

Ranald Macdonald joins forces with ABC Friends in National Campaign



Extracted from Michelle Pini's interview with Ranald in "Review"

Elected to the Victorian ABC Friends Executive Committee in November 2014, Ranald brings a unique wealth of experience, knowledge and contacts to the service of ABC Friends. Over a distinguished career he uncovered political scandals, aided the rise and fall of governments, raised the standard of journalism, campaigned for journalistic integrity and editorial independence and vehemently defended freedom of speech, and that was just at The Age.

He has also worked as a university lecturer at RMIT and Boston University and as a broadcaster on ABC radio; presided over Collingwood Football Club; headed the International Press Institute; instigated the Australian Press Council; chaired several media boards and started various entrepreneurial ventures.

While at the helm of David Syme and Co. Ranald was the first Australian to chair the prestigious International Press Institute and spent the better part of two years travelling

the globe, campaigning for freedom of the press and supporting journalists who were under house arrest, in jail, or under threat for speaking out.

If there is a defining accomplishment it would be his transformation of The Age, in his 19 years in the driving seat, from a conservative, parochial paper with a declining readership to a thriving, world-renowned publication. During his time it reached its highest circulation and was twice voted in the top 20 newspapers in the world by Columbia University.

Ranald is the co-ordinator of the new Friends Action Committee, with the objectives of:

- Running a National Campaign in defence of the ABC
- Establishing a National Fighting Fund
- Building Friends Membership to 50,000 from the current 10,000
- Lobbying politicians of all parties

The campaign will be launched in early May, and we urge all current members to throw all their resources behind it as we fight to save the ABC we know and value.

Inside Update

A Letter to the Prime Minister	3
Do you feel able to help out at ABC Friends NSW	4
CLASSIC FM and the CUTS to the ABC. The Unkindest Cuts of All?	5
Sarah Ferguson had no choice but to push the envelope when interviewing Joe Hockey	6
FABC Submission	7
Not again! Saving the ABC in the 21st century	8
Branch News	10
Too Much Information: A Political Device to Impose a Free Market Ideology	13
Quentin Dempster's address to Australian Institute of International Affairs	14

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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.fabcnsw.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?*

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From the President

A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN IN DEFENCE OF THE ABC

Our cover story brings to members the news that Ranald Macdonald, distinguished journalist, editor, publisher and academic, is leading the Friends Action Committee in a national campaign, which will have three stages. First, all members will receive a letter asking for their support in a membership drive (aiming to raise membership to 50,000), and for contributions to a National Fighting Fund. Second, with the help of several high-profile figures, a media campaign, designed to put real pressure on all Parliamentarians, will emphasise that Australia must have a properly funded, independent ABC. Third, there will be targeted lobbying of politicians on the vital role the ABC plays in our community, with the demand that funding, depth of reporting and range and quality of programming be restored. Watch your letterboxes and email inboxes! I urge every one of you to turn your passion for the ABC into action – we have lost much already, but there is far worse to come unless we all take up the fight in defence of our ABC!

WHAT HAVE WE LOST ALREADY?

Only 4 months into 2015 we can already see the consequences of the Abbott Government's savage cuts, and some quite incomprehensible decisions by ABC Management. A few examples:

- News (perhaps the ABC's most important service) has suffered greatly – there is less of it, with shorter bulletins or no bulletins at all, and it is covered much less competently and professionally than in the past (clearly a result of less people to do the job), and we really question the need for the flagship 7pm TV news to look and sound like a commercial network – why?

- A Local Radio example, Newcastle 1233. Serving a population of over 500,000 (greater than Canberra or Hobart), Newcastle has been downgraded from Metropolitan to Regional, lost 30% of its staff, compared with 10% across the whole ABC, and can no longer provide essential services to its community – why?

Read more in the Branch Report from Hunter FABC.

- Radio National (for some years the victim of ABC Management's seeming dislike of searching programs of depth and intellectual rigour) – gone are Bush Telegraph (an essential service?), Hindsight, Encounter, Poetica, First Bite, By Design, 360 Documentaries, Into the Music, all seemly part of the ABC's flight from coverage of the Arts, Religion, Science, and the telling of Our Stories, both personal and national. Read more about this from Tim Bowden in this Update.

- Classic FM – judged by many visiting classical music celebrities as perhaps the finest classical music broadcaster in the world, is showing the strain of a 25% cut in staff and a 50% cut in live broadcasts of outstanding Australian ensembles and performers, and a reduction in hours of real, live presenters on air (perhaps in response to a politician's suggestion that all a classical music station has to do is "play CDs all the time.") Management's priorities are clear in that, in comparison to the purging of Classic FM, Triple J was relatively unscathed. Why? Read much more about Classic FM in this Update

- Radio Australia – ABC Management is not to blame for the Abbott Government and DFAT's bizarre but clearly ideologically driven decision to cease funding Australia Network (TV), broadcasting into Australia and the Pacific, but it has left hundreds of millions of regular watchers in China and throughout Asia bewildered as to why a government would throw away such priceless soft diplomacy, along with the promotion of Australia throughout the region, as well as the service of news and current affairs. Radio Australia shared that funding though, and no longer serves Marshall Islands, Nauru, Marianas, Kiribati, Cook Islands, Myanmar, and has cut language programs to Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Papua New Guinea. Quentin Dempster provides a detailed analysis of the implications of the loss of these services in his address to the Australian Institute of International Affairs (in this Update)

There are many more examples across ABC Radio and Television which could be instanced, but in the traditional media of

radio and television, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that ABC Management values populist and trite above depth and intellectual rigour – its decisions seem to bear this out. We wonder how Management justifies this in terms of the ABC's Charter?

FOUR CORNERS STILL A JEWEL IN THE (SOMEWHAT TARNISHED) CROWN

Despite the all-pervading gloom of cuts to the ABC, special mention must be made of the performance of the incomparable investigative reporting Four Corners team in 2015. Throughout its long and outstanding history, Four Corners has shone the light into our dark places with brilliance, brought down a government, exposed corruption in public and private enterprise, and changed our society for the better. We must share the concerns of Peter Greste that recent moves by the Federal Government to impede journalists in their search for the truth, however unpalatable, endanger our democracy. In "Making a Killing," Four Corners did what the RSPCA, police force and the risible "self-regulated" Greyhound Industry was unable to – expose the appalling humans involved in the evil "sport" of greyhound racing, and, hopefully, hasten the end of this dreadful activity. Other programs in 2015 have exposed shonky employment trainers in "The Jobs Game," shonky financiers in "Game of Loans" and shonky universities graduating poorly trained nurses. All powerful reasons why we must have a well-funded public broadcaster, because these programs would never be made by the commercial media.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In the December Update I mentioned the need for a succession plan in Friends of the ABC. We are served by a brilliant team in NSW, but we are not immortal, and must pass on our knowledge and skills to younger(?) Friends. Perhaps, in the membership drive of our National Campaign we should look especially for future leaders. The NSW roles are outlined in this Update – please consider. Regarding succession, I must pay tribute to Gael Barrett, who has resigned as President of Victorian Friends. Thank you, Gael, for your commitment and dedication over many years – best wishes to David Risstrom who has taken over as Victorian President, and Graeme Connelly as Vice President. I look forward to working with you in the defence of our ABC.

