



June Factor

Former President, FABC Vic
Veteran of many battles

In 1938, just six years after the establishment of the ABC, the Postmaster-General – the government minister for the ABC – was A.G. Cameron. Cameron was a Country Party man from South Australia. At his first meeting with the Chairman of the ABC and two ABC Commissioners, he greeted them thus:

'I know nothing about broadcasting. I am not interested in it. If I had my way I would stop all broadcasting. No time for these mechanical things. Don't know anything about music. As for people who give talks and commentaries over the air, if I had my way I would poison the blanks blanks – would bring them under the Vermin Act.' (*This is the ABC*, Ken Inglis, 2016).

It seems there is a long tradition of political antipathy to the national public broadcaster. And commercial antipathy too. Sir Keith Murdoch, owner of both

newspapers and radio stations, bitterly opposed the establishment of the ABC, and with other press proprietors insisted that news be limited to 'one bulletin five minutes long, broadcast no earlier than 7.50pm, when people could be assumed to have finished the evening papers.' It took the Second World War to bring about change.

The politicians and the ABC's commercial competitors may wish to cripple the public broadcaster, but the Australian people are

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Update

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Who to write...

Anyone seeking basic information about writing to persons of influence might find it helpful to go to www.fabcns.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 Editor (and NSW President)

FRIENDS CELEBRATE AUNTY'S 85th BIRTHDAY

More than 300 Friends gathered at Federation Square, Melbourne, on Sunday 2nd July to celebrate a significant milestone in the life of our public broadcaster, and to hear of future plans to support the ABC as a vital and independent voice in our national life. The Friends' Vision Statement was launched by National President Margaret Reynolds, and those gathered saw the pilot of ABC Defenders – high profile and ordinary Australians talking about their ABC.

ABC veteran Kerry O'Brien spoke about leadership and Australian Children's TV Foundation's Jenny Buckland spoke about the important role of the ABC in children's television. Read more about the special gathering in this Update – we congratulate Victorian Friends for a great celebration.

ATTACKS ON THE ABC CONTINUE

In the April Update I wrote that the first three months of 2017 had not been good for the ABC. It didn't get any better in the next three, as the right-wing yap dogs of the Murdoch stable took every opportunity to heap further criticism on the national broadcaster. Roger Franklin, online editor of Quadrant, outrageously suggested that the Manchester bomber should have blown up the Q&A studio, while Yassmin Abdel-Magied's private ANZAC Day post on Facebook resulted in the ABC getting the blame!

Gay Alcorn writes with perception in The Guardian about the relentless and disproportionate attacks on the ABC from those on the right of the political spectrum, and you can read her comments in this Update. We are reminded daily on the ABC that there is freedom of speech – speakers and guests with a wide range of views are encouraged to say what they think. I doubt that the same can be said about the Murdoch press!

Q&A IN ALICE SPRINGS

Sue Pinnock (SA President) and I had the pleasure of being in the audience for the

Q&A program broadcast from Alice Springs on 3rd July. The ABC is to be commended for taking its top-rating program to such a distant centre, where the 400 seat theatre in the Araluen Cultural Centre was an ideal venue. Audience members went through the usual Q&A selection process, and security at the venue was tight.

From the pre-show briefing and instructions to the audience, it was clear that the ABC wanted a tightly controlled and "managed" evening. The questions selected were rather bland, did not touch on difficult issues of race relations in what can be a very tough town for indigenous people, and skirted the issue of the ABC's role in the Northern Territory, especially its abandoning of the large short-wave radio audience. However, it was a great tourist promotion for the Northern Territory.

COMMUNITY FORUM IN ALICE SPRINGS

Both Sue Pinnock and David Hewitt have provided excellent coverage of the Forum in this Update. I would add one comment – such events are pointless if the community's voice is ignored, as it was in Alice Springs. Greatest concern in the minds of community members gathered was the loss of short wave radio, but Michelle Guthrie's blunt response was that short wave would not be reinstated, without explanation, or the offer of a workable alternative service. This from a Managing Director who has made it clear that she wants the ABC to be accessible to "all Australians." The many thousands who depend on short wave are clearly not included.

FRIENDS NATIONAL CONFERENCE

NSW Friends will be hosting a national conference on the theme "Why is Public Broadcasting essential to effective democracy?" on 6th and 7th October. There will be an opportunity for members of Friends to participate on Friday 6th, where a range of prominent speakers will present their thoughts. More information will be available soon.

Mal Hewitt

Editor and President, NSW and ACT Friends

Continued from page 1.

its greatest friends and allies. I learnt this from my own experience, when Friends of the ABC were battling the Howard government's determination to dramatically reduce the broadcaster's funds. (Cabinet considered one recommendation of a 23% reduction in funding.) In 1996, the Friends held a massive gathering in Melbourne. The Town Hall (provided for no cost by the Mayor) was full, and the overflow filled the neighbouring Athenaeum hall and spilled over the tram lines in Swanston St.

In boxes in the Town Hall foyer was Save Our ABC, a booklet of information and comment from well-known Australians, produced in seven days on the initiative of the publisher, Hyland House, and the marathon efforts of its two editors, Morag Fraser and Joseph O'Reilly.

That gathering left little room for doubt about the Melbourne community's support for the ABC – and as people from all over the country were making themselves heard, the government was

forced to listen. The funding cut of 10% that was finally announced was bad, but nowhere near as destructive as was the government's original intention.

The ABC is our lifetime educator, our source of cultural riches, intellectual diversity, entertainment – and it is beholden to no corporation or political party. Is it perfect? Far from it! Friends of the ABC have always been critical friends. But we need to ensure that it survives for at least another 85 years!



My Shortwave Country

*I love a sunburnt budget
A land of mindless cuts
Of lunches-long in Sydney
Out here a plate of butts.*

*I love Michelle's cool thinking
I love her jewelled will,
Her beauty and her terror
So she can save One Mill.*

The ABC gets it wrong on its South Pacific service



Graeme Dobell

The Australian Strategic
Policy Institute
19 June 2017

Graeme Dobell has been a journalist for 45 years, reporting on Australian and International Politics, Foreign Affairs and Defence. He joined Radio Australia in 1975, serving as a Correspondent in Canberra, Europe, America, Asia and the Pacific.

The technical bastardry of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in degrading its shortwave broadcasts to the South Pacific has been starkly revealed. The bloody-mindedness helps explain the dumb decision to turn off Australia's shortwave service that broadcasts to northern Australia and the South Pacific.

The revelation happened in Parliament House last Friday, when the Senate Communications Committee took evidence on a draft Bill that would require the ABC to restore the shortwave services it killed on January 31.

After heavyweight evidence from Radio Australia's old shortwave guru Nigel Holmes, Foreign Affairs and the ABC, the Committee's final witness was earnest, if not expert: 'twas me—my submission is here (PDF).

Foreign Affairs wimped out, saying that ending shortwave was all the ABC's own work. Echoing other submissions, DFAT described ABC Pacific services as:

- a valuable channel for giving the Pacific news, Australian perspectives and content
- advancing Australian public diplomacy:

'We note that the annual operating cost of the ABC's former shortwave service was an order of magnitude greater than the combined public diplomacy budgets of all of our Pacific posts.'

- delivering warnings and updates during emergencies.

DFAT said the South Pacific wants shortwave, even though the ABC claims Pacific audiences have 'moved away' from shortwave.

The ABC submission opposed the Bill to restore shortwave, saying it would:

- impinge on ABC independence by directing the Corporation to use broadcast technologies that have limited and diminishing audiences
- impose significant costs for shortwave
- oblige the ABC to deliver Pacific language services that haven't been provided in the past.

The first point is the key, going to important questions about the ABC's role and what it should do in the Pacific. These separate but vital issues lead directly to what the Parliament expects of the ABC in the Charter given it under law.

The second point is merely the ABC objecting to doing the duty it has performed for decades. The ABC claims the cost would double from \$2 million to \$4 million—thus confirming how it has been running down the service.

The third point is odd. The proposed Act,

sponsored by Senator Xenophon, calls on the ABC to maintain a shortwave service for PNG and the Islands, with 'programs in languages appropriate for the 19 countries to which they are broadcast'. The ABC claims it's presently giving the South Pacific a good service, with broadcasts in English and Tok Pisin for PNG (after closing the last vestige of the French Pacific service in February). If the ABC believes its own quality assurances, it can give an instant affirmative answer to the legislative demand for appropriate languages. Or is the ABC conceding that it's not giving good/appropriate service?

Returning to point one takes us to the Holy Grail: the ABC Charter, enshrined in the ABC Act. Rather than impinging on ABC independence, the Parliament, which passed the Act, is telling the ABC to meet the first two elements of its Charter. The Senate is calling the ABC to account for failing its Charter responsibilities.

Under that 1983 Act, the ABC must give Australians 'comprehensive broadcasting services'. Killing shortwave to the Northern Territory fails that 'comprehensive' test. The ABC isn't meeting its obligation to everyone across this wide brown land.

The Charter instructs the ABC 'to transmit to countries outside Australia'. In an un-Charterish manner, the ABC is steadily gutting its South Pacific service. Killing shortwave highlights the Pacific withdrawal, as the ABC shrinks away from its international responsibilities.

When the ABC lost the contract to run the Australia Network TV service in 2014, the blame lay with the Abbott Government, which terminated a 10 year contract after one year. The ABC then compounded the damage with its

bad, sad and mad gutting of Radio Australia as it terminated Oz Network.

On the decline of shortwave, the ABC offers assertions but zero evidence. For detailed discussion of the continuing utility of shortwave, see the submission by Nigel Holmes, a shortwave guru who was RA's transmission manager for 23 years.

