli notification came after the attack. Of course if you were in northern Israel during any of the many cross border skirmishes or wars and were on the receiving end of Hezbollah's

Katyusha missiles, there was no warning at all.

On another day on the same trip in Southern Lebanon, an Israeli jet used three of the four corners of a UN camp we'd just arrived at for apparent target practice. The acrid smell and the sound are unimaginable and stay with me to this day .. So will the faces of the Fijians peeking out from beneath the guard bunker at the entrance to the camp, grinning widely and yelling a welcome to us as though nothing had happened. Once again I have to note, my poor driver!

When once I asked my Lebanese Christian driver to take me from East Beirut to a certain address in West Beirut, he reluctantly agreed, until we got to the destination street and he realised where I was asking him to take me .. Hezbollah headquarters, he dumped me and sped off. Ok no major threat but it was wryly amusing .. I still have the Hezbollah business card ... I know, weird!

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To see the Bolshoi Theatre foyer draped in black velvet, with even the theatre's cleaners tearful beside her open casket as a string quartet recalled her great moments in music

Arguably the most serious threat I ever faced though was Russia .. No particular part really, just all of it. The babushkas routinely warned that death was my certain fate in minus 25 degree temperatures if I didn't see sense and ditch that useless modern Goretex jacket in favour of proper Russian fur; more death loomed when the drivers we hired each time we went to Siberia insisted on keeping their cars warm overnight by lighting little fires under the engines .. Certain Kaboom I feared .. Then there was driving to the office on the eight lane highway from our apartment in west Moscow ... And there was the vodka of course Do not touch!! Fortunately for me its easier for women than men to refuse, such is Russia's quaintly sexist take on alcohol tolerance.

In the space of six years as a correspondent, there was a lot of edge. There were colleagues lost. There were countless victims of the many acts of savagery which inevitably define so much of what a foreign correspondent does. In three years in Jerusalem alone .. and I note with great delight that from there I got to travel to 20 different countries .. but during my time based out of Jerusalem from 1994 there were for example innumerable bus bombings in Israeli cities, including outside Mahane Yehuda market that was my husband's preferred place to shop. The bus bombings were terrible. I remember my Mother arrived one time for a visit, and on her first morning with us, we heard a bomb go off just a couple of blocks from our apartment building. It was 8.30am. I called Sydney. .. Andrew my husband, (then and now working for the BBC) rang his guys. The bombing it turned out was just outside the office of our favorite travel agent . An exUN travel agent who could find us a route into and importantly out of, the most unlikely places ... She had contacts ...

Anyway. We covered the bombing .. Really barely a story because the pattern was by then so well established.. so there was none of the major scramble to get enormous numbers of stories across to Sydney. It was really just a couple of quick reports and that was that. Not that the bodies blown to bits and strewn around the neighbourhood were any less important than any of those in earlier bombings. Not that the sight, the smell, the trauma of it all, had any less impact on me as a human being. It was just that this was now so gruesomely routine that it didn't rank as the kind of surprise that is so often the basis for deciding whether something makes the news or not.

I couldn't have done any of what I have done without my mother and her extraordinary strength and fine example. But equally, my husband has been a rock too. And he was going through some pretty hairy times in his work too.

He spent a lot of time in the former Yugoslavia, witnessing horror on a scale that scars us all.

He did much else besides .. and in those days there was no easy telephone access so we'd be out of touch for weeks on end when he was deployed.

But he and I shared a common love of the work, a common love of seeing new places and meeting new people and understanding the heart of the problems that plagued so many wonderful places.

So we were able to share thoughts on the eventual fate of a tyrant like Saddam Hussein, both of us having made several trips there .. and we were together caught up in the one event that has been able to tame the well-known robustness of daily life in Isreal .. at least for a time .. the assassination of their Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at the hands of one of his own people. I made several trips to Iran .. adore it .. he was whisked off to Africa as the ebola virus wreaked havoc in parts and savage wars tore apart of areas in a true Heart of Darkness way .. and always we could share the experiences from a shared perspective. We understood what we went through on these trips because we both essentially did the same job. It was an enormous support for both of us through some very traumatic times.

It's not all been awful of course .. we have some wonderful art and carpets from the places we've been. My husband has good taste and is a great haggler.

But story wise, I was honoured to report for example the on stories like the quintessentially Russian farewell to prima ballerina Galina Ulanova who died Moscow in 1998. To see the Bolshoi Theatre foyer draped in black velvet, with even the

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As I enter my 51st year, I am determined to keep following my mother's example .. there's always something new out there so go for it.

theatre's cleaners tearful beside her open casket as a string quartet recalled her great moments in music .. this was a moment I will never forget and a joy to report for radio. Not a lead story .. but what a tribute to the ABC that there was a place for a glimpse into this part of the Russian story.