Mal Hewitt
President, NSW & ACT Friends

A Letter to the Prime Minister

24th March 2015

The Hon Tony Abbott MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the government's treatment of the ABC and SBS.

I grew up in Western Sydney and started work in the building industry at 15 years old. As you can imagine I did not have an extensive formal education.

Over the decades since, the ABC especially, and to a lesser extent SBS has played a critical role in increasing my knowledge of, and appreciation for a world far beyond the limited reaches of my younger years. Through ABC TV, ABC Local Radio and Radio National especially I have come into contact with disciplines ranging from history to law and from science to archaeology.

The appreciation for knowledge gained by access to these national treasures has played a critical role in my encouraging my own children to pursue careers in life that have led them to achieve a greater level of education and skill than I could ever have imagined.

In addition to this, the joy of having a broadcaster that exists more in the tradition of the BBC rather than commercial TV from the USA is beyond description. I feel it is one of the things that defines us as Australians. This is an institution that is at the very heart of our cultural and intellectual life- and it is not one that should be undervalued.

The promises not to "cut the SBS or ABC" made by yourself immediately prior to the last election show that you understand very well the value that the electorate puts on these services. The outcry that occurred after those promises were broken should only serve to re-inforce this knowledge for you.

Protecting the future of the ABC is about far more than just having some ad-free shows to watch on the box. It is about nurturing and maintaining a national identity that treasures knowledge and balance. And of course some decent entertainment.

Please restore funding to the ABC showing that you also value this cornerstone of our national identity.

Kind regards,
Dennis Plink

PO Box 26 Mt Victoria NSW, 2786

Do you feel able to help out at ABC Friends NSW

Succession planning for NSW Office Bearers

While none of our office bearers is planning to retire any time soon, it makes sense to identify suitable persons who are natural team players and could step into the various shoes when that eventuates, and, if convenient, join the NSW Committee in the short term.

Please have a look at the possibilities and if you are interested to find out more, contact our secretary James Buchanan at jamesbuc@bigpond.net.au or on 0414 604 966.

President

(currently Mal Hewitt)

Represent ABC Friends to the public and the media, relations with the ABC, liaison with Friends in other States, attend functions, support regional branches, chair the NSW Executive Committee and the Annual General Meeting of the Association.

Editor of Update Magazine

(currently Mal Hewitt)

Gather and edit suitable content for the thrice yearly magazine Update, from a range of sources including regional branches, public media and other contributors. This is passed to our professional

layout artist under the control of the editor. At present Mal Hewitt chooses to edit Update in addition to his duties as President, but that will not always be the case.

Secretary Treasurer

(currently James Buchanan)

Maintain financial accounts and attend to all aspects of financial management, receive and disburse all monies using MYOB, spreadsheets and CBA netbank, accounts for audit and AGM, financial reports to the Committee, Insurances, Public Officer, receive and action all postal mail and coordinate general administration by Email. This position ideally requires someone with financial experience such as accounting.

Membership Secretary

(currently Angela Williamson)

Maintain and update the membership database on Microsoft Access, process new and renewing members on spreadsheet and as received through the mail, extensive member liaison including renewal notices and responses, members queries from various sources and a range of other administrative tasks relating to membership.

Webmaster

(currently Chris. Cartledge)

Manage and update the information on the ABC Friends NSW & ACT website. In particular, post news items in a timely manner as they come to hand. Manage website domains, security, email forwarders and work with our professional web developer for structural changes. Send mass emails to the membership as required.

Events Coordinator

(currently Jason Lowe)

Head up the Events Committee and manage all promotional and social events for ABC Friends NSW. Manage merchandise and promotional material (e.g badges, T Shirts, membership forms). Member of the NSW executive committee.

Campaign Manager

(this is a new position)

Provide support and advice to the ABC Friends NSW President. Trawl printed and electronic media for news items related to the ABC. Provide relevant articles to the Webmaster for inclusion on the ABC Friends NSW website and to the editor of the Update newsletter. Act as assistant editor of Update. Draft and once signed-off by the President, distribute media releases. Maintain up to date media contacts.





CLASSIC FM and the CUTS to the ABC

The Unkindest Cuts of All?



Mal Hewitt OAM Musician and Music Educator, with acknowledgement to Dick Letts, Director, The Music Trust, for much of the content.

The ABC's Charter requires it to "encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and performing arts in Australia." Other clauses refer to the ABC's contribution to a sense of national identity whilst reflecting our cultural diversity. These terms may be general, but they undoubtedly demand that the ABC takes a strongly pro-active role in encouraging and promoting music creation and performance across Australia.

This national challenge was clearly in the minds of the ABC's founding fathers, particularly Sir Charles Moses, because it was the ABC which founded, maintained and managed for over 50 years six symphony orchestras, a dance band and several professional choirs for the express purpose of broadcasting great music to the entire Australian population. The ABC also commissioned, performed and broadcast works by Australian composers, established a national competition for young classical music performers, and played a vital and all-encompassing role in music education, especially for children. Years of cuts to funding mean that the ABC no longer does most of these things.

ABC Management appears to have applied the axe with unusual savagery

to Classic FM in the most recent cuts – 25% of its staff have gone, most of those directly involved in programming (so much for the Minister's "back office" only claims). FM jazz programs have vanished, along with the new music program New Music Up Late. On both Classic FM and RN, programs of daring or innovative new music seemed to be a particular target. 600 live broadcasts of concerts and festivals by Australian performers and ensembles have been cut to 300, and regular Classic FM listeners will have noticed the dramatic drop in live broadcasts in 2015, replaced by past recordings from the ABC archives.

Weekly Sunday Live concerts, broadcasting mainly young performers and much new music from right across Australia have ceased completely. Broadcasts of outstanding concerts from Perth, Adelaide, Hobart and Brisbane will become rare, or cease altogether, with the loss of technical staff from these cities. Classic FM has been the major source in Australia of broadcasts and recordings by Australian classical composers and performers, filling a gap which will never be filled by commercial broadcasters or recording companies. Sadly for Australian music, this source is now greatly diminished.

Who is listening to Classic FM?

