

Call to Action

to All who Value their ABC

Our ABC is under attack and desperately needs your support.



Margaret Reynolds
ABC Friends National
President

If we can raise \$100,000 speedily, we can ensure ABC Friends are actively supported with resources for the Federal Election Campaign and to guarantee that Restoration of Our ABC is firmly on the Political Agenda.

We are up against an unsympathetic Government, the Murdoch media machine, the Institute of Public Affairs and aggressive ideological commentators.

Already, the ABC has been severely damaged by \$254 million cuts with

resulting massive job and programming cuts, endless repeats of British programs instead of more Australian content, the loss of the Australia Network (our international voice) and severe pressure on staff and management constantly being asked to do more with less.

We want to target political parties, marginal seat and senate candidates to gain guaranteed support for the ABC under the next federal government. Thousands of voters will only support candidates who value the ABC.

We are encouraged that the new ABC Board Chair, Ita Buttrose has

publicly spoken of her commitment to independence and that she will work to protect the ABC.

But she cannot do it alone!

So - Help us defend our ABC and to expose its critics who do not understand that Australian public broadcasting is fundamental to our democracy.

ABC Friends needs to raise funds to make sure the plight of Our ABC is front and centre during this election campaign.

Please donate now to support Our ABC. Google **mycause** and enter ABC Friends.

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Update

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You can try this now by going to www.fabcns.org.au and clicking on "Newsletter". If you prefer this delivery option for future Updates please contact your local state branch (see back page).

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?

Update Editor - Mal Hewitt

PO Box 1391 North Sydney 2059
editor_update@abcfriends.org.au

Assistant Editor - Angela Williamson

secretary_nswact@abcfriends.org.au

Proofreader - Dr Diana Wyndham

Cartoonist - Phil Somerville

Phil currently runs an online topical cartoon by paid subscription called **Line of Thought**. Enquire at phil.somerville@somervillecartoons.com

Layout Artist - Paul Martens

paul@martens.name



From the Editor (and National Vice-President)

A Fight to the Death

ABC Friends should be in no doubt – the outcome of the forthcoming Federal election will be crucial to the survival of the ABC that we know and love.

As regular survey results remind us, >80% of Australians value the ABC, and believe that it is providing an essential service. Why is the election crucial to the ABC's survival? Consider the record of the Coalition Government under Prime Ministers Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison over 5 years, resulting in:

- \$254m in cuts in 2014 (despite promises of "no cuts")
- \$83m further cut in the 2018 budget
- A further \$127m cut if the Enhanced News Gathering program is not extended
- 1,000 jobs gone, including many of the most experienced staff
- Working studios closed in Brisbane, Hobart, Adelaide and Perth
- Australia Network TV broadcasts to Asia and the Pacific shut down
- Radio Australia broadcasts to Asia and the Pacific shut down, with loss of 80 jobs

- Short wave radio broadcasts to all of remote Australia shut down, leaving much of remote Australia without a radio service (the ABC's Charter requires that the ABC service ALL Australians.)

Consider, too, the recent vote by the Federal Liberal Party to privatise the ABC, regular government inquiries which inevitably find no cause for concern, and constant allegations of bias against the ABC from conservative politicians, cheered on by the attack dogs of the Murdoch press. The Competitive Neutrality Inquiry, established after complaints from the commercial media about unfair competition, completely exonerated the ABC (See full report from Prof. Ed Davis)

Voters and politicians need to remember that a vibrant, fully-functioning ABC plays a vital role in underpinning our democracy.

That is why ABC Friends is mounting a strong campaign, targeting marginal seats, to make the ABC a vital election issue, as it was in the Wentworth by-election in 2018. ABC veterans Quentin Dempster, Kerry O'Brien and Graeme Dobell provide an insider's view of what the ABC has lost since 2014.



ABC Friends Life Member, NSW Secretary and Update Assistant Editor Angela Williamson with David, presenting her book on the 2015 Kangaroo March to the Governor General and Lady Cosgrove. Sir Peter participated in the re-enactment.