Holmes explodes the ABC's wispy techno-babble smokescreen, showing how the ABC deliberately degraded the strength and performance of its shortwave signal. From 2015, the ABC turned off half its transmitters at Shepparton, Australia's last shortwave station. This degradation had the predictable effect—desired by the ABC—of halving signal strength reception across the west and south-west Pacific.

The ABC is right that shortwave audiences have declined—a trend pushed by ABC bastardry against its own shortwave signal. After the switch-off in January, the Shepparton operator, Broadcast Australia International, announced its intention to sell the Shepparton site. If those transmitters are demolished, it'd cost \$60 million to create a replacement shortwave facility.

Many other players see a shortwave future. As the ABC exits the South Pacific, China Radio International is making large investments, snapping up any shortwave slots becoming available and building new transmitters.

Another way of demolishing the ABC utility argument is to ask what's changed in the South Pacific to make shortwave obsolete? The big Ds are exactly as they've always been: big Distances, big economic Development problems, and regular natural Disasters.

In villages across the Islands and in the mountains of PNG, people aren't suddenly logging on to the internet. Mobile telephones are a significant new force, but phones don't wipe away all Distance/Development/Disaster challenges. That's why leaders in places like Bougainville find it 'totally shocking' that the ABC turned off shortwave. Here's hoping the Senate maintains its sense of shock, and forces the ABC back to its Charter responsibilities and a Pacific broadcasting U-turn.



NATIONAL PRESIDENT of ABC FRIENDS, Margaret Reynolds, launched the ABC Friends Vision Statement on 2nd July at Federation Square, Melbourne

Preamble

Since July 1 1932 the ABC has provided independent public broadcasting so essential to our democracy. Yet, as we celebrate 85 years of this national icon, there is a disturbing campaign to undermine its traditional role as rival media and some politicians openly assault the fundamental principles of public broadcasting to protect their own interests and ideology.

Furthermore, the ABC is challenged by repeated government cost cutting and in a rapidly changing media environment: thus making it difficult to maintain its traditional standards of quality programming.

In response ABC Friends is launching its campaign - A Mandate for Public Broadcasting - and asking Australians to rally in defense of the ABC and telling us what they value and expect from the national broadcaster.

'We, ABC Friends National, advocate the following as a Statement of the Rights, Responsibilities and Values we expect from both the Government and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation:

- Clear explanations and open procedures and processes when the government appoints future ABC board members and board chairpersons.
- Transparency of ABC board and management decision-making – particularly the sharing on a regular basis of the objectives of policy decisions and of programming.
- Recognition by the government of the day that the ABC's authority and its role in the Australian media landscape depends on its independence and freedom from political influence. The Senate estimates and other hearings should ensure public scrutiny and accountability.
- Financial security being essential for sound management and for board decision-making, there is a clear need for the ABC budget to be secure and at a level which ensures the ABC can fulfil its Charter requirements that it provide the highest quality of programming with depth, range and diversity for all of Australia. A five-year rolling budget is recommended.
- In interpreting the ABC Charter requirements, the Friends believe:
 - That the ABC is required to present an independent, professional and authoritative journalistic voice in its news coverage, current affairs reporting, documentaries, and in its range of specialist programs.
 - There is a stated Charter responsibility for the ABC to provide for all Australians quality, innovative and diverse programming on radio, on television and digitally.
 - That there is a responsibility for the ABC to report authoritatively on international issues and news, while promoting Australia's 'story' to the Asian and Pacific region.
 - That the ABC's responsibilities include the provision of emergency service broadcasting, regional and rural programming, children's, music, science, religious and selected other areas of broadcasting as determined by management.
 - That, in encouraging and promoting musical, dramatic and other areas of the performing arts, the ABC has mentoring role for developing creative talent around our continent
 - We note that the ABC Charter refers specifically to the corporation's educational responsibility.
 - And, lastly, *that the ABC's prime objective is to set the 'gold standard' for ethical, quality, specialist and diverse broadcasting nationally in the interests of informing, entertaining and stimulating our robust Australian democratic way of life.*





ABC Friends Tribute

By Rana Macdonald

"Friends and supporters of the ABC join with all of Australia and New Zealand in mourning the recent death of the great John Clarke of a heart attack while walking in the Grampians with his wife Helen and friends, and taking bird photographs.

John was a particular friend of ABC Friends, giving generous advice as we prepared creative messages in 2016.

He was, of course best known as a satirist – with 20 years on the ABC doing his Thursday night Clarke and Dawe weekly take on politics and newsmakers.



He skewered them – not cruelly or unfairly – but by exposing pomposity, lack of honesty, double standards and spin.

All done with his wonderfully dry, flat

delivery and with that compellingly mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

On top of that, of course, was the enormous range of John Clarke's other interests and talents - and his role as parent, and loyal and caring friend and confidant.

Leigh Sales tweeted on his death that he was "respected by his peers, adored by his fans and loved by his colleagues".

Magda Szubanski said John was a "beacon of intelligence and decency."

And Jonathan Green, editor of Meanjin, ended his tribute with the words: "We're just that little bit more alone now."

Of course, when John Clarke came to Australia in 1977 from New Zealand he was already an iconic figure there with his creation of the gum-booted Fred Dagg.

In John's words – "With New Zealand in crisis during the 1970s, the very sensible Mr Dagg addressed a wide range of issues on national television. He was elegantly dressed and was often accompanied by a dog. Fred and The Old Sheila had seven sons all called Trevor. Very good boys they were too – especially Trevor".

Also, Fred enthusiastically spruiked the virtues of the game of farnarkeling, with its iconic, but terminally unlucky, champion Dave Sorenson

As John has patiently explained to those who never quite understood what it was all about:

"In essence, Farnarkeling is engaged in by two teams whose purpose is to arkle, and to prevent the other team from arkeling, using a flukem to propel a gonad through sets of posts situated at random around the periphery of a grommet. Arkeling is not permissible, however, from any position adjacent to the phlange (or leiderkrantz) or from within 15 yards of the wiffenwacker at the point where the shifting tube abuts the centre-line on either side of the 34 metre mark, measured from the valve at the back of the defending side's transom-housing."

Got it now??

So – humourist, writer, actor, talented bird photographer and keen environmentalist, avid golfer, devoted husband and loving parent, and mentor with a compassionate and wise shoulder to lean on for so many.

Vale, John Clarke.



The ABC's Offerings for Children – The Present and the Future

Jenny Buckland, CEO
Australian Children's Television
Foundation

Ten years ago the Australian Children's Television Foundation and the ABC joined forces to lobby for funding to establish the ABC's children's channel. I'd like to share with you why we did that, what happened and the lessons I've learned.



Back in 2005 the Nine Network commissioned *Mortified*, a loving and comedic portrayal of life through the eyes of an 11 year old. The ABC had knocked back *Mortified* in 2005, electing instead to commission a series called *Blue Water High*, about a group of teenagers in a surfing school in Sydney.

In 2006, the Nine Network commissioned *Lockie Leonard*, based on the Tim Winton novels for teenagers. *Lockie Leonard* had also been pitched to the ABC before Channel 9, but they had passed, in favour of another series of *Blue Water High*.



In 2007 the Nine Network commissioned *Double Trouble*, the story of twin Aboriginal girls, separated at birth, a culture clash story in that one grew up in an indigenous community out of Alice Springs and the other grew up in a white family in Sydney. What did the ABC commission that year? Yep. Another series of *Blue Water High*.

Channel Nine was meeting its quota obligations. Under the Australian Content Standard each commercial broadcaster is required to show 96 hours of first release Australian children's drama every three years, which means an average of 32 hours of new children's drama per network each year.

The ABC on the other hand, has no Australian content quotas and no formal requirements to screen any children's television. And in those same three years the only children's drama it commissioned was *Blue Water High*.

There are 4.5 million people aged 14 and under in Australia, just under 20% of the population. In an ideal world children would be provided with the same broad sweep of content that adults take for granted. A comprehensive service for children would include programs for all age groups, and for school aged children it would include children's news and current affairs,

children's drama, children's comedy and children's factual content.

But who should provide that and how should it be funded? By 2005 I was actively talking to politicians about my concerns and they said "What's the problem? The ABC does plenty of kids' TV." What the ABC actually had on telly for children around 2005 was a little bit sad:

Playschool, of course.

Repeats of *Bananas In Pyjamas* for the same age group.

13 hours a year of *Blue Water High*.

And hundreds of hours of imported kids shows for every age group.

It was for these reasons that in 2006 the ACTF developed a proposal that Australia should have a digital children's channel. We saw this as a response to digital uptake, the small amount of Australian content available for children on the ABC, and the drumbeat from the commercial channels that they shouldn't have to do kids TV. During 2006 there was a change of management at the ABC and we agreed to lobby together for additional

funding to enable the ABC to establish that channel. By joining forces we were stronger and an idea that had seemed pretty fanciful now had legs.

The Labor Government ultimately funded the channel in 2009, along with the provision of additional funding for adult drama and indigenous content. The additional funding effectively tripled the ABC's children's budget. When it received this funding the ABC established ABC3 for school aged children and put its preschool content on ABC2. It set an ambitious target of reaching 50% Australian content on ABC3 within a year.

That funding transformed children's television in Australia. When it became clear that there was now a market for

children's department, it wasn't. For the first three years, it was spent on children's television as envisaged. But after that the ABC was steadily reducing the budget for children's programs in a manner that was completely disproportionate to the overall funding cuts that it had suffered.

So where does that leave us today? The children's department appears to operate on an annual budget of around half what it had in 2009, 10 and 11. No one at the ABC is disputing this. That does still leave us in a better position than pre-2009. But the key thing to have changed is a more enlightened attitude to the children's audience. There are some great new shows coming down the pipeline, but without the level of funding that the children's department had, it

is reliant on imported programs to fill its schedule.