And getting inside the Pyramids at Giza with the irrepressible .. until the recent revolution at least .. Zahi Hawass, who for so long was the guardian of the Pyramids and the voice of their preservation. Recording us talking inside the chamber with its special audio qualities again reminds me why radio is such a great medium.

There are so many moments like these too. And it is only the ABC who does this .. though less and less as we carve back on correspondents and restyle the type of coverage we provide .. less of it being the result of journalists doing their job, going out, finding a story and reporting it.

But what I can assure you of tonight is that I've had a wonderful time.

I am enjoying my latest new horizon in local radio, presenting 702 Mornings. It has its own particular risks to one's mental health. You might be surprised to know how many people use the station text number to simply fling personal abuse at presenters. James Vallentine seems best suited to ignoring it .. Richard Glover and I sob into our respective cups of tea over it. People can just be awful. But largely, the audience is wonderful, even if they sometimes can't possibly understand how insanely hard it is to be completely competent across two and half long hours of radio.

As I enter my 51st year, I am determined to keep following my mother's example .. there's always something new out there so go for it.

And where better to be than at the ABC. 



Numbers attending are limited so don't delay.

Last bookings taken if not already filled by 8.30pm Tuesday 4th September.

Members may also bring non members.

Join us at our annual dinner, with Geraldine Doogue

Date: 7th September

Time Doors open 6:30, sit down 7pm

Location Cello's Restaurant in the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel
169 Castlereagh Street, Sydney

Cost \$65 per person, including two drinks.
Payment on booking with Mastercard, Visa or Cheque

Bookings MUST be made via telephone to
Joy 9502 2335
Ivy 9481 0381
Paul 9888 3797

Quentin Dempster FABC Bi-ennial State Conference Speaker

Quentin Dempster thanked the “Friends” for their lobby efforts this year. He was pleased to report that the ABC Act amendment which established an arms-length merit selection process for the appointment of ABC directors and the re-instatement of the staff elected director position had been passed by the parliament in late June and he understood it had been granted Royal Assent.

For the first time in 80 years the practice of the major parties stacking the board with partisans and ideologues had been countered by Senator Stephen Conroy's legislation. If this Minister did nothing else for the ABC during his tenure, at least he would be able to say he tried to address the issue of board stacking. A significant legacy! Over 80 years both the Labor and Liberal parties used ABC board appointment as part of their adversarial games to influence peddling, politicising the ABC and its governance when it should be regarded by all players as a cultural and media institution of great value to the national conversation, and not a party political plaything. Quentin said that he had already announced to staff that he would stand for the position when a ballot was called. He hoped to be elected and would give the process his best shot after maintaining faith with staff over the last seven years as 'staff-elected director in exile'.

Convergence review: Convergence combined broadcasting, computing and broadband internet. You can beam your digital TV as your wi-fi modem and, through internet TV, watch any available program, video or audio from anywhere in the world. You can also download the content to your hard drive and replay it at your later convenience. *Convergence smashes national boundaries.* We are still waiting for the Gillard Government's response to the final convergence review report. ABC would have to build a strategy based on the government's response. The survival of public broadcasting, let alone local commercial radio and TV, was now in play, particularly when you realised that, through the

digital revolution, 45,000 radio stations were instantaneously accessible to listeners through the internet. While mass circulation newspapers were now in grave danger, it may emerge that the local newspaper may have a better chance of survival as a viable business.

Google pulls \$1.7bn in advertising from the Australian market, pays negligible tax and contributes no home grown content. That's what convergence means. How does a nation like Australia protect its content industries, their revenues and the national tax base from those revenues? The ABC would have to mount a strong defensive and advocacy strategy through the response to the convergence review. News Ltd resents the ABC's existence – particularly on-line. The ABC is a substantial force in the on-line world. News Ltd is trying to construct pay walls around its content, as are Fairfax and other major players. The ABC provides its content for nothing. Taxpayers have already paid for it and if Quentin gets on the board he will be recommending that at no time should the ABC charge a fee or construct a pay wall for its content.