Our Government has failed our Regional neighbours

There has been growing concern in Canberra, resulting in a Government Inquiry, at the loss of Australian presence and influence in our region, and the growing presence and influence of China, especially in the Pacific. This can be linked directly to the silencing of the ABC in the Region. Until 2014, our ABC provided world news, current affairs, entertainment and, most importantly, emergency information and bulletins via TV (Australia Network) and radio (Radio Australia) using a short wave signal that was reliable, even when the cyclones raged. Short wave radio could be received on a small radio costing \$100 or less, even on the most remote Pacific islands. The service was cut by our Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (under Julie Bishop), despite the pleas from Pacific leaders that it be retained. Extraordinarily, the BBC simultaneously expanded its service to Asia and the Pacific, with a further £100m from its budget, and Chinese media have moved in to fill the vacuum created by Australia's withdrawal by their taking over all the bands used by the ABC to broadcast. We must elect a government that will restore this essential service to our neighbours, and raise Australia's profile again.

Campaign Launch in Brisbane, and Crowdfunding Launch

Sunday 3 March in Brisbane saw the launch of ABC Friends' Election Campaign, led by National President Margaret Reynolds, Vice President Prof Ed Davis, National Media Consultant Randal Macdonald and Queensland President Ross McDowell. ABC veteran Kerry O'Brien gave the keynote address, supported by international journalist Peter Greste and children's broadcast specialist Assoc Professor Anna Potter. Extensive coverage of the launch can be found in this Update, with edited versions of the major speeches. Congratulations to ABC Friends Queensland for organising a highly successful launch with a capacity audience in The Edge in Brisbane.

With the target of raising \$100,000 to support the campaign, a crowdfunding appeal has been launched as well, with details in this Update – note the rallying call from President Margaret Reynolds on the front page. We urge all ABC Friends to Support our fundraising and our activities in local electorates. Consult your state branch (details on the back page) to find out what is happening near you, and get involved,

if you wish to save our ABC for future generations of Australians.

Vale Jim Grainder

NSW Friends has lost a stalwart of many years, Jim Grainder. Founding member of Parramatta Branch and long -time member of the NSW Committee, Jim was a fighter. A stroke victim who had lost the ability to speak, Jim used his voice machine to great effect, and did not

allow his handicap to prevent him from doing all in his power to advocate for and defend the ABC. He will be missed from our committee meetings and from our activities, and we extend our sympathy to his family members.

Mal Hewitt OAM

National Vice-President
ABC Friends



somerville

Competitive Neutrality Inquiry: A Battle Won

Professor Ed Davis AM
President of NSW Friends



The report of the Inquiry into the Competitive Neutrality of the National Broadcasters was completed in September 2018. It sat on the desk of Mitch Fifield, Minister for Communications, until its publication before Christmas. The panel was led by Robert Kerr, an economist and former Commissioner of the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission. The other two members were Julie Flynn, former CEO of Free TV Australia and Sandra Levy, former CEO of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School and former Director of TV at the ABC.

The Inquiry was the product of a deal between the Turnbull government and Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party. The Inquiry, along with major budget cuts to the ABC, was demanded by Hanson in return for her support for government media reform, facilitating mergers across TV, radio and digital, between News Corp and other major media. The Inquiry was designed to clip the wings of the ABC. Senator Fifield drew up the terms of reference. News Corp, Fairfax and others loaded their guns and took aim. The most staggering part of this sorry episode is that those consistently opposed to the ABC and SBS came up with nothing. There were no wins for them. The Inquiry concluded:

'The national broadcasters are operating in a manner consistent with the general principles of competitive neutrality' (p.3).

The rationale was strikingly simple. The national broadcasters have been established, by federal legislation, to deliver services to the Australian public. In delivering these services, by TV, radio and digital platforms and, in line with their Charters, they are serving the public interest and cannot be held to be contravening the obligations of competitive neutrality.

There were a number of interesting observations in the report:

- The most significant threat to News Corp and domestic media in Australia comes

from the increased market share of the giant international companies, such as Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google