The Commonwealth Government has just announced a review into support for Australian and Children's Content. There is a lot at stake, because it means that among other things, they are reviewing the Australian Content Rules. This provides an opportunity to reframe this discussion and ask what we want for the children's audience in Australia across the board.

The ACTF response to the Review will argue that the ABC should be included within the policy framework for children's television. This means that the ABC should be provided with adequate funding to provide a comprehensive service for the children's audience; but that funding should be protected for children's content and it should be provided with Australian content targets to meet and transparent reporting requirements.

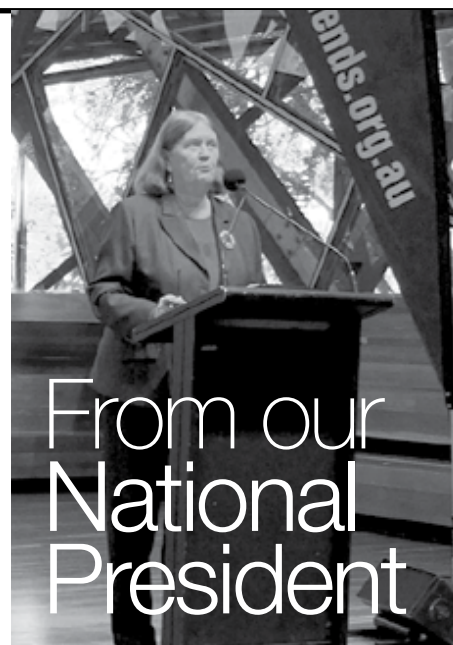
Providing quarantined funding to the ABC to ensure that Australian children receive a proper service and expecting to see some transparency around that funding is the only way to ensure that Australian children will receive proper levels of Australian content on any platform in future.

quality Australian children's drama on the ABC, Australia's leading writers and producers of drama got on board and started developing high concept drama for children. *Behind The News* was extended to a daily format called *News on Three*. *My Great Big Adventure* talked to real kids about serious issues in their lives like bullying and body image.

The results were dramatic. As the ABC children's audience share grew, significantly, there was an equally dramatic audience shift away from the children's shows on the commercial channels and the pay tv children's channels.

I have only recently learned that even though all the announcements around the funding for ABC 3 made it sound as though the funding was tied to the

“
There is a
lot at stake...
”



From our National President

I am very concerned about the extremist nature of some public commentary against the ABC. In recent months there has been an escalation in extreme statements including the advocacy of specific violence against the public broadcaster.

Special thanks to Minister for Communications Mitch Fifield for his instant public condemnation of those statements. While Managing Director Michelle Guthrie did receive an apology, it must be recorded that there can be no tolerance of such extremism in Australian public debate.

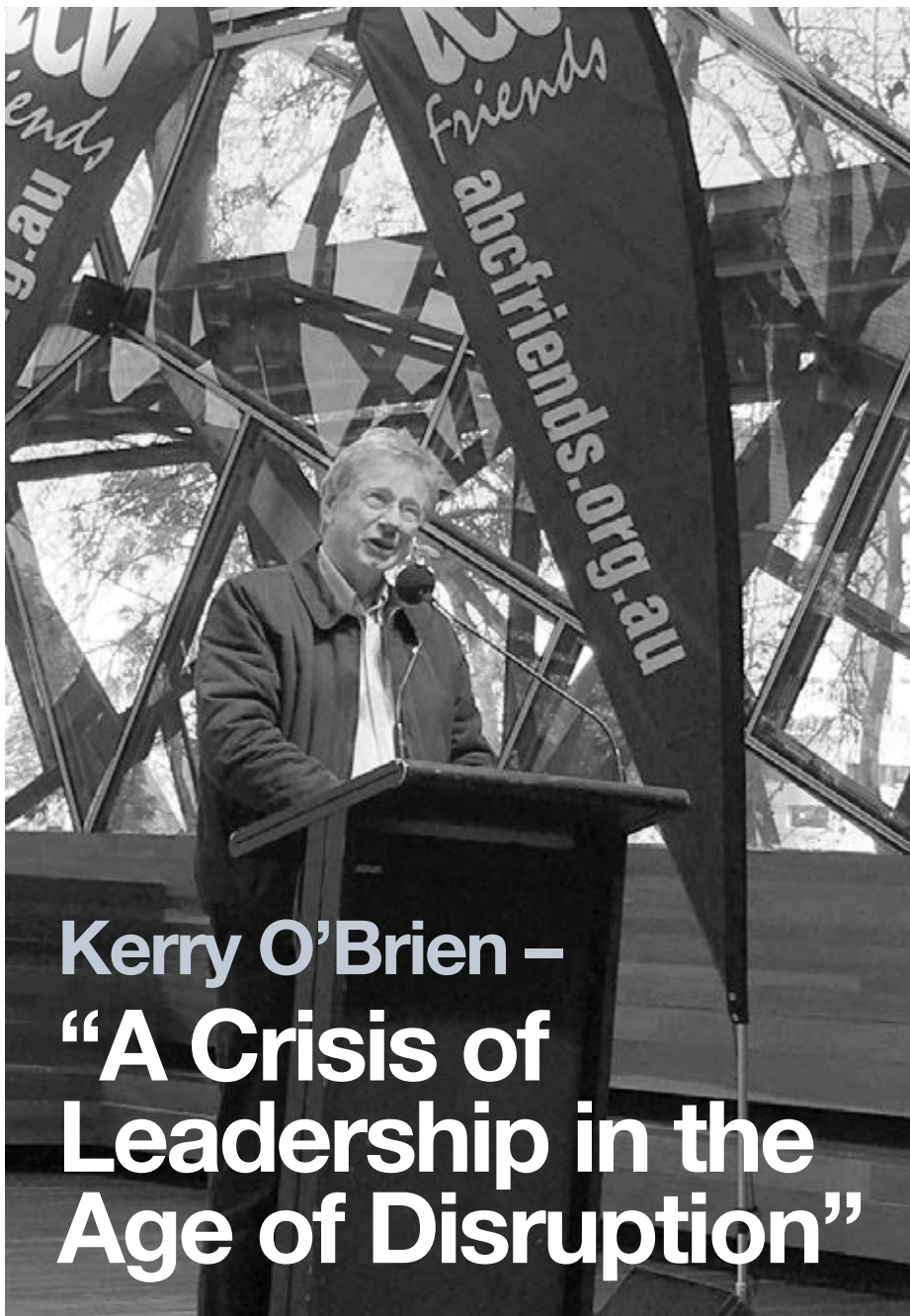
Furthermore on occasions senior political and other commentators have exhibited a lack of discipline in assuming they alone have the right to dictate to the ABC. Therefore it is timely to remind ourselves that the ABC in its 85th year is one of the nation's most trusted public organisations and its independence from political interference is essential to our democracy.

Of course as shareholders of this public company we all have the right to question ABC policies and priorities and to advocate for more accountability and engagement with communities around Australia.

But such spirited debate must remain respectful and tolerant and not rely on bias and innuendo. Public interest journalism is too important to be sidelined by ill informed critics.

Margaret Reynolds
National President, ABC Friends





Kerry O'Brien – “A Crisis of Leadership in the Age of Disruption”

At ABC Friends 85th Birthday Conference on 2 July, 2017, at Melbourne's Federation Square, Kerry O'Brien spoke of the need for strong inspired political leadership in this era of unprecedented and intense disruption. He drew a stark comparison between three examples of inspired and courageous leadership in the past—Nelson Mandela on reconciliation, Paul Keating on Mabo and John Howard on gun controls—and the kind of contemporary leadership we see today. These were examples where leadership was less about gaining votes or political advantage than it was about national well-being.

Discussing the current media landscape, Kerry expressed dismay at the difficulties faced by “old” media, particularly print; and the likely further reduction in variety

of political positions expressed as the number of proprietors shrinks. In this landscape, he stressed the increasing importance of the ABC, saying:

“The ABC has been such a constant target in the so-called culture wars, to the point of boredom, where the same tired old accusations have been flung at us by the same small, ageing coterie of haters endlessly, and often dishonestly, repeating their predictable mantra of accusations through very loud megaphones usually supplied by News Ltd. Never has an institution in this country been more heavily scrutinised than the ABC, and yet it remains the most respected institution in the country. The politicians who attack it would kill for the credibility it continues to enjoy. So would every newspaper in the country, including Rupert Murdoch's.

“The ABC is a strange magical creature that has always emerged relatively intact from every challenge it has faced, and has made an unequalled contribution to the culture of this nation in the process. As imperfect a beast as it indeed is, it is wonderful to watch good people coming into the place and see people around them striving for excellence, and begin to understand what they're capable of—to watch them start to build their body of work, and to see it begin to dawn on them that they have a chance to be a part of something special, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

“
You are one of the constants, watching our back, but calling us to account too. Keeping us honest in a thoughtful and constructive way.
”

But ABC newsrooms and current affairs programs are seeing the same draining of skills and invaluable experience as their commercial counterparts which must come at a cost. And in many parts of the public broadcaster I keep hearing of a sense of drift in the place, of uncertainty about where it's going, and not surprisingly, of morale taking a hit. The ABC's resilience has often been underestimated but it should never be taken for granted either.

“I've spoken to many groups of ABC Friends right across Australia over the years. You are one of the constants, watching our back, but calling us to account too. Keeping us honest in a thoughtful and constructive way. Making yourselves heard when it's been critical to do so, as you are again today in taking a fresh look at the ABC Charter and what it means in these times. I thank you for the support you've given and the effort you've made over the years. It has always been important, but it's never been more important than it is today.