'Platform agnosticism' is a term now used inside the ABC in debates about the allocation of resources to cover ABC News 24 (continuous TV), NewsRadio, ABC Online, radio and TV now available through smart phones, ipad and iPod. While multi-channelling and multiple devices were part of the digital revolution and the ABC should be on every available delivery system the debate about the ABC's *raison d'être* should primarily be about CONTENT

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The limitless capacity of cyberspace to store and instantaneously retrieve an archive is of immense value to a public 'cybercaster' and its educative role.



and its quality. Quentin said he was going to produce a manifesto, outlining where he stood on all current issues facing the ABC. It would highlight the need for greater specialisation in content creation. It would outline localism as a major strategic objective. The ABC could be turned into the nation's living knowledge base, recruiting and training specialists in the major fields: environment, economics, international relations, education, science, law, media, religion, arts and culture. For example, Robyn Williams – where are the Robyn Williamses of the future ABC? The limitless capacity of cyberspace to store and instantaneously retrieve an archive is of immense value to a public 'cybercaster' and its educative role.

Internally the budget allocation through multi-channelling had stretched things to the limit. The sustainability of operational base funding was now the major internal issue. Unless there was some increased investment through the triennial funding negotiation the ABC would inevitably face a down-sizing, as was now occurring at Fairfax and News Ltd. 70% of the ABC's

operational funds go on payroll. It would be instructive to know the operating costs of the internet servers maintained by the ABC to back up its IView, iPod and Online content services in comparison with the broadcast transmission costs. I.T. is now a big number in the ABC's survival strategy.

How can Friends of the ABC help?

As the FABC considered its campaigning strategy it might be best to wait until we have the benefit of the government's response to the convergence review. FreeTV, the commercial TV networks, will accept a continuation of the local content quota if they can win the removal of the licence fee. If there is no local content quota, Quentin fears for the future of TV production in Australia. In that regard the role of an adequately funded public broadcaster would be vital.

If there is to be any review of the Charter of the ABC the issue of locally-produced content should be paramount. FABC should start to think about campaigning for the eventual doubling of base funding to the ABC on the basis of local content creation. In any event a substantial increase was needed, given rapidly declining prospects of news print content.

In the first instance the ABC needed to build its current local programming. Four Corners, Lateline, Australian Story, Foreign Correspondent, Media Watch all went off air and deserted the audience and the marketplace for three to four months a

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The ABC could not have creative independence unless it had a capacity to make things itself through a genuine mixed production model.

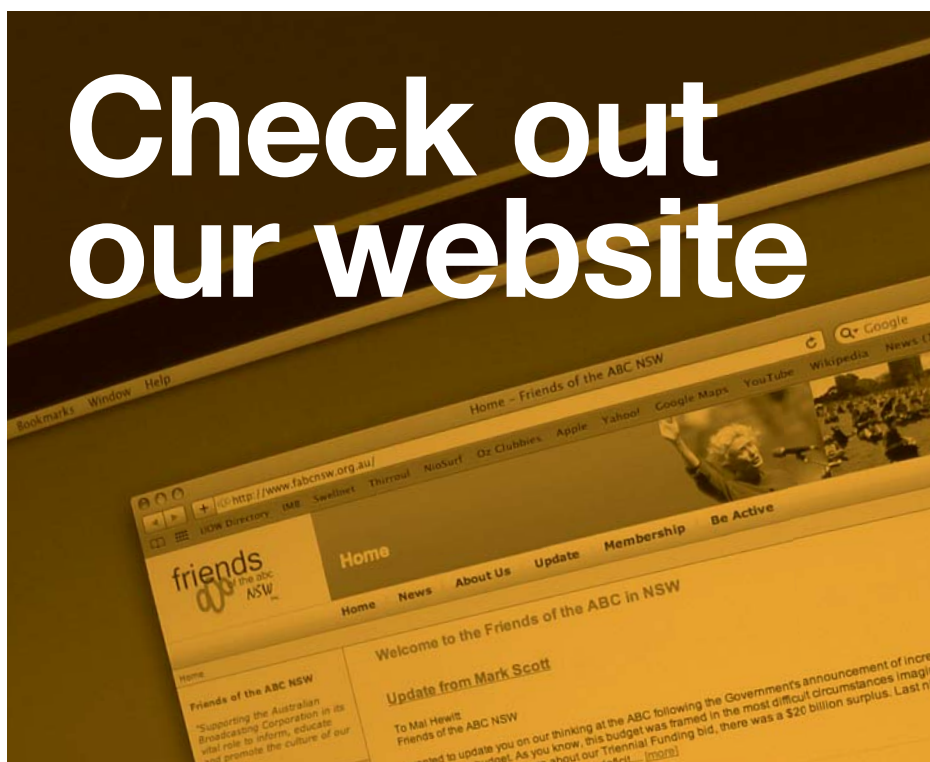
year from early November to late February and early March. This was indicative of already constrained budgets. FABC should highlight this deficiency to drive the need for more operational base funding as well as expand content creation for ABC 2, particularly when the commercial networks could have a local content quota imposed on their free to air multi-channels.