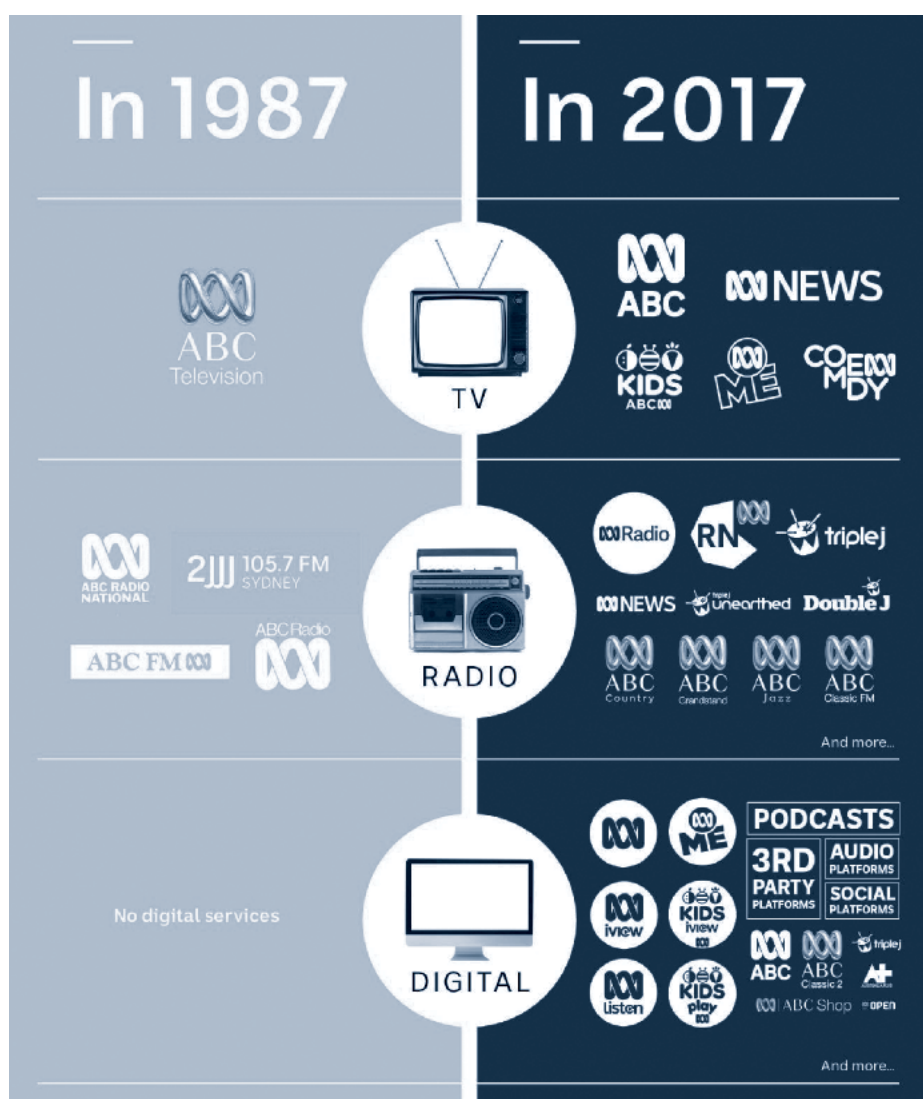
- There have been no complaints about national broadcaster breaches of competitive neutrality to the Australian Government Competitive Neutrality Complaints Organisation since 1999, when a complaint against the ABC was dismissed
- The Inquiry recommended greater funding certainty for the national broadcasters, following recent changes to the BBC's funding
- Submissions to the Inquiry reflected very high public support for the national

broadcasters and a demand that they not be privatised.

It might be remembered that the direct cost of the Inquiry and costs to the organisations concerned, in time and money, were considerable. The ABC and SBS spent \$800,000; the federal government spent \$500,000 (SMH. 10 January 2019). What an appalling waste of time and money.

Finally, the report produced the following figure, illustrating the massive growth in ABC programs and services over the past thirty years. At the same time the ABC's budget has been cut by 30%. Governments must be pressed to restore proper funding to the ABC and this report helps to make the case.

Figure showing growth in ABC activity, 1987-2017



Source: ABC Submission (2018) p. 11.

ITA BUTTROSE ABC CHAIR



Matthew Peacock

Journalist, Author,
Former Staff-Elected
Director on the ABC Board
Co-Convenor ABC Alumni



Ita Buttrose may prove to be an excellent choice as ABC Chair.

She has the media knowledge, the corporate experience, the popularity and the intelligence to lead one of our most important cultural institutions.

Already she has vowed to defend its independence, and anyone who has dealt with Ms Buttrose in her previous roles knows she can be a fighter, not likely to meekly submit to pressure.

But once again, the Government in choosing her has made a "captain's call", ignoring the very process of nominations established to ensure at least the appearance of an independent appointment, free of partisan political interference.