We need a strong ABC more than ever.

It cannot pander to rightwing attacks

Gay Alcorn
The Guardian
2 June 2017



Gay Alcorn is the Melbourne Editor of The Guardian, Australia, and a three times Walkley Award winner.

The ABC deserves criticism but News Corp's campaign against it is extreme and disproportionate. The danger is that the ABC plays by its enemies' rules

The relentless, disproportionate attacks on the ABC usually receive little pushback from the ABC. Presenters hold their tongues, perhaps reporting what was said but usually refraining from full-throated rebuttal. That changed last week with the astonishing suggestion by Quadrant online editor Roger Franklin – in an attempt at satire, presumably – that had there been “a shred of justice” the Manchester bomber would have blown up the Q&A studio instead because, you know, the ABC excuses terrorism or denies its seriousness.

The basis for Franklin's fury was that a Q&A guest, physicist Lawrence Krauss, said that Americans are more likely to die from a fridge falling on them than in a terrorist attack.

Jon Faine, morning presenter for ABC radio in Melbourne, said that for years, he had ignored attacks on the ABC, “but quite frankly this morning I've finally decided, I've had enough of it, I'm sick of it”.

“To have people threatening violence, or encouraging violence ... I've got text messages (saying) and this is the point, ‘if a Muslim publication suggested a bomb be put in a public facility, can you imagine

the outcry, the police investigation ... the armed terror squad raids descending? Why should a rightwing conservative magazine be any different’, and I couldn't agree more.”

News Corp would, he continued,

“quite like Melbourne to be a one paper town, they'd quite like to silence the ABC, to get it out of the way for them basically having unfettered media control over not just Melbourne but the whole of Australia.

I don't know if that an exaggeration, it's certainly the way they are conducting their public campaign.”

Afternoon presenter Rafael Epstein was also riled.

“They've almost written a book on Yassmin Abdel-Magied, there have been 60,000 words written in the Australian media about Yassmin Abdel-Magied's Facebook post on ANZAC Day. Will there be a similar outcry, should there be a similar outcry, when someone on the Quadrant website effectively encourages the bombing of the ABC studio because he doesn't like what he sees and hears on Q&A?”

These reasonable points are unlikely to stem the obsessive focus on the ABC by a handful of conservative politicians and commentators, mostly at the Australian newspaper, but they do go to the heart of our diseased culture wars – how they drip with hypocrisy and selective outrage, how dishonest they are. More importantly, how they stymie debate on vital issues.

It is our national broadcaster that bears the brunt of a fixation that knows no limits, the primary purpose being to discredit and damage the ABC. The tactic of treating any statement that doesn't accord with their world view as reason for hysteria is working. It is a time-worn strategy – throw mud, lots of it, all the time. If the criticism is justified, ramp it up. If the criticism is not justified, ramp it up anyhow. Create a sense of perpetual “crisis” and eventually, it will come.

Consider these contributions just in the last few days when even the professional ABC haters might have paused for breath, to reflect a little. Andrew Bolt at first called



Franklin “magnificent in his anger at this Q&A sophistry,” expressed surprise that anyone would take this “satire” seriously, then backed away a little.

The Australian’s Chris Kenny acknowledged that Franklin’s suggestion to blow up an ABC studio “went way too far”, but mostly he wanted to say how understandable was the author’s anger because “pointing out the jihad denialism on the ABC is an important part of the national debate”.

Some routine ABC critics like Nick Cater were more unequivocal in their condemnation of Franklin’s diatribe – and Quadrant did apologise eventually – but Epstein’s underlying point that the outrage of those fixated with the ABC was selective and ideological was born out.

The real target, of course, was never Abdel-Magied, who was naïve or brave enough to write in a private Facebook post that on ANZAC Day, perhaps we should also remember Manus, Nauru, Syria and Palestine, a post she quickly deleted and apologised for. The real attack wasn’t on Krauss, either. The target is the ABC, which is bizarrely judged to subscribe to the views of its guests and contributors.

An Australian editorial stated that the broadcaster has a “tendency to sugar-coat the cruel realities of radical political Islamism, even to the point of jihad denialism”. Gary Johns in his regular column suggested that “perhaps ABC really stands for Allah Before Christ”. Maybe the government should sell it, he said, the favourite punchline for the ABC’s enemies.

Faine named what this is really all about:

“At the very core of it seems to be this absolute ridiculous notion that because one talks to mainstream Muslims who are living successful lives in a pluralistic democracy of Australia, because we acknowledge that (the) vast majority of Muslims for generations (are) getting on with their lives like anyone else does, that therefore somehow that’s turning a blind eye to extremism.”

It is about Islam, and it is also about the commercial struggles of the mainstream media. ABC boss Michelle Guthrie told a Senate estimates hearing recently that “at a time of major disruption in the media sector”, the ABC’s remit “cannot be understated”. The ABC has always insisted that it is not a “market failure” broadcaster, merely plugging gaps the commercial media neglect. Yet to some extent it is becoming such an institution,

more vital than ever, as commercial media wobble in the digital age. And that is one reason why its haters are so relentless.

Regional newspapers, once the lifeblood of communities, have been decimated by staffing cuts. The ABC is attempting to fill the gap through recruiting more journalists outside the major cities. Guthrie also noted a renewed commitment to covering the arts, science and education “at a time when other media organisations are abandoning these key genres”.

The ABC’s role is changing. It is becoming more, not less, critical and overall it does an outstanding job. Note Four Corners’ forensic examination of the Lindt Café siege. Note the excellent War on Waste series, and the illuminating You Can’t Ask That. Note the daily coverage of local and national news, never perfect – no fast-moving newsroom is – but pretty darned good.

Guthrie was forced to – yet again – go down the Kafkaesque rabbit hole of defending the ABC’s response to Abdel-

“
To drum up public fear and anger against everyday Muslims, to assume that every Muslim – especially a refugee – is a potential terrorist or will breed a potential terrorist? Is that the goal?”
”

Magied’s post. And this is the real danger for the ABC –that it starts to jump at shadows, to overreact to the attacks on its credibility, to play the game by its enemies’ rules.

Abdel-Magied is not an ABC employee, she’s a contributor. I can’t see why the ABC had to disown her comment – it was her opinion, and not in truth an outrageous one. The most you could say was that it was insensitive on Anzac Day.

But for the ABC’s hierarchy to “counsel her on the matter” is odd, as was Guthrie’s

admission that “I spoke to her specifically” – why on earth did the managing director need to do that? The decision that she had to be counselled because she breached the broadcaster’s social media policy not to bring the ABC “into disrepute” is strange indeed, unless any criticism of ANZAC Day automatically damages the ABC. That the program that Abdel-Magied fronted was axed just weeks after the “controversy” looked suspiciously like a panicked reaction, although the ABC denied it.

There’s an irony here, of course. Many in the broader media – not just the ABC – as well as community and political leaders, are struggling with how to discuss terrorism. The insistence that radical Islamism has nothing to do with Islam the religion is wearing thin, not just among One Nation supporters. The “all we need is love” response to terrorist attacks is platitudinous.

Some on the progressive side of politics do downplay the impact of terrorism. Krauss offered up the fridge analogy, and others claim that somehow terrorism isn’t as serious as, say, domestic violence, because more people are killed by their partners than in terrorist attacks. These are facile comparisons.

Australia has been exceptionally lucky, or well-prepared or both, with security agencies saying they have foiled 12 imminent attacks since September 2014. ASIO has said it is watching about 400 high-priority targets. It is true that we must somehow learn to live in this new reality – while trying not to give up the freedoms that define us, a hideous dilemma – but to suggest that somehow this is a body count comparison insults us all.

All these issues need open and rigorous discussion, as sensitive and complicated as they are. Of course, we need to name the problem – Islamic extremism – but then what? What’s the real agenda here? Ban Muslim immigration as Pauline Hanson would have it? If there was ever an “Australian value” we need protecting, it is that we do not discriminate against people on the grounds of their race or religion. If we give up that principle, who are we?

To drum up public fear and anger against everyday Muslims, to assume that every Muslim – especially a refugee – is a potential terrorist or will breed a potential terrorist? Is that the goal? To make it even harder for intelligence agencies to work with Muslim communities to identify those at risk of radicalisation? To target the ABC for failing to toe this line?

Anne Aly, a terrorism expert, a Muslim, and now a Labor MP, articulated the dilemma in the illuminating radio series, "The Islamic Republic of Australia" last year – broadcast on the ABC, of course. Moderate voices are being pushed out, fearful of being co-opted by the rabid.

"There's (Muslim) people in Sydney who don't vote, who live here, who are Australian and don't vote because it's haram (forbidden). So why are you living here? Go live somewhere else," she said.

"If you were to say that, people will go, 'how dare you? that's like saying go home'... because the right wing say it so

The virulent attacks against the ABC are, paradoxically, counter-productive because they are so extreme...

much, and because Reclaim Australia are saying it so much."

That's a critical point. Our public discourse is hopeless, helpless really. The virulent attacks against the ABC are, paradoxically, counter-productive because they are so extreme, so often disproportionate. The ABC is the number one scapegoat because it's publicly funded. It deserves critique – everyone has an opinion on the ABC – but it does not deserve this distorted campaign against it, a campaign that is beginning to weaken our national broadcaster. Right at the time when it is needed more than ever.

Australia (and the ABC) burns another woman at the public stake

Acknowledgement to Julia Baird, host of The Drum, for the headline.