The argument with the director of TV at the ABC, Kim Dalton, was continuing. Mr Dalton favours the total external production on TV broadcast by the ABC. He says he can turn \$1 of ABC money into \$3 of content on air through outsourcing and co-production with finance arrangements with TV and film commissions, the TV production industry and the use of the tax break, the producer offset. Quentin said he realised drama was very expensive. But he was arguing

inside the ABC, that even if it never did drama in house again, couldn't the ABC at least have a documentary-making capacity. Through the Dalton model the ABC no longer produces documentaries, such as Country Town Rescue – Andrew Denton's company did that show, and he gets the Copyright. It could easily have been done in house by ABC. Creative talent does not just exist just in Sydney and Melbourne. It exists right through Australia. The ABC could not have creative independence unless it had a capacity to make things itself through a genuine mixed production model. Soon the ABC will have no capacity to make things inside the ABC, other than News and Current Affairs. *In our strategy, Quentin asks us to accentuate the positives, and then outline in forensic detail what we would like to see, but wait till the outcome of the Convergence review.* But ABC must be much better funded for our National Identity, and for relevance. We must clearly identify the deficiencies.

The coalition will eventually speak about their intentions. Analogue transmission is about to be switched off. The saving from the switch off, \$95m for ABC, could be redirected to ABC operational base funding. But the Department of Communications may already have re-directed these funds. The ABC would produce its triennial funding submission by Christmas and the crucial date for the ABC's survival into the future would come with the May budget in 2013. 

Check out our website



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Branch News

Illawarra

YOUR CHANGING ABC

On June 17 about fifty members of the Friends of the ABC Illawarra met at what has become our regular venue, the Aboriginal Centre in Wollongong, to participate in a workshop on how new technologies are creating many different ways of accessing the ABC and enabling the national broadcaster to reach wider, more diverse audiences.



Rod McGuinness

We were fortunate to have as our presenter, the ABC's social media producer, Rod McGuinness from Sydney, who told us about his job of advising existing ABC outlets about their relationship to social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Many of us were surprised to learn that there are hundreds of ABC websites and that it has one hundred and fifty different Twitter accounts and over a hundred different Facebook accounts. One of these jobs is to police these accounts, which no doubt requires considerable tact and finesse. The ABC takes privacy very seriously and has stern conditions regarding the use of Facebook.

The ABC moderates all of its Facebook

pages and this has meant a huge increase in people's workloads, but participation in social media gives the broadcaster access to a much wider audience. There are eleven and a half million Australians on Facebook and the ABC Facebook pages are a valuable way of reminding people about the ABC and its offerings. In addition, two and a half million Australians have Twitter accounts, so this particular social media provides useful insight into the views of the wider community. Whenever *QandA* goes to air, for example, the ABC receives 30,000 tweets and there has to be careful selection as to which ones appear on screen.

Each week, eighty per cent of Australians come into contact with the ABC and people feel great trust in it as an institution. It can offer services not available on commercial networks and no other network in Australia has i-view which allows listeners and viewers to download programs, for repeat viewing or for individuals to catch up with them at a time they find more convenient. Moreover, in Australia i-view is free! Listeners can also use podcast in much the same way for catching up on radio content.

The ABC home page produces an enormous amount of content and the broadcaster seeks to make it as easy as possible to access its various sites, aiming to teach people digital literacy, especially in the regions. It even has a website devoted to explaining technology and occasionally offers workshops to help with this. The ABC Technology Explained website is: www.abc.net.au/technology/techexplained/about.htm

Rod's audience showed immense interest in the information he provided and provided a barrage of questions. Even for those of us who might still feel somewhat challenged by all the technological changes, he made us realize that they have enabled the ABC to reach a much wider and diverse audience than hitherto. It is great to know that it has been so innovative and adventurous in taking advantage of the various forms of

digital technology to expand its reach so greatly and our workshop on the subject proved a very fitting way of celebrating the ABC's eightieth birthday.

Dorothy Jones

Central Coast

SCOTT BEVAN'S VISIT TO CENTRAL COAST BRANCH FABC. WEDNESDAY 18 JULY 2012

More than 60 guests attended the "Lunch With Scott Bevan Function" organised by the Central Coast Branch FABC group and held in the Darts Room at the Central Coast Leagues Club Gosford. The room proved to be quite satisfactory without the overhead pounding from the fitness club we have experienced before.