With a weekly reach of 724,000 in 2013-14 in Australia's five largest cities (14m people), the audience is fairly evenly

distributed from age 30 upwards: 30-39, 15%; 40-49, 15%; 50-59, 19%; 60 and above, 17% per decade. Largely absent are listeners under 30, but these figures do not reflect management's view that Classic FM's audience is exclusively geriatric! And many commercial radio stations wouldn't mind having those figures.

Why is Classic FM so important to the future of Australian music?

- Celebrated conductors, instrumental and vocal soloists and ensembles who visit Australia are unanimous in their praise of Classic FM as in the forefront of broadcasters of Classical music around the world.

- Concerts and festivals in Australia reach a world audience, promoting Australian composers, music, performers and ensembles on a world stage.

- Classic FM's coverage of events such as the Townsville Chamber Music Festival, Musica Viva festivals, Sydney and Melbourne International Piano Competitions, National Music Camp performances and many others enable every Australian, regardless of location, to share in these great music festivals.

- Presenters on Classic FM are renowned for their expertise, experience and authority, some of them being practising musicians (such as conductors Graham Abbott and Guy Noble), as well as broadcasters of vast experience (Margaret Throsby, Mairi Nicolson), and all play a vital role in educating the radio audience whilst remaining entertaining and informative.

We must seriously question the motives of ABC Management in targeting Classic FM, particularly as its stablemate Triple J has remained relatively untouched. Is it victim of a "dumbing down" process that can be identified across the ABC as resources are denied to programs which challenge the intellect? Management must be reminded that the ABC has a clear charter "to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and performing arts in Australia," as well as to educate the Australian people.

Classic FM has fulfilled this superbly, and must be adequately funded to enable it to continue doing so.

Please write to Mark Scott (General Manager of the ABC) to express your concern at the treatment of Classic FM.

His email address is
Scott.Mark@abc.net.au



Sarah Ferguson had no choice



but to push the envelope
when interviewing
Joe Hockey

A screen grab shows Sarah Ferguson interviewing Treasurer Joe Hockey on 7.30 after the release of his first budget.
Photo: ABC 7.30



By
Quentin
Dempster

The impertinence!

How dare you interrupt the Prime Minister when he/she is talking!

The adversarial TV and radio political interview has been contentious in Australia from the start.

The audience phone-ins that follow scream bias and rudeness. Or, in some cases, condemn the interviewer for being too soft.

Why is it adversarial?

Because your executive producer can only give you eight to 10 minutes of broadcast time and you must drive the “talent” to get to some intellectual or explicative point on the issues and events under examination. With most politicians schooled in staying “on message”, sometimes interviewers have to push the envelope. Otherwise, the audience will nod off as the interview degenerates into “blah-de-blah”.

Journalist Colleen Ryan’s critique of Sarah Ferguson’s Joe Hockey interview on 7.30 reveals a lack of understanding of the form and its acceptable parameters. Ferguson’s interview was short-listed for the Walkley Awards last year because it established on budget night 2014 the issues that have

dominated domestic politics ever since – broken promises, unfairness and the destruction of trust.

“How would you go if you had just eight to 10 minutes with a politician as slippery as we breed them in Australia?”

(David Speers’ Sky TV interview with Attorney-General George Brandis just pipped Ferguson for the gong as Speers cleverly established for his audience the A-G’s knowledge of meta thingy).

ABC editorial policies require appropriate “respect” to be shown to the guest. You cannot shout out “you shameless liar”, but must so construct your questions that you hope this conclusion becomes obvious to your audience.

Under pressure with back-to-back interviews, Ferguson emerged from hours in the lock-up to challenge the Treasurer. The audience had already watched his budget speech and his explanations and justifications for the measures announced.

Ferguson’s first question “is it liberating for a politician to decide election promises

don’t matter” is justified by the facts. So, too, the confronting question about the definition of tax.

Mr Hockey had every opportunity to explain himself and the government’s imperatives now it had to take responsibility for the nation.

The audience around Australia responded well to Ferguson’s stint in the 7.30 chair, because she did push the envelope.

Ryan is a great journalist. She was asked to give her subjective views under ABC chairman’s James Spigelman’s external audit of editorial standards.

With very great respect, this subjective audit is a daft idea, as the ABC is already subject to external oversight on its code of practice by the Australian Communications and Media Authority – let alone defamation, contempt and discrimination laws, federal, state and territory.

The chairman announced the audit last year in a pre-emptive buckle to the strident vilification of the public broadcaster from the Murdoch press.

While debate rages, please have some sympathy for the interviewer. How would you go if you had just eight to 10 minutes with a politician as slippery as we breed them in Australia? With very great respect.

Quentin Dempster is a former ABC presenter and interviewer and now a Fairfax contributing editor.



Submission to: The Inquiry into the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Local Content) Bill 2014

Environment and Communications Legislation Committee

From: ABC Friends NSW & ACT

ABC Friends

ABC Friends is the major community organisation representing the public's interest in its independent national public broadcaster. It is a politically independent organisation whose aim is the maintenance of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) as a healthy, independent and comprehensive national public broadcaster. This submission is from ABC Friends NSW & ACT (also known as Friends of the ABC [NSW] Inc.).

Our Submission

1. Notwithstanding the centralisation of ABC to Sydney NSW, ABCF NSW supports strongly carriage of local/regional news and other programs by the ABC and a strong physical presence of inhouse production facilities in other States. These facilities must be adequately funded.
2. The concept that outsourcing is a cheaper means of production for the ABC has never been subject to close scrutiny. It seems to be taken as read that outsourcing is cheaper option when there is an extant literature which shows that this is not always the case. An independent critical review of outsourcing with regard to the production sector is required in order to demonstrate unequivocally that this a more efficient and effective mechanism and that there are no untoward consequences with regard to the ABC meeting its charter, quality of production, and bias or interference. Such a review should not be limited to a narrow financial analysis but must be more wide-ranging in its reach to include matters such as government cross-subsidisation to the private production sector, development of regional capacity for reporting and production, and protection and ownership of intellectual property. There is capacity in the Australian community to provide such independent analysis.
3. The current management of the ABC appears to be 'gold-plating' various digital capacities preliminary to sell-off to the private sector in order to have the ABC 'pay its way'. Once sold the ABC will be forced to buy back these services from the private sector and will be at the mercy of the sector because it no longer has capacity inhouse for production. The ABC could be shut out of the market for purchase of product in these circumstances much as has happened to its capacity to purchase product from the BBC. It is not that the ABC is uncompetitive, it is that the private sector offers a much larger price to make sure that the ABC does not have programs available to it in order to impact its place in the community. We have profound concern that the loss of regional ABC capacity will lead to a dumping-down of regional capacity for reporting and production.
4. Many of the current changes to the ABC and its programing which have prompted the proposed amendments to the ABC Charter have been prompted by the Lewis 'efficiency' review of the ABC/SBS. This hastily-written, seriously-deficient document, which goes well beyond its remit, has never been subject to an independent review process. It is recommended that the Lewis review be subject to independent review commissioned by the Senate Estimates Committee. ABCF NSW would be happy to spell out the terms of reference for such a review including the need for an Amicus Curiae with regard to certain management assumptions which underpin the Lewis document.
5. ABCF NSW insists that there be a proper review of funding by the ABC so that it is able to meet its Charter requirements. We are already aware of examples where regional ABC facilities are badly underfunded and centralisation of facilities will not solve this problem. Local feet on the ground with appropriate means of production are essential to the ABC meeting its Charter requirements.
6. Without an adequate regional ABC presence the quality of local news suffers a lack of critical independence. We know that a local ABC news presence keeps other sources on their toes with regard to appropriate investigation and reporting although recent cuts to the ABC are impairing significantly that capacity. A healthy democracy is dependent on an independent media.