Mal Hewitt
Editor and
NSW President



The ABC was complicit in the extraordinary over-reaction which has forced the talented former ABC presenter and author Yassmin Abdel-Magied to flee the country in fear of her life. Her crime – to write a Facebook post on ANZAC Day remembering those fleeing from war and suffering today, particularly those whom our Government chooses to imprison on Nauru and Manus Island, without hope of release, and the victims of war in Syria and Palestine. She immediately withdrew the post and apologised for any offence she may have caused.

Instead of defending freedom of speech and her right to express a private opinion, the ABC axed her program, "counselled" her, and the Managing Director spoke to her personally. Predictably, she was subjected to a firestorm of criticism and abuse from right-wing commentators and

politicians (both George Christensen and Eric Abetz suggested that she should leave the country), and an unbelievable 60,000 words of press coverage were devoted to her crime in the month following April 25. Julia Baird quotes the poet Les Murray: "In Australia, a lone woman is being crucified by the Press at any given moment," and writes further: "Abdel- Magied's savaging has been so grotesque in its meanness, ugly in its intolerance, and alarming in its violence, that it's obvious something else is going on too – something has been legitimised and unleashed. And it seems to be hostility to Islam, as well as women."

Queensland's Young Australian of the Year in 2015 for founding Youth without Borders, helping young people work for positive change in their communities, it is both bizarre and tragic that she no longer feels safe in her own country. She was admired as an ABC presenter – intelligent, articulate, with strong opinions, but perhaps, along with the fact that she was young, female, brown-skinned and wore a headscarf, these very characteristics

have created such intense fury amongst her (mainly male) conservative critics. It is most regrettable that the ABC has been so reluctant to speak out in her defence.

And the words she used which have brought this retribution – "Lest We Forget."

It may come as a surprise to many Australians that we do not own these words – nor does ANZAC Day – nor does the RSL. They were written by English poet Rudyard Kipling, commissioned to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Kipling saw value in the British Empire, but recognized that its days may be numbered. The word "recessional" means going out. In some respects it may be seen as strong a cry against war as a solution to the world's problems as the poetry of Wilfred Owen, who died in the trenches of France in 1918. How appropriate, then, that Yassmin Abdel-Magied should choose these words to remind us that humanity is suffering in 2017.

The full text of Kipling's poem can be easily found on Google.

ABC comes

up short with

Catalyst revamp



Amanda Meade
the Guardian
23 June 2017



The ABC's promise to replace its weekly science magazine show Catalyst with 17 one-hour science documentaries in 2017 has been broken. We are past the halfway point of the year and the ABC has not screened a single episode. The director of television who made the promise, Richard Finlayson, has gone and Brendan Dahill, the executive who wrote the report which recommended the axing of the weekly program, had moved on before the decision was made.

At the time of Catalyst's downgrading in October last year, ABC insiders warned it was unrealistic to get that many programs to air in such a short timeframe, especially since they hadn't yet hired an executive producer to commission them. The ABC eventually imported British producer Aiden Lavery, a former editor of BBC's flagship science program, Horizon, who began work in April. Which didn't leave much time to make any programs.

“

ABC radio broadcaster Robyn Williams famously called ABC management “morally and spiritually bankrupt” for killing off Australian science reporting.

”

A spokesman said Catalyst would return in August and a total of 12 episodes would be broadcast by the end of the year, meaning they will be five short on their pledge, although more are planned for next year.

“The ABC is committed to science broadcasting and anticipates it will broadcast more science content in 2017 than it has in any of the past five years, across television, online and mobile platforms,” a spokesman said. “This includes Catalyst which returns to screens on 15 August 2017 with 12

one-hour episodes to be broadcast this year and a further eight episodes in early 2018. In addition, the new series Ask the Doctor is currently screening and a new digital science series called Seven Minute Science will premiere on iView and social media later this year.”

ABC radio broadcaster Robyn Williams famously called ABC management “morally and spiritually bankrupt” for killing off Australian science reporting, a situation made worse recently when major redundancies at the Sydney Morning Herald and the Age saw experienced science and health reporters walk out the door. The end of Catalyst saw 17 experienced science broadcasters leave the ABC, and with it all the corporate knowledge they had amassed.

More on Dahill, the ABC executive who wrote the Catalyst report: he left the ABC to manage production house Keo Films Australia last year. But this week Keo Films suddenly shut up shop in Australia leaving the future of its local shows in doubt. They made Struggle Street for SBS, River Cottage Australia for Foxtel and War on Waste and Bullied for the ABC. A second series of Struggle Street is in the can but has yet to screen on SBS.



Sometimes being an ABC Friend officeholder is difficult.

Ranald Macdonald
ABC Friends National
Media Adviser



You want to shout from the rooftops about how dumb an ABC Board or Management decision seems to be, criticise an on-air interviewer for rudeness or lack of preparation, or just to say that everyone expects better from our publicly funded National Broadcaster.

My challenge is to keep a sense of proportion and recognise what to me is the bigger picture.

That the ABC must be preserved as an essential source of information and entertainment – an alternative voice in a democracy where many voices and sources of information need to be heard.

As a former ABC board member said to me, he and others sitting in judgment on the performance of management and staff have to filter the cacophony of criticism from competitors who benefit from a battered public broadcaster (the Murdoch Media Empire looms large in this) and also the ideological views expressed with such force and certainty by those who resent funding a huge monolith.

My view is simple – some would say, over simple – the ABC is far from perfect, but this country desperately needs a strong ABC able financially, and committed to, fulfilling its Charter requirements for all Australians.

Further, it needs for it to be free of political interference.

Currently, the Turnbull Government is pressing for the Senate numbers to bring about media ownership 'reform'.

The proposed changes in reach, content and frequency for the commercial media will have two results.

Launch a 'Defenders' campaign to fend off attacks and prospective funding problems or legislative controls.

The current media groupings will become more powerful and also more attractive to financial predators with little interest in content or their own investment longevity.

With that further media accumulation there will be a corresponding greater reliance on the ABC to service the rural and regional communities and provide journalism in 'the public interest'.

The term public interest may appear outdated, but it is a key argument in combatting the view that social media coupled with the various platforms available to the main media players will ensure diversity of

information and in-depth reporting on serious issues that need to be aired and debated.

Most of the really important investigative stories have been researched and broken by the Fairfax newspapers (The Age, Sydney Morning Herald and Australian Financial Review) and in partnership with, or singly by, the ABC.

So, the ABC Friends in trying to fulfil its two prime roles as Friends of the ABC, that is as supporter and critic is currently launching two initiatives.

The first is a national plebiscite – welcomed by ABC CEO Michelle Guthrie – where over three months its State and Territory ABC Friends organisations are encouraging feedback about what Australians really want from 'their' ABC.

To find out where the ABC 'shareholders' believe it falls short of expectations and what it might do better in the future.

As well, a Friends' detailed 'Vision' for the ABC is being promoted so as to stimulate the national plebiscite.

All responses will come to the National body's website <abcfriends.org.au> or through its state bodies and then be collated, published and sent to the ABC management and board members.

The Friends' second initiative is to launch a 'Defenders' campaign to fend off attacks and prospective funding problems or legislative controls.

Prominent citizens are part of the drive, but many supporters of our public broadcaster have indicated they are keen to take part and will be featured on Facebook.

The specially designed ABC Defenders logo is demonstrated in the flag illustration.





JULIAN BURNSIDE QC
Barrister



ABC DEFENDER

"That it is free of political and commercial interest is absolutely fundamental to its importance to this country"



PROF. MARCIA LANGTON
Academic



ABC DEFENDER

"It is absolutely necessary to our democracy that we retain the ABC"



ROSIE BATTY
Australian of the Year



ABC DEFENDER

"There is the opportunity to learn about something in greater depth ... without the sensationalising"



FATHER BOB MAGUIRE
Community Worker



ABC DEFENDER

"All the rest have vested interests"

For 85 years the ABC has provided vital, entertaining and challenging programs for all Australians.

WE ARE THE FIRST FOUR 'DEFENDERS' AND INVITE YOU TO JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN TO DEFEND YOUR INDEPENDENT ABC

"This fight we must win"

Please

- donate through our website
- email words and photos so we can put you on Facebook
- or write to us

Tell us what you want from the ABC and we will pass it on.

E: office@abcfriends.org.au W: www.abcfriends.org.au A: GPO Box 4065 Melbourne VIC 3001

ABC
Friends
NATIONAL

A local view

on the visit to Alice Springs
by the ABC Board in July



by David Hewitt.

With the closing down of shortwave radio transmissions on January 31 this year, many local people felt that this visit by the ABC Board should have come six months ago. They would have then seen the very strong support for shortwave radio in the local community and amongst listeners in the bush, tour operators and grey nomads travelling the outback.

On the agenda for the Board and senior staff of the ABC during their visit was inspections of local heritage sites, a tour to the Ntaria (Hermannsburg) Aboriginal community, Q&A at the Araluen Centre and a community forum. Alice Springs ABC staff, particularly Alex Barwick and manager Rick Hind did a wonderful job in co-ordinating the visit and arranging local travel.

The Community forum, held in the open air at the Desert Park just out of town on Tuesday was an opportunity for local people to express their views on ABC radio programs and transmission in the Northern Territory. Charlie King, popular ABC sports commentator from Darwin, and Alice Springs radio presenter Rohan Barwick did an excellent job of chairing the forum and in introducing speakers. There were 12 tables each with about 10 local people and ABC representatives at each table.

We were invited to list issues that affect Northern Territory listeners and comment on programs and ABC services, on a large

sheet of paper. Later in the evening, a spokesperson from each table reported back to the whole gathering. 10 of the 12 tables listed the removal of shortwave radio as one of their main concerns.