Scott, a Newcastle boy, said that the Central Coast was always a good place to visit and he was pleased to be here today. Journalism he added is, "where culture meets adventure".



Scott Bevan (image courtesy of ABC NEWS)

After 20 years of journalism, the former Newcastle Herald reporter was appointed the ABC's Moscow correspondent in January 2008. Scott's Russian language skills were shocking and his Japanese language studies at university did little to prepare him for his new venture. However being the father of twin boys did. The Russians love their children and his first experience at the airport was a stern voice from a Customs Officer, "You have children, you, you go to the front of the queue, what kind of parents are you!" Scott recalled the lines from a Sting song about a nuclear attack. "What can save you, me and you,

Russians love their children too."

Scott, his wife, Jo and the twins lived on Kutuzovsky Prospekt in Moscow, a street Scott describes "as living on the fringe of history, a thoroughfare on which Napoleon entered Moscow in 1812." One day the road was blocked as the president approached. A policeman stopped the traffic and asked Scott and his family, "Well are you going to cross?" Across the family walked and Scott's thoughts were, "Me and Vladimir Putin, that's all we had in common, we can stop the traffic." He did at one time suggest to his wife that perhaps he could borrow the kids one day and maybe get to sit up front at the press conference.

Again his street in Moscow, Kutuzovsky Prospekt, from the Bevan's house if you walked left about 800m along the road you would come to rows of designer boutiques where the "gorgeous things got out of their cars complete with their bodyguards", turn right and the walk was to the train station, the main line to Kiev, a hub of scrounging and scrawling folk trying to get through their daily life. Fruit and vegetables were cheaper, but here in Moscow he was able to experience "the two Russias within 2 kilometres of each other".

Scott said that he was given some great seats while in Moscow, a rocket take off in Kazakhstan, an incredibly moving experience with 3 human beings in the rocket, driving a steam train in Poland, hearing a landmark speech by Obama, the Georgian War and many smaller stories too. He phoned the Kremlin every day during the 2008 election and on Day 73 he was invited to join an end of winter freezing ice hockey game but he was not to ask any questions. However he did and was asked to get off the bus. His words, "I'm a stupid Aussie, please let me stay on the bus", swayed the decision and he climbed back on.

"One of the greatest things about the ABC," Scott said "is that they have contacts everywhere, Moscow, Johannesburg, New Delhi. We therefore have a better understanding of the world we live in and our place in the world. The ABC's international coverage is so important."

While in Moscow Scott Bevan often thought about his background,

the Hunter, and so he has been commissioned to write a book about this 400km river from Ellerston at the junction of the Hunter and Pages Creek which is high up in the Barrington area to the Pacific Ocean mouth. "The River Hunter makes my heart skip a beat. 11 years ago I paddled it and I might do it again. The narrative flow of the book meanders like the river." This new book "The Hunter" is published by the ABC.

Scott entertained the audience with his descriptions, his humour and his advice. "Once you are hypnotised by the screen, you may become anaesthetised by it too. The key to a good story is to find out about the people. In my journalism I am still seeking out the answers."

Answers indeed followed the questions the audience asked.

Q. How free is journalism in Russia.

"I never felt threatened but for Russian journalists that is a different story. A suburban editor trying to draw attention to the saving of one of the few tracts of forest left on the outskirts of Moscow was beaten up. He is still not well".

Q. On censorship. "It's difficult to get through the doors, both metaphorically and physically. Folks censor themselves in what they tell you".

Q. Moscow's railway stations. "Stalin considered them the Palaces of the People, they are really now Museums that are being restored, including busts of Josef Stalin".

Q. The future of ABC24. "Lots of criticism from outside and within. There are still answers to come."

Q. Your twins and concert attendances. "Yes they really did wear earplugs at rock concerts but now take them out. And before we took our twins in utero to a U2 concert at Madison Square Gardens in New York we visited a paediatrician for an opinion. 30 seconds and \$500 later we were told it wouldn't hurt the kids at all. We are actually trying to steer them towards classical music now, one is happy, one likes Rock & Roll."

Q. Shape democracy might look like in Russia. "It's forming only, just a generation since it began, but I think its future is fairly strong. I don't think people will be dragged back

to the past. Yet only 2 hours out of Moscow, in small villages you can still see women going to the well and inside houses in winter, ice on the walls."

Q. Any get-togethers with Tim Flannery and John Doyle over your new book . "No, they would only make me paddle."

Q. Lasting impressions of Russia. "The people, the warm and beautiful Muscovites who did not live up to their hard and ruthless reputations".