Overall ABCF NSW supports the concept of support for a strong local presence of the ABC throughout Australia.

Mal Hewitt

President – ABC Friends NSW & ACT

Not again!

Saving the ABC in the 21st century



By
Tim Bowden

Veteran ABC broadcaster Tim Bowden spoke at a public meeting of Victorian ABC Friends last November. His words, experience and insights have just as much relevance in April 2015.

Well, what a week it has been. Game on indeed for the future of the ABC – and complicated by the fact that some of the cuts are, not only in my view, self-inflicted wounds.

But the main challenge for the moment is to protest against the Federal Governments unwanted, un-needed and dishonest cuts to the national broadcaster.

It would seem that the ABC is, according to Tony Abbott, also not playing for the Australian team.

I don't think that the ABC should be badged in this way, and it would be farcical if it were not serious. Our current Prime Minister, it seems, really believes that the ABC should forsake its traditional role to examine all issues with independent rigour – on behalf of all Australians – and is now seeking to punish the ABC (and SBS) by cutting funding.

The weasel pre-election words of Tony Abbott that he would not cut the funds of the ABC or the SBS were only a part of similar deceptions of his 'Government of no surprises' which of course came up with a raft of very unpleasant surprises indeed.

But I wish to dwell on the grave problems facing the ABC, whose budget has been cut, and trimmed further under the guise of efficiency reviews and a number of other more sneaky ways to attempt to bend the national broadcaster to the Coalition's will – like appointments to the ABC Board. In early 2014 we learned that there is now a mechanism (a Kevin Rudd initiative) to use an independent nomination process that was supposed to de-politicise the

“As a public service broadcaster I wasn't paid all that much, but I loved the freedom of choosing topics not driven by a commercial imperative ...”

way board members to the ABC and SBS were selected. The 'independent' panel considers applications, then offers a shortlist of board candidates to the Minister for Communications and PM. Until recently it was overseen by Ian Watt, the Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Two of the latest atrocities (among many) perpetrated on the ABC, were

to appoint ex-Liberal MP Neil Brown to this committee, an ABC-hater of renown who is on record as wanting to break it up, sell it off and more besides, plus Janet Albrechtsen, a Murdoch columnist whose anti-ABC splenetic columns in *The Australian* have been unrelenting and who was a Board member herself from 2005 to 2010, appointed by the Coalition.

All positions on the panel expire by April 2015, so it's not difficult to predict that the Abbott government can entirely remake the panel as it sees fit.

Scott has bent over backwards in recent years to set up fairness procedures, complaints handling mechanisms, and making sure that even barking-mad (and uniformly anti-ABC) members of Melbourne's uber-right Institute of Public Affairs cropped up regularly on programs like *Q & A*, as well as the likes of Piers Akerman and Andrew Bolt who had regular exposure on Sunday morning's *Insiders*.

When I first began writing this address, I contacted a senior source in ABC Radio National for some background. My informant said that in all his time at the ABC, he had never experienced such fear and loathing in the organisation, trying to plan ahead for the expected cuts whose scope and seriousness were still to be spelled out.

We now know that Radio National will lose eight important programs – *Bush Telegraph*, *First Bite*, *By Design*, *360 Documentaries*, *Into the Music*, *Encounter*, *Poetica* and *Hindsight*.

This last one means a lot to me, as Hindsight is the remaining remnant of the Social History Unit which I started in 1985, and which has done really important documentary work on Australian history for the last 29 years, until the axe fell this week. The ABC will not be worth fighting for if it abandons its quality products on RN – among other unfortunate decisions like cutting State-based programs on television.

As Quentin Dempster put it so well: “Radio National, with its specialist programs hitting 64 million downloads so far this year is being (quote unquote) ‘reshaped’. A nincompoop in senior management has been heard to comment on ‘the need to get rid of the stranglehold of specialisation’”!!!

However none of this would be happening had the Abbott Government not lied about no cuts to the funding of ABC and SBS, and played into the hands of the Murdoch ABC hate squad who have been baying for the ABC’s blood for years.

There is certainly no public perception that Aunty needs a makeover. Polls, as I mentioned, consistently show a very high level of satisfaction for the services Aunty provides Australians in television, radio and indeed online.

(Tim described his long and varied career with the ABC to illustrate his total familiarity with the organisation.)

As a public service broadcaster I wasn’t paid all that much, but I loved the freedom of choosing topics not driven by a commercial imperative, and – with overtime not being an option – worked for as long as I had to, in order to get my programs on air. Most of my colleagues were doing the same thing. There were times when we felt we were poorly served by our managers, but this is the way it is in any large organisation.

I can assure you none of us felt we were running the place. We were running just to keep up with what we had to do.

I could quote examples of staff striking against blatant censorship of current affairs programs – sometimes initiated by ABC management itself. But staff never took industrial action over their pay and conditions. It was always over matters of principle involving the ABC’s charter. There was, and still is, a great delight by ABC broadcasters to use the freedoms provided by a public broadcaster to pursue stories and topics that shine a light on our own society, political, social and cultural. And our listeners and viewers

seem to like it this way. Believe me there is no sinister agenda. Basically the ABC is quite a conservative organisation.

But not conservative enough for the Coalition. Doubtless John Howard hoped that when he appointed his close friend Donald McDonald as Chairman of the ABC for ten years from 1996, probably hoped that he would reign in the perceived radicals – but McDonald is a civilised and cultured man and while not completely captured by the culture of the ABC (let’s

“It is now being suggested by the likes of the National’s Senator Ian MacDonald that this has been a deliberate act of bastardry by the ABC ...”



not forget it was McDonald who unleashed the unspeakable Jonathan Shier briefly as its MD) he allowed most of its flowers to bloom.

Now the Coalition has taken board stacking to new heights with this latest ploy, bringing Albrechtsen back into the fray with Neil Brown to presumably nominate the next batch of crazies to be inflicted on poor old Aunty from within.