We had a member of the ABC advisory council and Judith Whelan, Head of ABC radio at our table. At the start of our discussions, Judith Whelan expressed the view that shortwave radio is a very unreliable medium. Shortwave radio is in fact an extremely reliable, relatively cheap and long standing technology that always has clear reception over long distances, no matter what the weather conditions may be. Ms Whelan's view was typical of the misunderstanding of many ABC personnel of the role and value of shortwave transmissions.

Towards the end of the evening, Rohan Barwick introduced the Managing Director of the ABC, Michelle Guthrie. Several people present had been invited to ask questions and my question was:

"If the ABC does not respond to the great number of remote listeners in NT, the Kimberley and the north of South Australia - I was one of these listeners - and bring back shortwave radio, what is the ABC proposing as a replacement for the important weather, road conditions and emergency information that was an important part of the shortwave service".

In reply, Ms Guthrie made the surprising observation that the removal of shortwave radio affected only a small number of listeners in the Northern Territory.

Left: Getting underway for the forum at Desert Park.

I reminded her that there were also many listeners in South Australia, and in the Kimberley, where remote residents were promised radio reception from Katherine when the WA shortwave service closed in 2001, and in the Gulf region of Queensland. Again her comment showed a total lack of understanding of the needs of the bush.

This month (July), tour operator friends of ours are guiding a group of four wheel drive vehicles in the Great Victoria Desert in WA. They always depended on the ABC for valuable weather details and the latest news. Also, many grey nomads with Codan or Barrett HF radios in the vehicles are travelling through the Outback during the winter months and they used their radios for emergency information, news and the weekend football results.

As part of their justification for the removal of shortwave, the ABC estimated there were no more than 500 listeners. There would be at least 500 grey nomads in the region at present who would have depended on the service. A 96 year old cameleer, John Wilkinson, from Colleambally in NSW, who visits the Simpson Desert at this time of the year, had a Codan radio installed in his vehicle to tune to shortwave radio while out with the camels.

Local people at the community forum included Mal Crowley, who made the TV News Australia wide in January by smashing his HF radio at the Roe Creek transmitter on the day that the service closed down, Rod Cramer, who proved the range of shortwave radio by receiving the Alice Springs station while on a boat in Spencer Gulf, SA and Benjamin Quilliam, from Frontier Services of the Uniting Church, who carries the concerns of many listeners on remote cattle stations and communities.

Benjamin has a technical background in communications, having worked for the Codan company in Adelaide and at a radio station in Kununurra, and he has recently produced an excellent paper on the future for shortwave radio.

During their visit to Central Australia, the ABC board must have surely heard the message loud and clear on the value of the shortwave service. Like many other Territory residents and people in remote SA and WA, we sincerely believe that shortwave radio can be restored, and the cost would be negligible in the overall budget of the ABC.

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Alice Springs Forum

As part of its new rural and regional engagement strategy the ABC will be holding a Board meeting and Community Forum in each of 3 regional centres this year: Wagga Wagga (NSW), Port Pirie (SA) and Alice Springs (NT). The forums are designed to provide the ABC with an opportunity to hear feedback directly from the local community, and to gain a deeper understanding of community expectations of the national broadcaster

Mal Hewitt and I, representing ABC Friends National, flew to Alice Springs to attend the first Community Forum held on the 4th July.

The Forum was set up at the Desert Park with 12 tables. At each table there were about 2 ABC representatives from ABC Board/ABC Management /Advisory Board and about 8 to 10 community members. Each table shared their views on the role and activities of the ABC in regional Australia. A representative from each table reported back 2 priorities from their discussion to the whole Forum.



Top: ABC Alice Springs Offices. Above: David and Margaret Hewitt, Matt Peacock, Sue Pinnock at the Adelaide House Museum.

When we registered we had been told that we might be invited to ask a question at a short Q&A session at the end of the night. We were not invited to ask a question and so our shortwave questions did not get up! Long term Alice Springs resident, David Hewitt (Mal Hewitt's brother) managed to get a question asked which related to SW and emergency services. I was wondering would the closure of the ABC's shortwave radio service to the NT get a high profile at the Forum?

Mal and I were buoyed up by the response of about 10 out of 12 tables identifying shortwave for reinstatement as one of their priorities for the ABC.

Immediately after the feedback Managing Director, Michelle Guthrie said to the forum, "SW is not going to be reinstated". I did not think this helped the ABC re "we are listening" to regional Australia! Michelle Guthrie had also said this a day before on ABC Alice Springs radio after Tracey Hayes, CEO of the NT Cattleman's Association, was reported talking about the importance of the shortwave service to social and economic goals in the NT!

I brought up DRM (Digital Radio Mondiale) at our table and this was mentioned in our table's feedback. It was pleasing that Judith Whelan, Head of Radio, was at our table and she took with her what I wrote about DRM in the form of a question which was:

"DRM is a high quality digital replacement for current analogue radio broadcasting AM/SW/FM. Most modern transmitters are DRM capable or easily and relatively cheaply upgraded to DRM. The range,

reliability and resilience are similar for current SW.

Why is the ABC, which in 2012 and 2014 said DRM is the most promising technology, letting access to the Shepparton transmitters lapse (currently up for sale) when to re-establish the transmitters from the ground up would be hugely expensive i.e. keep SW going and transition to DRM"

Here is a useful link about DRM:

www.drm.org/what-is-drm-digital-radio/summary/

It is frustrating that Michelle Guthrie and the Board are so unrelenting even in the face of the expressed need to reinstate shortwave by the Alice Springs Community! I would hope that the community response would at least sow doubt in the minds of ABC Board members, "hearing from the horse's mouth"!

Following is a summary of the feedback the ABC gleaned from the forum:

The top 10 things that the ABC heard from the Alice Springs Community Forum were:

1. The importance of ABC Radio, particularly to regional Australians who rely on this service.
2. The ABC is trusted, even-handed, inclusive and independent, and reports accurately on important matters.
3. Accessibility issues relating to shortwave, broadband and digital services are important issues for rural and remote communities.
4. Audiences want more local content which is produced locally.
5. Audiences want more diverse language and cultural content.
6. The ABC produces great Australian content, particularly in the arts.
7. Audiences want more content relating to science and arts, and programming which is in-depth. You also want programming which encourages critical thinking and fosters local and national conversations.
8. The ABC has great local coverage and great programming for children.
9. It is important that the ABC remain free from commercial advertising.
10. You want the ABC to be bold, take risks and be courageous.

From my point of view the forum was a valuable experience. There was, in

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general, a good vibe and the opportunity to have face to face dialogue with ABC Board/Management/Advisory Council members was immeasurable. I appreciate the opportunity to attend representing ABC F National.

Susan Pinnock

President Friends of the ABC (SA/NT)

South Australia/ Northern Territory

Our stall at the ABC's Gardeners' Market on Saturday 8 April was well supported. Members of the Executive engaged in lively discussion about current ABC issues. Whilst we were keen to discuss broad issues with the public, we encouraged people who had particular TV or radio issues to contact the ABC directly via the ABC website to make their voices heard. On the day, we sold a healthy amount of merchandise. Member Wendy Parsons suggested including a tote bag in our merchandise. This was taken up with ABC F National and a tote bag is currently in production for events towards the end of the year. Thank you Wendy!

Those attending our Cafe Quiz over breakfast at La Vita Cafe Ristorante on Saturday 22 April enjoyed mixing socially with other Friends. This time our "brains trust" did better at Ashley Walsh's ABC Adelaide's Saturday morning quiz. We now understand how the process of ringing in to ABC Adelaide works and how best to position ourselves answering questions!

Aussie Kanck (Treasurer) and I visited Don Farrell's electoral office in early May to bring him up to date on the closure of the ABC's shortwave radio service into the NT and the South Pacific. Senator Farrell is a Parliamentary Friend of the ABC and is very supportive of our efforts to restore the ABC's shortwave service on behalf of those affected by this action.

A Special General Meeting was held at the WEA on Sunday 25 May to ratify SA adopting the ABC F National fee structure. This was comfortably achieved over afternoon tea. At the meeting Aussie Kanck made a presentation about some of the logistics of membership management on becoming part of the national association. Constructive discussion ensued.

We are holding our AGM at the WEA on Sunday 13 August when the 85th birthday of the ABC will be marked with a special cake. Our guest speaker is Narelle Graham. The title of her talk is "Through the Eyes of a Rural Reporter".

As part of its new rural and regional engagement strategy the ABC will be holding a Board meeting and Community Forum in each of 3 regional centres this year: Wagga Wagga (NSW), Port Pirie (SA) and Alice Springs (NT).

Mal Hewitt and I, representing ABC F National, flew to Alice Springs to attend the first Community Forum held on the 4th July. The event was held at The Desert Park under the stars. The event brought together more than 120 members of

the local community to share their views on the role and activities of the ABC in regional Australia (see full report in Update).

Rohan Barwick (ABC Alice Springs) was one of the hosts and after introductory remarks from the Chair of the Board, Mr Justin Milne the night got under way. There were 12 discussion groups set up. Around each table were two ABC representatives from the Board, Management or the Advisory Council and about eight to ten community members. Judith Whelan, Head of ABC Radio, and Sarah Burr a member of the ABC Advisory Board were at our table. Ms Burr is an Adviser in the Indigenous Affairs Group at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in Canberra.

Discussion focussed on what the ABC does well and what can be improved. It was documented and a table representative reported back to the whole meeting about 2 table priorities. (see "Report Alice Springs Community Forum" elsewhere in this Update).

Upon registration for the Community Forum specific people had been asked to submit questions for a mini Q&A session following feedback from the tables. Mal Hewitt and I had gone to Alice Springs with some quite specific questions about the closure of the ABC's SW into the NT and South Pacific. We were not asked to submit any questions and we were feeling somewhat frustrated about the SW issue getting up. Michelle Guthrie had even reiterated the day before, on local radio, that the ABC was not reinstating shortwave just to make sure everyone understood that!