Once again Central Coast FABC has enjoyed lunching with a television journalist and we now look forward to Eric Campbell's visit at the end of August. Many thanks to Pat McDonnell whose invitations were accepted by these presenters.

Margaret Hale

Northern Rivers

On Saturday 30 June, Kerry O'Brien gave an address on journalism to a packed A and I Hall at Bangalow. Kerry kept the large audience enthralled with stories of his early days as a journalist where he was filing stories for wire services and then working with the ABC. Kerry commented on recent developments in technology that are making life easier for journalists but argued that there is no substitute for considered, in-depth, quality reporting. His address was followed by a lively question and answer session

On the same program the finalists in the branch's Junior TV Journalist Competition had their short DVDs screened. They were thrilled to receive feedback from the judges (Jeanti St Clair and Sharlene King) and from Kerry. There were two tertiary, one secondary and two primary finalists in attendance.

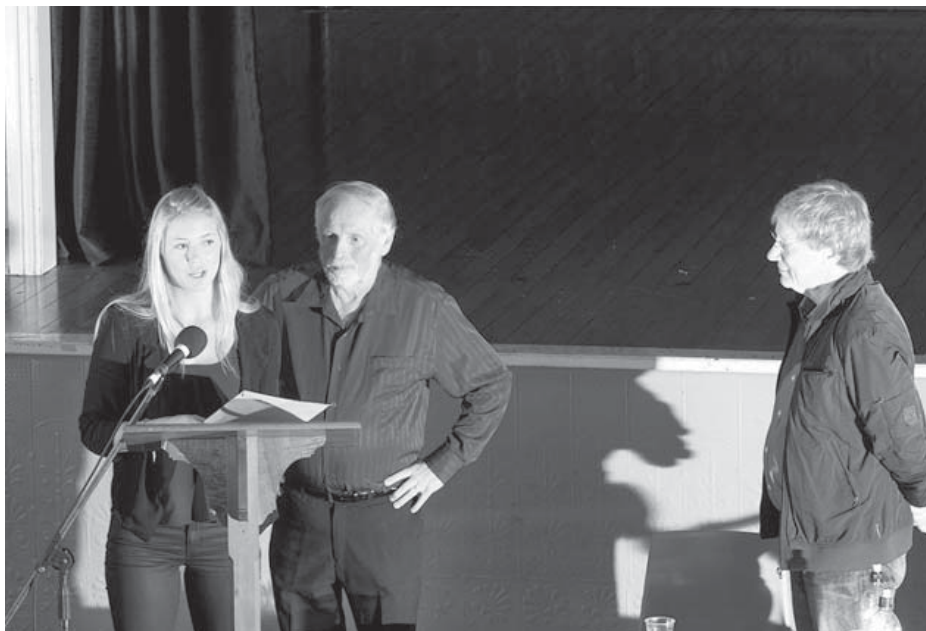
The branch's next event is likely to be held at Mary Ryan's bookshop in Byron Bay. Members should watch out for branch emails, the branch website at <http://www.friendsabcnr.net> and local papers for details.

Members of the Northern Rivers branch attended the Byron Bay Writers Festival on the weekend of 3-5 August. Our branch is a modest financial supporter of the festival. On the program this year there were numerous ABC identities either chairing or taking part in panel

discussions. These included: Kerry O'Brien, Fran Kelly, Sally Neighbour, Monica Attard, Simon Marnie, Richard Fidler, Petria Wallace, and Chris Uhlmann. The local ABC North Coast station organized an outside broadcast from the festival on the Friday session. Our branch members feel that local stations should be given increased funding to increase live coverage of local events. We also discussed with ABC staff members the need to increase funding for the mentoring of junior ABC staff members so that the wisdom of veteran journalists could be shared more effectively.

Neville Jennings

President, Northern Rivers FABC ABC 



Budding journalist - Katie Brown.



Budding journalist - Jacquelin Robson.



Budding journalist Georgia Lee, with Kerry O'Brien and Neville Jennings.



Kerry O'Brien.



Financial Review 6 July 12

As debate rages about Gina Rinehart and Rupert Murdoch ruling the airwaves, of far greater threat is the ABC, writes John Roskam

Two of Australia's three major media organisations are cutting costs and jobs dramatically and are being changed fundamentally. Those two organisations, Fairfax Media and News Limited, are public companies trying to make a profit.

There is of course another big media organisation. It's the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. It's owned by the government, it's funded by the government, and it's operated by people picked by the government.

The business challenge for Fairfax and News executives is to get paying customers to buy their product. The business challenge for ABC executives is to keep on getting \$1 billion a year from the federal cabinet.