At the very least, the Government should have waited until the Senate inquiry currently underway into the sacking of the former MD Michelle Guthrie and resignation of the previous Chair, Justin Milne, amidst suggestions of direct political pressure on the ABC, has reported in a few months time. That inquiry is likely to find that there was political interference in the national broadcaster by the current Government, going beyond the massive cutbacks to its budget - almost a quarter - in recent years.

More importantly the Senate inquiry should make recommendations on how to fix the current flawed process of nominations to the Board and Chair, designed to ensure

independence, but more often than not bypassed to appoint Government cronies.

The first major task Ita Buttrose will have is to join the existing Board in appointing a new Managing Director to replace Michelle Guthrie.

It's been a time of great turmoil, cutbacks and restructures at the ABC, and Ms Buttrose is correct in observing that the staff and the institution need a period of stability.

She could do worse than to appoint the candidate already acting in the job, David Anderson, an executive widely respected both inside and outside the ABC, who was groomed by former ABC Managing Director Mark Scott to take the job and was runner-up to Ms Guthrie.

He is a steady pair of hands, with extensive knowledge and a long commitment to the ABC, as well as a deep knowledge of the challenges it faces in adapting to the digital revolution enveloping all media.

He would probably be a popular choice for the staff, whose morale not surprisingly is currently near an all-time low. The staff have kept the ABC on air during the recent past tumultuous years, but they are stretched near breaking point, with a huge departure of experienced colleagues, shrinking budgets, and constant corporate restructures.

It is the staff who have kept faith with the ABC's audiences, providing quality programming across multiple platforms across the nation, despite the chaos.

The new Chair will quickly discover that the ABC is a bigger and more complex organisation than even she might have imagined, with its multiple time zones,

multiple specialist constituencies and ardent audiences.

And now it must face the digital world to compete with the globalised giants of Netflix, Google, Amazon and others. If Australians are to retain their unique culture across the nation they will need an ABC which is stronger, cleverer and more engaged with local audiences than ever before.

Buttrose's predecessor Justin Milne did not understand the need to maintain the ABC's independence, urging the sacrifice of individual journalists to please his political masters in Government.

But he was right about one thing.

The ABC will need more money. A substantial investment will be required to enable it to compete on the global digital stage.

One logical way to find at least some of it, is for the Government to allow the ABC to retain the money it saves when its terrestrial transmitters - the TV and radio towers across the country - are switched off to go fully digital, and then re-invest that money for the digital infrastructure required.

That requires forward planning, and a funding commitment from Canberra beyond the current on-off triennial arrangements.

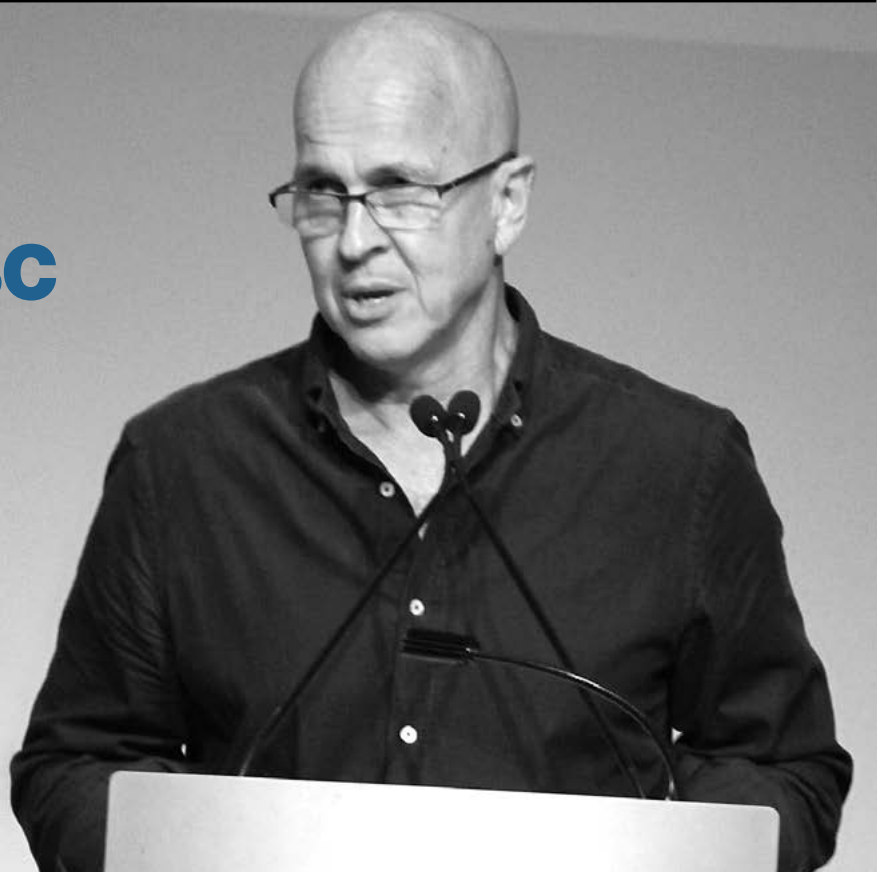
A temptation Ita Buttrose must resist is to allow advertising to creep in to the ABC's offerings, as the digital output blurs some of the traditional broadcasting lines.