I never cease to be amazed by the visceral hatred of the national broadcaster by the ABC’s right wing critics. In July 2002 – when we were all much younger – I addressed the Brisbane Institute, and my talk was titled Managing the ABC – Mission Impossible?

I began by saying:

When the appalling Jonathan Shier was finally sent packing last November by the same ABC board that had appointed him, the baying of the hounds of the right entered the realm of the theatre of the absurd.

By the way, let’s not forget the Mansfield Review, which took place over 1996 and 1997, and a classic case of the old adage that no government should set up an inquiry unless it can predict the outcome that it wants – or words to that effect.

Senator Alston (and Howard) miscalculated badly on this front. Bob Mansfield was a marketing man, and called for submissions from the public on what should happen to the ABC. He received, as I understand it, some 10,500 submissions, 10,000 of which were essentially saying that the writers approved of what the ABC was doing, and wanted more of the same. Mansfield’s conclusion was essentially that the ABC was doing a great job, and should be given more money!

Suffice to say the Coalition never made that mistake again. The Mansfield Report was quietly shelved – and their cuts stayed in place.

Enough history. But, of course, it is all happening again.

I’d like to reiterate the point that reducing the effectiveness of the ABC to perform the functions it does, and generally appreciated by its large nation-wide audience, it would be unwise to think that all conservative members of parliament would welcome the results of further budget cuts.

The National Party is already kicking and screaming about cuts to the ABC’s services to the bush, including five regional centres. What did they think was going to happen when their members in Cabinet voted for the present cuts? It is now being suggested by the likes of the National’s Senator Ian MacDonald that this has been a deliberate act of bastardry by the ABC to put pressure on the Government. The cuts had to be spread across the board.

Bashing the ABC, or attempting to muzzle its freedoms, is actually not electorally sensible. In my view, most Australians would take an extremely dim view of that perception. At the moment, the ABC and indeed SBS needs all the friends it can get.

So as I said at the beginning, it is game on for public broadcasting as we know it and want it. Let’s maintain the rage, keep this issue high in the minders of voters to make sure we can keep public broadcasting as it should be.

This is an edited extract of a longer and entertaining address with many anecdotes that was given by Tim Bowden to an ABC Friends (Vic) public meeting Nov 28, 2014. The full address is at www.abcfriends.org.au/events.html



Branch News

Hunter

Following the public rally in Newcastle in support of the ABC in mid- November, we informed our Hunter Branch members in a newsletter about the disastrous impact which the Federal Government's funding cuts had had on staff numbers (reduced by one third) and programming at radio station 1233 ABC Newcastle. The station was downgraded from its metropolitan status to that of a regional station even though its listening audience is larger than either Hobart or Canberra which retained their metropolitan status.

Less tangible, but none the less serious outcomes occur when a community begins to have its voice and identity whittled away, only to be replaced by those of a large, impersonal metropolis. Our local ABC station staff knows what is important to their Novocastrian listeners and have developed a variety of interesting programs that reflect the culture, interests and concerns of their audience. And their listeners have repaid them over many years by ensuring that the station always rates very highly against its commercial competition.

One of our members, Michael Jameson, was so incensed about the downgrading of 1233 ABC Newcastle that he organised a petition which stated:

Don't Gut 1233 ABC Newcastle!

The people of Newcastle and the Hunter region pay their fair share of tax. Mr Scott states that approximately 10% of ABC employees will be sacked due to the Federal Government's budget cuts. Why should Radio 1233 Newcastle lose 30% of its staff? What economic model applies when a region of 500,000 potential listeners is downgraded from metropolitan to regional status but areas with a smaller population, i.e. Canberra and Hobart, retain their metropolitan status?

It is unacceptable that ABC radio 1233 Newcastle has been gutted in comparison to equivalent stations. We demand the revision of this disproportionate slashing of ABC radio 1233's service.

A total of 1774 signatures were gathered through a variety of means in a short time and Michael forwarded the 92 pages of signatures to the Minister for Communications and the Managing Director of the ABC. We congratulate Michael for his determination in the face of a number of difficulties in ensuring that the voice of the ABC's Hunter supporters was well and truly brought home to the Minister and the Managing Director.

Hunter branch members organised an ABC Friends' stall at one of the Sunday markets held at the Newcastle Showground in January and we received a very positive response from market attendees who expressed their anger and disappointment about the Federal Government's savage cuts to the ABC's funding, particularly to ABC radio 1233 Newcastle. Many visitors to the Friends' stall happily signed the petition and took postcards, bumper stickers and membership application forms away with them. It was gratifying to hear how much Novocastrians love and support their ABC!

Blue Mountains

ABC Friends Blue Mountain's first meeting for 2015 started with a new President and quite a few new faces. Sadly, Margaret Foy, outgoing President, had made the hard decision not to re-nominate for health reasons. Margaret did a wonderful job and her drive, ideas and dedication to the ABC and our branch have been an inspiration to many of us. Margaret will continue to be an active member of our group, sharing her knowledge and expertise. We are grateful to Barry Redshaw for taking on the role of President, especially after saying "not this year!"

Our meeting focused around how we can continue to help the ABC. How we can constructively voice our dismay and anger at what the Government has done and is continuing to do to the ABC. How we can educate members of the public regarding the ABC's decimation and the vital importance the ABC has as our independent, unbiased and much needed public broadcaster.

The first event was our participation in the Springwood Foundation Day Parade. We were represented by a very small but enthusiastic group of members including NSW President, Mal Hewitt. We wound our way through the main street of Springwood waving banners and handing out membership flyers, save our ABC

Letter to the Newcastle Herald

In Defence of the ABC

I am concerned about the recent budget cuts to the ABC, especially the severe cuts to Newcastle's ABC 1233. One of the many reasons why I support the ABC is because it provides an advertisement-free media alternative. We live in a society increasingly driven by private interests. Governments are selling whatever they can and almost every government activity is now questioned unless it can pay its way. Obviously private enterprise drives our economy to produce material wealth, and commercial media plays a part in advertising goods and services. But there is more to a civilised society than just material wealth.

The ABC provides services which aren't covered by commercial media, and would not be commercially viable. I believe that without the ABC, Australia would be, culturally, a much poorer place.

No one can deny that having advertisements regularly interrupting a program does distract from the continuity of a program. In a newspaper the equivalent would be to have two or three lines of an advertisement regularly interspersed within an article. A civilised society needs to cater for all types of people and tastes and to that end the ABC must be properly funded and remain part of the media mix.

Allan Thomas
President ABC Friends (Hunter branch)

flyers and bumper stickers, these were snapped up – we could have handed out more had we been carrying extra!

Our new, powerful “boom-box” pounded out a collection of catchy themes from popular ABC television shows. The tunes were obviously fondly recognised by many watching as people from all ages responded by clapping and a few joined in singing along as well.