There's not much doubt who's got the easier task. The Coalition is scared of the ABC, and Labor is satisfied with it. Admittedly, extracting money from ministers takes skill, but the ABC has 80 years of practice.

Every Coalition politician knows, as the refrain goes, "the ABC is our enemy talking

to our friends".

The ABC's huge reach outside of the capital cities ensures that at the slightest change to its budget, the cry of "cuts to rural and regional communities" goes up.

Labor may be annoyed to be invariably criticised from the left, but it would definitely prefer to have the national broadcaster maintain its broad liberal/left perspective to any alternative.

Any discussion about the media in Australia must take account of the fact that of the three most significant players, two are privately owned, and one is government owned. While the organisations have different market shares and operate across a range of the four different platforms of print, radio, television, and online, taken together they are the three dominant media voices in Australia.

Right now, on many measures, the healthiest media outlet in Australia is the ABC. As the privately owned companies go through the turmoil of their restructures, the prospect is for the position of the ABC to keep growing relative to Fairfax and News.

The emerging dominance of a government-owned media company with its distinct political slant must surely be as important an issue in any debate about a free and independent press as any question about whether the proprietors of Fairfax are

entitled to determine the editorial position of the company's publications.

Communications minister Stephen Conroy and his government are preoccupied with the second question but quite unconcerned about the first.

The problem with the ABC is not just its bias. Just as big a concern is the way it is using its privileged, government funded position to crowd out the market against its commercial rivals

For example, the ABC recently started a 24 hour news channel. It operates in direct competition to Sky News. The ABC's online opinion website, The Drum, operates in direct competition with the online opinion pages of the Fairfax and News newspapers and myriad other privately run commercial websites and blogs.

The ABC's rapidly expanding online presence duplicates what Fairfax and News already provide, but with one vital difference - the Fairfax and News sites are, or soon will be, behind a paywall. In the not-too-distant future, consumers will have a choice: pay to get stories and commentary from Fairfax and News, or get them free from the ABC.

While Fairfax and News will inevitably attempt to compete with each other and against the ABC on the basis of quality, the difficulty they have is that the quality of much of what the ABC produces is very high. As it should be, given all the money it gets.

The ABC is cutting up and eating Fairfax and News's lunch. It's not Gina Rinehart and Rupert Murdoch that journalists should be worried about. It's Mark Scott, the boss of the ABC, they should fear.

Critics of Murdoch like to prove their point about his power by quoting that 70 per cent of newspapers bought by Australians are from News.

Indeed, the ABC's Jonathan Green repeated this figure just last week on The Drum site as he lamented the decline of media diversity in Australia. Nowhere in the article was there any mention of the ABC. On the ABC's website is its own proud boast that "74 per cent of all Australians use ABC services each week via television, radio and online ... ". Then there's the threat of any government that wants to change this - "87 per cent of Australians believe the ABC provides a valuable service to the community".

Media concentration in Australia is all going one way - and it's in the direction of the ABC. 

John Roskam answered by Allan Thomas President, Hunter FABC

AFR 8 July, 2012

Dear Editor,

John Roskam ("Aunty looms too large", Opinion, Jul 6), is worried about the ABC's increasing media presence at the expense of News Limited and Fairfax. He seems to think the ABC should not be allowed to compete against a commercial equivalent saying the competition is unfair because the ABC is government-funded and because "the quality of what the ABC produces is very high". Roskam notes that soon consumers will have an online choice: "pay to get stories and commentary from Fairfax and News or get them free from the ABC".

And why not the latter? With roughly ten million tax payers in Australia the ABC costs just \$2 per week per taxpayer. Most people would consider that good value given the breadth of the ABC TV, radio, and on-line services, all free of advertisements.

Another article in the same AFR edition by John Lanchester, "Can't buy me love" (Review, July 6), argues that there are some things that should not be subject to market forces. I would argue that being able to choose ad-free radio and TV programs if one so desires, is equally desirable. Does commercialisation have to permeate everything?

In this, the 80th year of the ABC, I think it deserves kudos, not brickbats. Historically every government has found the ABC irritating. Surely this indicates balanced reporting rather than bias.

Allan Thomas 

FABC NSW Inc Annual General meeting

friends
of the abc

Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc

Post Office Box 1391
North Sydney NSW 2059
Telephone 02 9990 0600

e-mail: fabcnsw@fabcnsw.org.au
Web: www.fabcnsw.org.au

28th August 2012

Notice of Annual General Meeting 22 September 2012

Dear Friends,

The Annual General Meeting of Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc. will be held this year at Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, Level 1, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney (Between Park and Bathurst Streets) on Saturday, 22 September 2012, commencing at 1.00 pm.