She grew up knowing and loving the ABC. Almost certainly, she will have the passion to make it greater.



Save the ABC

Why public service broadcasting has never been more important.



**Professor Peter Grete,
speaking at the Brisbane
launch on March 3.**

**Journalist, author and UNESCO
Chair in Journalism and
Communication, University of
Queensland**

When I was asked to take part in this event, initially I was a little hesitant. After all, I'd probably be confirming every single critic who accuses the ABC and its supporters of lefty activism by putting a convicted terrorist on stage to defend it...

But there is another reason.

For almost all of my professional life – for half of *all* my life – I've been out of the country as a correspondent – most of it for the BBC and Al Jazeera, so I have no special loyalty to the ABC.

I'm not an ABC staffer, have never been on the staff of the ABC. I've done a few freelance contracts for it and still enjoy a great relationship with the ABC.

Like so many of us, I grew up watching Play School and my Dad was an obsessive listener of ABC programs (he is secretly in love with Geraldine Doogue). And while I have been watching and listening to its output more recently, I haven't got the kind

of rusted-on emotional attachment that some of you might have. In fact, I am very critical of much of what the ABC does, especially with news and current affairs.

But the more I thought about my own experiences, and the role I've taken on since I returned from Egypt, the more I realized that this is something I had to do.

One of the upsides of my time in Cairo was having a bit of spare time to think. (I know it's a luxury a lot of people want these days, so I suppose I ought to be grateful to my friends in Egypt...) And I spent a lot of that time thinking about the role of the media in a functioning, vibrant democracy.

There is a lot to be said for the ABC's contributions to Australia's cultural life – its children's programming, rural services, its importance at times of emergency, and its support for music and so on. There are others here who will speak about those issues, but I want to talk about what I know, and that's the news business.

I've worked as a journalist for about 30 years, 25 of them abroad as a correspondent. I had 15 covering places as diverse as the UK, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Mexico, South Africa and Kenya. And the more I reflected on those states, the more I came to see the importance of a genuinely independent, vibrant, feisty, publicly-funded journalism to an effective society with lively open public debates.

Of course, we are not talking about state media here. State media is accountable to the government. It is the voice of the authorities. It never questions those in power. It never holds them to account. It offers them a platform and a voice without challenge. It is a propaganda machine. And the observant among you will realise that you don't even need to be owned by the government to take on that kind of role. If you need any confirmation at all, you only need to ask an Australian government minister about whether they think the ABC is a state broadcaster.

Unsurprisingly, in authoritarian states that do own and operate their own media, their funding is never in doubt.

In the same way, commercial journalism is accountable to its owners, whether they are shareholders or families, or corporations. And increasingly in those newsrooms what matters is not what is editorially important, not what you need to know as a responsible citizen. What matters is what holds eyeballs. What generates clicks. What creates revenue. What is best for the business.

A few years ago in Britain, James Murdoch spoke at the Edinburgh Television Festival, where he attacked the BBC for undermining freedom of speech, and declared the British license fee system that funds the BBC as an anachronism. He then went on to make a remarkable

statement. He said, “The only reliable, durable, and perpetual guarantor of independence is profit.”

Think about what that means for a moment. Profit apparently unhitches a news organisation from political partisanship. I can think of a host of reasons why that idea is questionable, but let’s assume for a moment that he is right. It also means that news becomes hitched to making money. It assumes that the kind of news that makes a profit is inherently good. These days, what generates clicks seems to be stories about the Kardashians... and you can see where I’m going here.

I am not suggesting that all commercial media is bad. Quite the opposite. We need

commercial news advertising dollars, the serious if less sexy political interviews are left to the ABC.