Extraordinarily, a number of people in the crowd asked us “what is happening to the ABC?”; it seems many simply had no idea about the funding cuts, staff redundancies and other damaging changes.

Our branch will also be participating in

the Blue Mountains Winter Magic Festival Grand Parade. More great fun. This is a fabulous event which sees large crowds attending and will again give us the chance to inform visitors and locals about what is happening to the ABC.

Photos from last year’s Winter Magic are still on our website under the gallery tab.

fabcnswbm.org.au.

Letter writing

Susan Lamont, who has taken on the role of Letter-Writing Coordinator, has sent the following letter to all federal Nationals, 15 MPs and 6 Senators, expressing her personal concern about the ABC and SBS funding cuts.



Blue Mountains Friends march in Springwood Foundation Day Parade.

Letter to Federal Nationals MPs and Senators

Dear

Re: Funding Cuts to the ABC and SBS

I write to you as a member of the federal Nationals about my genuine concerns relating to the very substantial funding cuts that have been made to the ABC and SBS, and my concerns that the federal Liberal/National Coalition government may be planning more such cuts in the upcoming 2015 federal budget.

I am not currently a member of any political party, nor have I ever been a member of any political party. I write as average Australian citizen who is greatly concerned about the current financial attacks to our respected national broadcaster, the ABC, and cuts to SBS and what these cuts are translating into in terms of the scope and quality of programming that is now possible with such cuts.

I take a keen interest in both federal and state politics. I must say that I am surprised and very disappointed that the Nationals have not been more vocal in opposing the large cuts that have already been announced, particularly in relation to the ABC. Considering that the Nationals profess to be ‘the party for regional Australia’ I would have thought that opposing substantial cuts to ABC funding would (should) be a major activity for the Nationals. The loss of ABC jobs in regional areas should also be of significant concern to the Nationals.

I currently live on the western outskirts of Sydney, however in the past I have lived for many years in different parts of rural NSW. As much as I am distressed about the funding cuts in the context of where I live currently, one of the last things I would have wanted (or expected) a federal government to do when I was living in rural NSW would have been to very significantly cut funding to the ABC, with the obvious resultant negative impact on the quality and quantity of public radio and

television broadcasting. It is just ludicrous to think that such enormous funding cuts will only affect ‘back room operations’. As if ‘back room operations’ are somehow not related to the quality and/or quantity of the finished product that the ABC listener or viewer will hear or see!!

The ABC in rural, regional and particularly remote areas of the country is an essential life line to the local area, the rest of Australia, indeed the world. This life line should provide local, national and international news as well as essential information in times of emergencies such as during times of fire or flood. However the ABC should have a much greater role. It should be funded adequately to provide, via radio, television and on-line technologies, a diversity of programs that include but are not limited to comprehensive, independent background information and analysis of current Australian and world affairs and quality entertainment that reflects the best that Australian culture in all its diversity can provide.

I do agree that Australia needs to address the current deficit in the federal budget however a deficit reduction should not be an end in itself, as it appears to me that the Liberal/National coalition government believes. Deficit reduction, in a modern, multicultural and comparatively wealthy nation such as Australia should not come at the cost of destroying our fine national broadcaster the ABC and our unique Special Broadcasting Service, SBS. Australian life and all Australians will be substantially diminished as a result.

Yours faithfully,
Ms Susan Lamont



Left: Blue Mountains Friends march in Springwood Foundation Day Parade.
Above: An invitation to join Friends.

Central Coast

The ABC Friends of the Central Coast held their AGM on 14th February, 2015. It was decided to shift the AGM in the coming years to July/August (2016) to align with the NSW Committee's AGM.

Membership has grown significantly over 2014. Convenor, Klaas Woldring reported. During 2014 the branch has engaged in much activity in terms of protests and campaigns against government cuts in ABC funding, reductions in staff and the ending of the overseas network etc. Central Coast FABC participated in the "March in March" on Sat 15 March 2014; a protest meeting outside the ABC Ultimo where Jonathon Holmes attempted to present Board Members with a petition of some 57000 signatures; the "March in August" at Gosford and again the following day in Sydney; on 22 November outside Sydney Town Hall, our banner appearing in several Sydney newspapers; and again a protest on 24 November outside the Gosford ABC studio.

The first guest speaker in 2015 was Emma Alberici, the ABC's Lateline presenter. She spoke at a Forum attended by over 80 people organised by the Branch on Wednesday April 8 at the Gosford Leagues Club.

Emma provided a lively, interesting overview about her background both



Some of the committee members with Emma Alberici.

Left to right: Margaret Lund, Audrey McDonald, John Lund, Emma A. Pippa Preston, Klaas Woldring.

in Australia and in London where she worked for ABC for three years. She indicated that the ABC both here and in London through dedicated journalists covers a much greater number and range of programs in radio and TV with fewer staff than commercial channels, and at a much lower cost.

Speaking about the ABC and commercial channels Emma pointed out that the (existing) revenue problems of the commercial channels have little or nothing to do with the demonstrated success of the ABC. She outlined the huge revenue successes of very young entrepreneurs in the digital media industry that few people

know about. Emma also talked about the advanced direction of the ABC in the use of new and modern technology, strongly encouraged by MD Mark Scott.

Her presentation was warmly welcomed and provided very important information about the role and future for the ABC which is leading TV and radio journalism with very competent and knowledgeable presenters. The customary excellent Finger Food Buffet and social interaction with the speaker and her husband Jason completed this successful function.

The next Friends of the ABC Forum will be take place Friday 22nd May when Dr. Fiona Martin, a Senior Lecturer in Communications at Sydney University, will be the guest speaker at the Central Coast Leagues Club. Her special interest is in Public Broadcasting, in particular the ABC.

The branch has booked an auditorium for 220 people at the Ourimbah campus of the Newcastle University for Thursday 3rd September for a presentation about the ABC's role in modern society. Students, members and the general public will be invited. The Campus now services 4,500 students. Negotiations with a speaker are in train. For the fourth session of the year the branch hopes to attract a Rural Specialist of the ABC, probably in mid November.

Klaas Woldring
Convenor, ABC Friends Central Coast

Too Much Information: A Political Device to Impose a Free Market Ideology



Richard Gates - Past President, Northern Rivers Branch

It's forty-five years since Alvin Toffler published *Future Shock* in which he put the view that society would soon be overwhelmed by too much information. In reality, the future's here now. Toffler was right. The sheer volume of information coming at us 24/7 is something to behold much of it lacking critical substance and depth! And it's not benign either in content or design. The information storm is but a distraction from what's really going on, the handing over of the ABC and other public communications assets, to the private sector and the profit motive.

Shock jocks, the sports teat, and the cult of personality, in various forms, have become the easy default media options in which to languish when our heads hurt and we've had enough. These diversions are the latter day versions of 'bread and circuses'. No hard thinking required. Just sit back, enjoy the emptiness and buy more stuff, preferably on credit.