As it turned out 10 out of the 12 tables reporting back to the forum identified one of their priorities being the reintroduction of the shortwave service into the NT. When Managing Director, Michelle Guthrie got up to address the forum she said again that shortwave would not be reintroduced. Surely it is a good thing for the ABC Board to hear that the closure of shortwave services is a real issue in the NT.

The forum was an excellent initiative by the ABC to engage with the Alice Springs community and get feedback about how the ABC is performing. Our trip to Alice Springs was really worthwhile. We made some very useful contacts and the trip has given us some new direction going forward re the SW issue.

Sue Pinnock

President ABCF South Australia



Sue Pinnock, Tina Phillips and Barbara Turnbull sharing information with ABC supporters.



Terri Brown, Marie Glover & Lis Francis manning the ABC Friends stall at May Day Festival.

Western Australia

Hello to WA members and all readers.

If you are a WA member, you will have already received an email or letter to let you know that we are holding our Annual General Meeting earlier than usual this year, on Sunday, 20th August at 1:30pm, and it will return to Studio 620 at the ABC in East Perth. Our guest this year is the President of ABC Friends Tasmania and President of ABC Friends National, Margaret Reynolds. Please mark the date in your diaries or schedules if you have not done so already.

The AGM will elect a new committee for the 2017/18 term and propose changes to the Objects & Rules (constitution) of ABC Friends (WA) Inc. Some of these changes are required by new legislation which came into effect in 2016. Other changes relate to membership fees and subscriptions and are essential if we are to participate in the new national structure and membership system which will provide more payment options for renewals and new memberships, improve communications and free the volunteers on the WA committee from some of the administrative 'grunt work' so that we can concentrate on building membership and lobbying for a better deal for the ABC.

I encourage you to nominate for the committee – it's great when a group of people work together for a common purpose as the previous and current committees have done and are doing. The term runs from one AGM to the next, and, to answer a frequent question, it is the task of each new committee to decide the timing, frequency and venue of those meetings. If you have any questions, email us at wa@abcfriends.org.au.

abcfriends.org.au or phone 0468 560 993 and leave a message.

Quiz Night

We are planning a fund-raiser Quiz Night later in the year; it will be a Friday evening in early November. You may like to think about putting together a table – probably for eight people, but this will depend on the venue. Further information as soon as the details are available.

Bobbie Mackley

President, ABC Friends (WA) Inc.

WA Friends at May Day Festival

Hundreds of unionists and community members celebrated the rights and achievements of working people at the annual 2017 May Day Festival and family day on the Fremantle Esplanade.

And ABC Friends were there, as always. On the hottest May day for well over a decade, dozens of ABC aficionados wandered up to our stand to share and to enquire.

As always happens, there were many interesting anecdotes and opinions shared – and we learned some interesting snippets and had some good laughs.

Several people joined and many more took away membership forms. If you're one of those, we're looking forward to your completed form coming in!

Thanks to those stalwarts who manned the stand and carried banners or handed out flyers on the march around the streets of Fremantle. A successful event in anyone's language. Onwards and upwards!

Lis Francis

ABCF-WA Committee member

Tasmania

Let them eat cake

Down South

The Southern Group of ABC Friends are a rugged lot. Here we are at 8am on a wintery Sunday morning in July at our wonderful Farm Gate Market in Hobart. It was barely sunrise when our "Happy 85th Birthday" banner was unfurled, our clipboards were organised, and our volunteers keen to get started.

This Sunday market coincided with the Festival of Voices event in Tasmania, and we were delighted when one of the pop-up choirs at the market for the Festival, the 60- member-strong Glorious Mudsingers from NSW, agreed to sing "Happy Birthday" across the crowded market for us. This made quite an impact on visitors and other stall-holders alike. We are always very warmly received at this market.

We cut the birthday cake and shared it with many well-wishers. There were membership enquiries, payments and donations – one should never discount the appeal of fresh cake!

Thanks to the enthusiastic support of our members, this patch of Hobart is well aware of our existence. The Farm Gate Market is but one of the initiatives of the Southern Friends to increase membership and continue to raise awareness of the importance of our ABC. Celebrating the ABC's 85 years of operation was an excellent way to highlight its value and vulnerability.

Meanwhile up North...

On Tuesday 18 July 2017 the Northern Group of ABC Friends TAS held a birthday party at the Launceston LINC Library café to celebrate 85 years of the ABC.

Longtime ABC Friend, Fay Gervasoni, brought a homemade cake and served it to an appreciative group of guests, some of whom came for the party, and others who happened to be at the Library that day and joined in the fun.

Anne O'Byrne, the Northern Group Convenor, who has been a member and Committee office-bearer of the Friends for many years, cut the cake. Musical accompaniment ("Happy Birthday to you") was provided by the guests.

Welcome special guests at the occasion were Deniker Gerrity, the Chief of Staff at Northern Tasmania's ABC Regional Office in Launceston and two of her staff,



Above left: At the Launceston ABC birthday party are supporter Jan Brown on the left, Belinda Wright, our Treasurer, in the middle, and Anne O'Byrne, Northern Convenor, on the right. Above right: At the Farm Gate Market in Hobart are Margaret Reynolds, President, left, and Roslyn Stoddart, Southern Convenor, market organiser and cake decorator.

Catherine Zengerer and Fred Hooper. The guests spent an hour talking to various ABC Friends and members of the public who had joined us. Fred recorded a number of interviews with Fay Gervasoni, and other members and bystanders.

Balloons, badges, stickers and leaflets about the ABC, and information about the 'What Do You Want of Your ABC' survey were given to the attendees. The survey is being conducted by ABC Friends with the support of Michelle Guthrie. It is designed to allow us all to express our thoughts about what the ABC is doing and how it might better achieve what we want of our national broadcaster.

The Tasmanian Friends plan to grow and flourish in the years to come. If you have friends or relatives living here, please do encourage them to get on board.

Roslyn Stoddart, Southern Convenor,
Belinda Wright, Treasurer

We have a growing list of Tasmanian Friends who have specialist talents we can draw on. The latest addition is Karen Treanor, a member who has put her writing skills at our disposal. Karen pulled this article together from the material written by Ros and Belinda.

Victoria

Victorian Local Groups - Reports

- **Boroondara:** Held a successful lunch. Contact: Gael Barrett 03 9859 5185 or barretts75@gmail.com
- **Geelong/Corangamite:** this active group held a successful meeting attended by 30, with 10 apologies. Speaker was Cameron Best – local ABC identity. Michael Kinnane is acting as chair. Contact Ivor 03 8580 6402 or

ivor_donohue@hotmail.com

- **Inner Melbourne:** heavily involved in organizing recent highly successful 85th Birthday Conference at Federation Square. Contact Russell Huntington 0401 080 762 or huntingtonrk@gmail.com
- **North Melbourne:** Just held a successful launch. Contact Margaret 0421 338 155 or Margaret@nashcc.com.au
- **Southern Bayside:** Well established group near marginal seat of Dunkley. Recent successful recruiting. Plans for Theatre night? Contact Ivor 03 8580 6402 or ivor_donohue@hotmail.com
- **Eastern:** This group has hit the ground running with a stall in June (see photo below). The group is holding another stall inside the South Blackburn shopping centre in August. The group likes the idea of "show bags" on stalls. Contact Neil 0411 487 348

A blustering day on 27 May did not deter an enthusiastic band of volunteers from the ABC Friends Eastern Group holding a stall

at the Brentford Square shopping centre. It was heartening to see the interest shown by the general public, including migrants who were using the ABC to improve their language skills. The interest in the stall may have been sparked by the attack on the ABC by Quadrant Magazine.

We raised \$330; the majority of this coming from donations although some T shirt sales were taken and indicative of the concern. Sally Moseby came up with the great idea of give away show bags, one of which included a badge, some stickers, a copy of 'Update' and a card to be sent to Mr Turnbull or to your local MP, registering your dissatisfaction with the cuts to the ABC. The other smaller one was for children with an ABC kids sticker. Both young and old loved getting a free cap donated by Valerie and Derek Minter. Of course being the ABC, free of logos!

In general, the public were happy to engage and to discuss the future of the ABC and it is important we get out there and urgently spruik the importance of it. As a result of the success of this day, the Eastern Group is now getting ready for a stall at the huge Whitehorse Spring Festival in October.

The Eastern Group is mainly focused on an area from Surrey Hills to Heathmont and to the south, Burwood and Vermont. For more information please ring Neil on 0411 487 348.

Robyn Weir

What Do You Want of Your ABC? – 2 July 2017

ABC's 85th Birthday – Conference at Federation Square, Melbourne

Contributions to the Conference have been put together by Peter Monie, President, ABC Friends Victoria, and are all included in this Update.



Eastern Group manning the stall in June.

Peter welcomed the more than 300 participants and emphasized that the day was very much about ideas for our national broadcaster's future.

The meeting provided the opportunity to launch the pilot of ABC Defenders: a campaign to allow well-known and less well known Australians to tell us what is important to them about the ABC.

ABC Defenders was launched on 1 July in the Saturday Paper with a full page advert. ABC Friends is extremely grateful to Schwartz Media for their support.

Margaret Reynolds, ABC Friends' National President - Our Vision Statement

Kerry O'Brien – ABC Icon – A Crisis of Leadership in the Age of Disruption

Jenny Buckland, CEO, Australian Children's TV Foundation – The ABC's offerings for Children – The Present and the Future

June Factor – Former Victorian President of Friends, and Campaign Veteran.