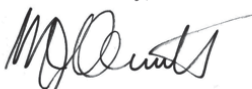
There will be an address, followed by a short tea break, after which the meeting will commence with presentation of reports, election of office bearers and general business. We expect the meeting to conclude by 4pm.

The constitution provides that Committee positions including President, other office bearers and Committee members become automatically vacant and "shall be elected at each annual general meeting". In most cases the incumbent position holders are likely to stand for re-election, along with any others who nominate. Should you wish to nominate for the committee or for one of the abovementioned positions, please indicate below as soon as possible.

Afternoon refreshments will be provided and in order to assist catering, we ask that you complete the RSVP form shown below.

We look forward to your attendance on 22 September.

Yours sincerely,



Malcolm Hewitt
President

◆ Cut here

PLEASE RETURN TO PO BOX 1391, NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059
Or Email to James Buchanan jamesbuc@bigpond.net.au

Tick box ☐ I wish to attend the AGM

I also wish to nominate for the position of: _____ (optional)

Name: _____

Phone: _____

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State and Regional Branches

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Go to:
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New South Wales

Mal Hewitt (President) FABC NSW
PO Box 1391 North Sydney 2059
Phone: 9637 2900
malandal@optusnet.com.au

ACT and Region

Margaret O'Connor
Phone: 0422 975 848
margoforte@hotmail.com

Armidale

Val Sherwell (Secretary)
167 Markham Street
Armidale NSW 2350
Phone: 6772 0342
valsherwell@bigpond.com

Bruce Hansell (President)

Phone: 6775 1889
hansells@bordnet.net.au

Blue Mountains

Tony Tayler
15 Spencer Street
Leura NSW 2780
Phone: 4784 3642
tonyt@sysygy.com.au

Central Coast

Co-convenors:
Klaas Woldring
Phone: 4341 5170
woldring@zipworld.com.au

Paula Murray

Phone: 4385 3783
Mobile: 0428 578 535
paula.murray1@bigpond.com

Cowper

Joyce Gardner (Secretary)
7 Royal Tar Crescent
Nambucca Heads NSW 2448
Phone: 6568 7532
fabccowper@gmail.com

Eastern Suburbs

Nizza Siano (Secretary)
16 Holland Rd
Bellevue Hill NSW 2023
Phone/Fax: 9327 3423
nizzamax@gmail.com

Great Lakes & Manning Valley

Margaret Gardner
PO Box 871 Forster NSW 2428
Ph: 6554 9181 (H) 6591 3704 (W)
margaret.gardner@tafensw.edu.au

Hunter

Allan Thomas
c/o PO Box 265
Merewether NSW 2291
Phone: 4930 7309
allan.thomas2@bigpond.com

Illawarra

Jan Kent (Secretary)
Friends of the ABC Illawarra
PO Box 336, Unanderra 2526
Phone/Fax: 4271 3531
jankent@hotmail.net.au

Mid North Coast

Drusi Megget
24 Arncliffe Ave
Port Macquarie NSW 2444
Phone: 6583 8798
fabc.midcoast@gmail.com

Northern Rivers

Neville Jennings
PO Box 1484 Kingscliff 2487
Phone/Fax: 6674 3830 (H)
njenning@scu.edu.au

Byron Bay Sub-branch convenor

Jill Keogh
Phone: 6688 4558

Parramatta

Mal Hewitt
31 Queen St Granville 2142
Phone: 9637 2900
malandal@optusnet.com.au

Victoria – FABC

Glenys Stradijot - Campaign Manager
Friends of the ABC (Vic)
GPO Box 4065
Melbourne VIC 3001
Phone: (03) 9682 0073
fabcvic@vicnet.net.au

Queensland – FABC

Professor Alan Knight
Creative Industries Faculty QUT
GPO Box 2434
Brisbane 4001
Knighta1949@gmail.com
fabcqld@hotmail.com

South Australia – FABC

Anne Levy
PO Box 7158 Hutt St
Adelaide SA 5000
Phone: 08 8232 5075
annelevy@adam.com.au

Western Australia – FABC

Harry Cohen
PO Box 534
Subiaco WA 6904
fabcwaw@hotmail.com

Tasmania – FABC

Melissa Sharpe
PO Box 301
North Hobart TAS 7002
Phone: 0427 041 161
melissa.dms@bigpond.com

FABC RESOURCE CENTRE

Darce Cassidy
www.friendsoftheabc.org



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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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