The quality of the commentary gives the easy option game away? Take sport for example.

'We would of won the game if we'd played better!' Or 'we would of had a higher total if we'd scored more points'.

Or from the dismal 'science' of the economics commentators, empty weasel words not far removed from palm reading or phrenology. 'Level playing field', 'sustainable growth', 'benchmarking', 'efficiency and effectiveness', 'best practice', 'trickle down effects', 'going forward in the future' are part of the not-so-sophisticated but nonetheless comforting lexicon of paternalism, of father knows best. They just roll off the tongue again and again like soap brand advertising until they are part of who we are and what we think without even thinking about it. All boats will rise on the economic miracle of an unencumbered free market tide. How comforting!

Unfortunately, information overload has

been captured as a political device to create Toffler's *Future Shock*, or is that 'Present Shock'? It's a way of keeping us off balance. Saturate, nay drown the population in more and more information so they switch off and turn to the easy default options, or turn off altogether. Give 'em too much information so they can't take it all in. And keep it coming, wave after wave. Hard to get your head above it.

The current government's been publishing report after report after report, much of it a repeat of what's been done before but dressed up in a new ideological language.

The common driving force for all these reports has been the very much discredited 'budget emergency' with 'efficiency and effectiveness' reviews the common purpose in order to save us all from ourselves and the hyperbolic financial catastrophe.

But the myriad reviews are not so much about saving money through untested, crude, simple-minded economic experiments as they are about putting in place a way of thinking about the world, an ideology, which says that the free market is best and that government should leave it entirely to that market and competition to make Australia a better place for us all to live.

It takes a while to learn the new economic catechism but what better way than through repetition. Read the executive summaries. See the same language again and again. Don't you worry about the critical details!

No independent reviews of the pap served up to us is necessary. We know what's best for you. Trust us.

The Lewis 'efficiency and effectiveness' review of the ABC and SBS is larded with a variant form of narrow conservative rhetoric and concept to get us in to a way of thinking about the ABC and SBS from a free market perspective. It's a hastily-prepared softening up tool to prime us and the ABC for delivery to the private sector.

A mark of ideological 'prepping' is that the communications traffic is all one way. You can't have the ideology challenged or thwarted by the clumsy method of community consultation. Don't talk with

your target audience. You don't need to. They will vote with their feet if they don't like something. That's how the market works. But note the irony!

The commercial sector who will, of course, do it better and more cheaply. No argument there. There will be no debate about the false public-private dichotomy and the rent-seeking and other forms of subsidy which contaminate the private sector argument, the limits to competition, the race to the bottom which we see often in commercial radio and television.

No mention of the fact that the ABC has, for some time, been experimenting with the new social media and other tools to see what worked and what didn't. The cost of discovery was paid out of the public purse with the successful branches of the lucrative evolutionary tree to be passed off to the private sector. Effective cost reduction for them if you don't have to do product testing.

Malcolm Turnbull's department purchased an accountant from commercial media to do the privatisation job for government, and private sector consultants were hired to assist. It is not clear how Lewis got the gig. Was he Turnbull's choice?

The Lewis review has certainly generated fear in staff, a sure way to stifle productivity and make people obedient. Staff sackings help. And well-paid short term contracts for senior management guarantee political control of the agenda. Don't toe-the-line and your contract won't be renewed. None of this independent, free and fearless advice nonsense!

With Lewis' appointment to the Board of the ABC to keep a watchful eye on proceedings from the inside, fear and insecurity are guaranteed in the transition of much of the profitable bits of the ABC to the private sector while the rest will be left to wither on the vine. Perhaps ABC news will be outsourced to commercial interests? Rip and read is already here. A good start.

Well, let's see how all this plays out. Inflexible, born-to-rule, paternalistic thinking, which so profoundly infects the government ideology, will have its day. The Lewis 'efficiency and effective review' will be seen for what it really is, a camouflage for privatisation of much of the ABC with Malcolm at the podium.

Let's hope there's enough left of Our ABC for it to recover once the current fad passes. There's sufficient angst amongst regional Coalition politicians and marginals for this to happen. You can't go past self-interest. And we, the dumb public, need to speak up and let the government know we're not happy and see through the thin veil of being saved from ourselves.



Address to Australian Institute of International Affairs



Quentin Dempster

Tuesday 3 February 2015
The Glover Cottages Kent Street Sydney

Australian insularity and the strident xenophobia it generates is, I reckon, a significant drawback to our development as a responsive and engaged country in the Asia Pacific region.

In this context it was immensely distressing to see the recent vandalising of this country's international broadcasting services through Foreign Minister Julie Bishop's unilateral decision to terminate DFAT's contract with the ABC.

While Minister Bishop can be expected to reject any suggestion that she has exercised her discretion to terminate the Australia Network contract at the insistence and persistence of a lobbying campaign by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, she has exposed the shallowness of her thinking through her stated reasons for such termination. In a speech to Chatham House in London (12th March 2014) she said:

It's not about the ABC promoting its news programmes or whatever into the region. It's actually meant to be fulfilling the Australian Government's foreign policy objectives. My question is whether or not there is an inherent conflict in having the ABC contracted to deliver Australian government messages into the region. We've had the conflict writ large when it comes to the issue of asylum seekers and the issue of the Snowden allegations. The ABC is a news organisation and perfectly entitled to report how it wishes into the region on those two contentious issues. But under a soft-power diplomacy contract, it's meant to be delivering a positive image of Australia into the region.

Obviously the Minister wanted Australia Network to be a propaganda arm of government in spite of the long standing protocol that the ABC would adhere to its editorial Code of Practice in its international reporting. DFAT had contractually agreed that it would not have veto or censorship control of material to be broadcast. Of course the ABC would expose contentious issues concerning domestic Australian

politics and foreign policy and the politics and human rights abuses occurring anywhere in the region. The ABC would be bound by its editorial practices, constrained by defamation, contempt and discrimination laws domestically and by protocols covering cultural and ethnic sensitivities. The two contentious issues the Foreign Minister seemed to be referring to at Chatham House were the "burnt hands" claims of asylum seekers under Australian Navy operations and the ABC's joint reporting with Guardian Australia of the Edward Snowden drop of "five

But I warn there are forces at work at the ABC out to commercialise its international broadcasting services perhaps through a similar subscription model. I am opposed to this as it would be a breach of the ABC's Charter purpose.

eyes" intelligence surveillance showing that the Australian Signals Directorate had tapped the mobile phones of the Indonesian president and his wife and senior Indonesian ministers and officials. For sure both were embarrassing, but journalism's role is to inform the public. In spite of Minister Bishop's claims in a recent *Insiders* interview with Barrie Cassidy that the Australia Network service was contractually under-performing, DFAT at no time raised any concerns that the ABC's operation of Australia Network was not meeting its contracted performance standards. I understand DFAT did not counsel the Minister against termination of the contract. As the department was

already facing funding reductions as part of whole-of-government deficit reduction, my informants tell me DFAT seized the opportunity to claw back some revenue. In the process the national interest has been vandalised.