I'm sure you are aware that, on 1 July 1932, the ABC was officially launched.

85 years later...

You see before you a cake in celebration. We are fortunate to have with us one of the grand champions of the ABC, June Factor. June was President of FABC Vic during the torrid nineties and led many events and campaigns.

Peter Monie

President, Victorian Friends



The crowd at Federation Square on 2nd July.



The Panel – Kerry O'Brien, Margaret Reynolds, Jenny Buckland, and the cake!

NSW Branch News

Armidale

In our March report the ABC Friends (Armidale) reported on the collection of signatures for a petition concerning parliamentary respect for journalists, and questioning cutbacks to Radio National music programs and shortwave broadcasting. After collecting signatures we asked our local member, Barnaby Joyce, to present this petition to the Federal House of Representatives. Unfortunately, we had been unaware of the prescribed wording for such a petition. We had addressed the petition "To the

Deputy Prime Minister and Member for New England, the Honourable Barnaby Joyce MP, and Members of the House of Representatives" when in fact it should be addressed to either "The House of Representatives" or "The Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives". No other body or person (e.g., one's local member) should be referred to on the petition. The result was that our petition was invalid and could not be presented to the House of Representatives. One minor win was when Barnaby Joyce promised to pass it on to the Communications Minister, Mitch Fifield. For those contemplating a petition, it is

certainly worth visiting the relevant website (http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Petitions), which includes a prescriptive information sheet. We know better for next time.

A more positive note is our collaboration with other community groups in the New England area. Several years ago ABC Friends (Armidale) supported the local International Film Festival, helping to bring David Stratton to Armidale for this festival, which is a major event on Armidale's cultural calendar. This year we wanted to try and repeat our earlier success, with another visit by David. However, a

NSW Branch News

visit had to be aborted because David was invited as a special guest to the Cannes Film Festival, with a film on his life presented in Cannes. We had the good fortune to then source that same film through the International Film Festival committee, and present it here in Armidale in late July. ABC Friends and film-lovers have both benefited from this cooperation. Similar cooperation has extended to other groups in our area. The message being that support for public broadcasting is multi-faceted, and there may be natural synergies with other groups in one's community.

Having established an ABC Friends (Armidale) media prize, we look forward to awarding this to a worthy student later in the year. This prize consists of \$1000 to the strongest applicant in their final year of the University of New England's Bachelor of Media and Communications.

Bruce Stevenson
Armidale President

was booked and it was packed. It was wonderful to see so many people, all passionate about the ABC and wanting to have their say about the ABC now, and into the future. Michelle gave an entertaining talk on her childhood and how she sees that as shaping her love of radio and TV. She patiently answered a myriad of questions from the audience, covering almost every spectrum of the Broadcaster. It was an informative night, and we hope that some of the comments made by members of the audience will give Michelle plenty to think about, and hopefully act upon. I am sure that she was assured of the ongoing loyalty by the public towards our ABC. So Please Look After It!

Every year the Winter Magic Festival is held in Katoomba on the Saturday closest to the winter Solstice. The BMABCF participates as often as possible and this year we had a group walking in the Parade, and we also manned a stall with a couple of petitions and a questionnaire

for the public, as well as some ABC merchandise and literature.

The walkers in the Parade were led by Tony, wheeling the ABCFBM boom box playing many popular themes from ABC shows (and the crowd participated by singing and dancing along), our lovely Banner held by a few intrepid members, and the remainder of walkers happy and encouraging the crowd to all be ABCers. It was a beautiful day and the response was excellent. Our stall attracted a lot of attention as well. All the copies of our ABC questionnaire were filled out in record time. We found that even though many people had complaints about the ABC, they filled out the Form with many more Excellent than Negative ratings and the Comments were generally flattering. We set out with large numbers of everything, but found that all the forms were filled in, the donation buckets were pleasantly filled, merchandise was sold and we were occupied all the time so that the day went by very quickly. Thank you to all the members who uncomplainingly gave up a Saturday so willingly. It was a very successful day.

Blue Mountains

The mountains were gloriously spectacular this autumn, the best autumn I can remember since moving here 11 years ago.

Winter arrived and with it, a couple of great events. Firstly, we had a visit from Michelle Guthrie, the Managing Director of the ABC, on 5th June. We were very lucky to have her and only for the effort of our local Federal Member of Parliament, Susan Templeman, we may not have had that privilege. 'The Hub' in Springwood,



Above left: Michelle Guthrie addresses Blue Mountains audience. Above right, below: Blue Mountains Friends at the Winter Magic Festival.



We are planning a Speaker from the ABC for our AGM in November. More than half the year has gone, and still the ABC is being bullied by the politicians, the Murdoch press attacks it every day with blatant untruths, and so do some of the shock jocks. How do they sleep at night? The first time since I have been associated with the ABCF and its predecessors I have ever heard nasty opposition directed towards everyone under the banner of the ABCF was at Winter Magic this year. Of course, we ignored it, but it shows that some of the anti ABC rhetoric is having an effect. There would always be some opposition, of course, but it must have stayed silent in public. Now the non-believers have been emboldened. Obviously, we must keep our message out in full view, stronger and better than ever.

Margaret Foy

Vice President ABCFBM

Mid North Coast

At the end of May Mid North Coast ABC Friends were very pleased to have former Lyne MP Rob Oakeshott as guest speaker at a morning meeting. Our group had a lovely morning with a crowd of about 100 people, and made lots of contacts including new subscriptions.



Mr Oakeshott's talk was wide-ranging but along the way he did cover some very important issues with the press/media. He said media and business are getting closer together with no transparency, there is an uncertain future for newspapers and a need to support groups such as the Public Interest Journalism Foundation. The ABC was important because it provided "ballast to provide a bit of sense in the public square".

He also spoke of the important work of the ABC, some ongoing such as the coverage of indigenous issues, but also the sad closing of the Australia Network which broadcast Australian programs to the south Pacific and Asia. Mr Oakeshott said that this left our neighbouring countries

with less knowledge about Australia. Why was the network closed down? There appeared to be no logic to such a move. Rural Australians have also been denied service through the closure of short wave.

There was some politicking in that Mr Oakeshott gave a "budget reply". He talked about his work in the Pacific and had seen, for himself, the problem of rising seas in Fiji from the effects of climate change. 30 communities have had to be moved with more in trouble.

There was a small discussion about "fake news". Mr Oakeshott recommended that people check the source of their news – is it reliable and from an independent source? And people should look at lots of sources and discuss with others. And beware of "click bait" where media trap readers into clicking on empty gimmicky rubbish. We were all agreed that the ABC was a reputable source and highly valued but then it probably was a biased audience – unlike the ABC of course.

In other news we hope to have more activities in the future including a presence at markets and a December picnic. We have a hardworking committee and I thank them for their input and effort.

Drusi Megget

President, ABC Friends Mid North Coast

Northern Rivers

In May this year our Lismore Co-ordinators, Therese Crollick and Felicity Holmes held a stall at the local Lismore Markets, distributing brochures promoting ABC Friends and seeking new members.

In June, our President Peter Dickson contacted Federal National MP Kevin Hogan, and met with him in July to discuss support for the ABC's independence, freedom from commercialisation and ongoing funding. Mr Hogan indicated that he and his party supported the ABC especially its role in regional areas, as well as valuing its independence and freedom from commercialisation. He also said that he would fight for ongoing funding for the ABC. He did also say that members of the Nationals regard the ABC as too Sydney centric.

Our Northern Co-ordinator, Sandy Copley, contacted the ABC Board of Management via National Friends regarding the role of the ABC in recent severe flooding in the Northern Rivers. Her letter is worth quoting in part:

"Cyclone Debbie hit the tiny historic village of Tumbulgum of 300 people on the Tweed River on 29 March with devastating results. The tragic loss of 3 local lives (a mother and two of her young children) overwhelmed the community which also suffered incredible damage to homes, properties and possessions, including loss of 100 cars. It was by far the worst flood on record.

The ABC's Justine Frazier from the Lismore office attended the post Flood Forum and spoke of the service provided to the community. The local radio broadcasted around the clock, 24 hours per day, for 3 days to provide updated information on river heights and immediate threats for the area. Not a bad effort with a staff of 11 people! Apart from broadcasting all the official information the broadcasts taps local knowledge - staff know that when water comes over the step of the corner store in a particular village then farmers need to move their livestock up on to a particular hill. So, they phone the store for updates. People from remote valleys at the headwaters of major waterways phone the ABC studio with readings from their rain gauge. Early warning signals for people downstream are broadcast. Engagement with the local community is central to their operation.

The key message from the Forum was that clear, reliable, unambiguous, accessible, local communication is central to management of such crises and is our best chance of averting tragedy.

Michelle Guthrie needs to know that whilst the newer communication platforms are widely used, an older demographic may not have the technology or the skills to access mobile phones, text messages, Facebook etc. And anyway, when the power goes out for 17 hours, when NBN-based home phones cease to function and when other whizz-bangery quietly dies, people in harm's way still rely on their battery-operated radios for critical information to keep them safe. The community service obligations of the public broadcaster cannot be downgraded and the importance of this service cannot be underestimated."

Jennie Hicks

Secretary ABC Friends
Northern Rivers



Join the ABC Friends

There is strength in numbers, and every membership counts at this time of unprecedented attacks on 'Our ABC'.

To join go to www.abcfriends.org.au or phone your local contact below.

ABC Friends NEW SOUTH WALES & ACT
Friends of the ABC QUEENSLAND
ABC Friends SOUTH AUSTRALIA & NT
ABC Friends TASMANIA
ABC Friends VICTORIA
ABC Friends WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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