In response to the Abbott Government cuts to operational base funding and the termination of the Australia Network contract the ABC Board has determined to continue international broadcasting as the Charter under the ABC Act requires it. But there can be no pretence that what we can offer through what is now being branded as Australia Plus TV is in any way effective engagement through in situ correspondents and specially designed programs for countries in the satellite footprints.

Australia Plus TV was launched immediately on the closure of Australia Network on September the 29th 2014, mainly I understand to ensure the broadcast of the AFL grand final on September 28th.

This network continues to reach audiences across India, Asia and the Pacific through its established arrangements with re-broadcasters. While the number of re-broadcasters has dropped significantly - the remaining partnerships contain all the region's largest subscription television operators in all the key Asia/Pacific territories. The actual potential reach (which is assessed through the quantum of individual rebroadcaster subscriber numbers) seems to have actually increased slightly due to a small number of new re-broadcasters coming on board late last year. Our potential reach is more than 170 million people in the region. Australia Network was under 150 million.

We have retransmission agreements with subscription TV companies in India, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, Papua New Guinea and with many of the Pacific Island nations. The main change to distribution is that we are no longer available unencrypted in Asia, which, as I indicated, means we have lost untold direct to home viewers who had their own satellite dishes and an unknown number of hotels similarly equipped.

The new schedule is based on a repeating six hour block of mixed genre programming and is heavy on rebroadcast of ABC News

24 domestic programs (Breakfast and Mornings). There is just one 30minute international news program, presented by Bev O'Connor, broadcast each evening on both Australia Plus and News 24.

What we have lost most is the range of lifestyle, educational and news programs produced specifically for the region and, in many cases, in the languages of the regions.

The Australia Plus brand has had a longer life on digital platforms, having launched at the end of 2013. We syndicate news content to more than 30 third party sites in Indonesia and China.

Radio Australia, as I indicated, has been decimated. Shortwave into Asia has stopped completely. It now produces a two hour morning program that goes live into the Pacific weekdays (Pacific Beat) and some short news updates throughout the day. The rest of the network streams NewsRadio, LocalRadio, some tripleJ and some Radio National content. RA is still rebroadcast on a network of FM transmitters in Myanmar.

The stated objectives of ABC international broadcasting services are described as:

To share Australia stories that engage our neighbours in Asia and the Pacific and provide insights into Australia life.

To promote regional dialogue and understanding of Australia's multicultural society and Australia's role in the region.

To deliver quality, independent and pluralistic content in relevant ways on relevant platforms.

To foster partnerships that promote exchange of ideas and support business development.

With the termination of the DFAT contract we saw the demise of our 'public diplomacy' responsibilities as part of that contract. I think it is understood by the board acting to fulfil the obligations under the ABC Act that international broadcasting implies that sensibility. The ABC remains highly recognised and valued in the region for one distinctive thing - its independent news coverage. Yet Minister Bishop does not seem to recognise that value in projecting Australia throughout the region as a robust liberal democracy. The ABC will still have a place in the region but these vastly diminished services and the decimation of Radio Australia is indicating that we do not want to engage.

Sky News, the domestic subscription service on Foxtel, is now marketing Australia Channel - five channels of news,

business, sport, top stories and A-PAC - public affairs. Australia Channel can be viewed on desktop tablet and mobile phone with a WiFi or internet connection - \$9.99 per month.

It's what's called OTT - Over the Top service. As a fellow journalist and content producer I wish Australia Channel every success.

But I warn there are forces at work at the ABC out to commercialise its international broadcasting services perhaps through a similar subscription model. I am opposed to this as it would be a breach of the ABC's Charter purpose. Such a user pays/subscriber model or one made dependant on advertising and advertorial type sponsorship of programs or content would only reach English speakers and expatriates in the region. The whole purpose of international broadcasting through any distribution systems is to engage with the entirety of the region's populations. To destroy short wave radio, still a valuable and universal distribution

It is this democratic check and balance, particularly in a media dominated by the dogmatic simplicities and partisan propaganda of the Murdoch Press, which justifies its continued existence.

system particularly to the remotest and most impoverished islands (well out of mobile phone range) is distressing. I urged the ABC Board to re-agitate for untied funding for international broadcasting from any future government to repair the damage now being inflicted by the Abbott Government.

The ABC is currently thinking about applying user pays charges to its successful iView replay services for domestic programming. Again I am opposed to this as it represents the thin edge of the wedge to the full commercialisation of ABC content. Taxpayers have already paid for the content the ABC produces and should not be asked to pay again. The objective of international broadcasting is one of

engagement with our region, not to formulate business plans by which profit can be earned. Public service broadcasters operate on one simple principle. We treat our audiences as citizens in a democracy, not as consumers to be delivered up to advertisers. If the Abbott Government, the Liberal and National parties (or any political party for that matter), the Institute of Public Affairs (or any other so called think tank) want to abolish the ABC (and SBS) in Australia please say so.

We need a debate about the role and sustainable future of the taxpayer funded public broadcasting system in this country particularly as the digital revolution is enabling aggressive global players to have smart TV access potentially and eventually to every Australian household through WiFi video streaming. Many of these players do not pay full tax on the revenues they currently earn from Australians through download charges and/or advertising. Many use tax havens.

The ABC by survey is now the most trusted institution in Australia - up there with the Reserve Bank and the High Court. I believe it is trusted because in our now polyglot Australia people can see the ABC and its programs on occasions have the capacity to call government to account. It is this democratic check and balance, particularly in a media dominated by the dogmatic simplicities and partisan propaganda of the Murdoch Press, which justifies its continued existence.

What has just happened to our international broadcasting effort is a tragedy. There are an estimated 3.3 billion mobile phone users in the Asia Pacific. The ABC was developing a momentum to wire this country into the region as never before with targeted, quality and ethical content. That momentum has been undermined, mindlessly.

In coming months public broadcasting supporters will be calling on all political parties to renew their commitment to our unique broadcasters - the ABC and SBS - and non-commercial international broadcasting, next time preferably without a DFAT contract.

This is an edited version of Quentin's address, in which he provided full details of program and staff cuts across all ABC networks and locations around the world. The full text can be found on the FABCNSW website www.fabcnsw.org.au



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I am paying by ☐ cheque in favour of FABC (NSW) Inc.

☐ visa ☐ mastercard ☐ money order

Card Number _____

Name on credit card _____

Expiry date _____

Cardholder Signature _____ Date _____