Oddly enough, our politicians know this. There is a reason why, when they have something important to say, they will hold a news conference and then head straight to the 7:30 studios, to stiffen their spines before they sit down to a roasting by Leigh Sales. They know that if they want to be taken seriously, they have to submit to the ABC.

What of foreign news? In a world more interconnected than ever before, we can no longer think of ourselves as a lonely island. We need our own eyes and ears across the globe to make sense of world affairs in ways that are relevant to us.

but because the story flowed out into the rest of the media and became a subject none of us could ignore. And anybody with aging family members, or anybody who plans to get old – and that must surely mean every single Australian – ought thank 7:30 and Four Corners for their investigations that triggered the Royal Commission into Aged Care.

Finally, for those who complain about political bias in the ABC, remember this: public media is accountable to those who own it – that’s us, the public, the taxpayer.

Now, I’m not going to buy in to the debate about ABC bias – the organisation is not perfect, and there is certainly a lot it could do to improve its governance. But that is a separate issue, and conflating governance with independence is to miss perhaps the most important point of all.

What matters is the very fact that we can have a public debate about bias in the ABC, along with parliamentary inquiries. We can have this debate because the ABC is ours. We own it.

Of course, we can complain about bias in commercial media – you can write a letter if you like, but that’s about it. We have no real say over any of it. The journalists in commercial media are accountable to their employers who set the editorial direction, not based on what is healthy for our democracy, but on what is healthy for their bottom lines.

In political debates we tend to forget something fundamental. Politicians work for us. We hire them when we cast our votes, and every time we pay our taxes, we pay their wages. Whatever they do is in our name. It is on behalf of us. That’s how democracy works. As responsible employers, we need to know what’s going on, and while some commercial news services do a very good job of covering politics, ultimately, we need a well-funded news service that is also accountable to us, working on our behalf, to keep watch over those in power.

Whether you are a compulsive viewer or never consumed a second of ABC content in your life, the indisputable fact is that the ABC has helped shape and inform our country in profoundly important ways. If we were to lose it – if it were to become just another commercial entity or whittled away in a form of financial death by a thousand cuts – our Australia – and every single one of us who lives here – would be immeasurably poorer.

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it. It is important to our society. It plays a vital role that the ABC cannot and should not try to fill. Commercial media offers us diversity of views. But as James reminded us so eloquently, commercial media exists to make money. Public media exists to serve the public.

That doesn’t mean public media is always good. But let’s stop to think for a moment what Australian journalism would look like without the ABC. There would certainly be no Four Corners. No Don Dale investigation. No inquiries into the aged care business, match fixing in cricket or corruption in the Queensland police force, or scandals in the horse racing industry. Instead, we’d have another commercial equivalent of 60 Minutes. Don’t get me wrong... 60 Minutes is a fine program, but we’d be indisputably poorer without Four Corners. Nor would we have 7:30. Only A Current Affair. And because we know political interviews turn viewers off and lose

The commercial news services have correspondents in the United States and London... but who else but the ABC has their own reporter covering our closest neighbour, Papua New Guinea? Or an Africa correspondent? Or reporters in Jakarta and New Delhi? And as much as I respect Alan Jones and love Hamish and Andy, none of them are substitutes for AM, or The World Today or PM.

In the commercial world, none of those programs would survive. They are far too expensive to produce, and they bring relatively small audiences. But the fact is that we need that stuff.

Those programs have an outsized influence on political debate because the questions they ask and the stories they break inform and influence the wider debate. The reason most Australians know of the Don Dale Child Detention Centre’s treatment of indigenous kids is not because they all watched Four Corners,

**Associate Professor Anna
Potter, speaking at the
Brisbane launch on 3 March.**

**Associate Professor, School of
Communication and Creative
Industries, University of the
Sunshine Coast**

One of the most popular shows
that has ever streamed on iView
is Bluey.

This series has had over 21 million views
since its launch six months ago. It's
made in Brisbane, by the very talented
Ludo Studios and is clearly situated in
Queensland.

Shows like Bluey remind us of the value of
Australian kids TV, television that situates
children in their own national cultural
contexts, reflecting their daily lives back
to them. Its popularity – that was 21
million views - confirms that home-grown
television really resonates with Australian
kids and their parents. And that's at a
time when other television services like
Netflix and YouTube are making strenuous
efforts to attract children, with mainly
international offerings.

Bluey is an excellent example of ABC's
children's television.

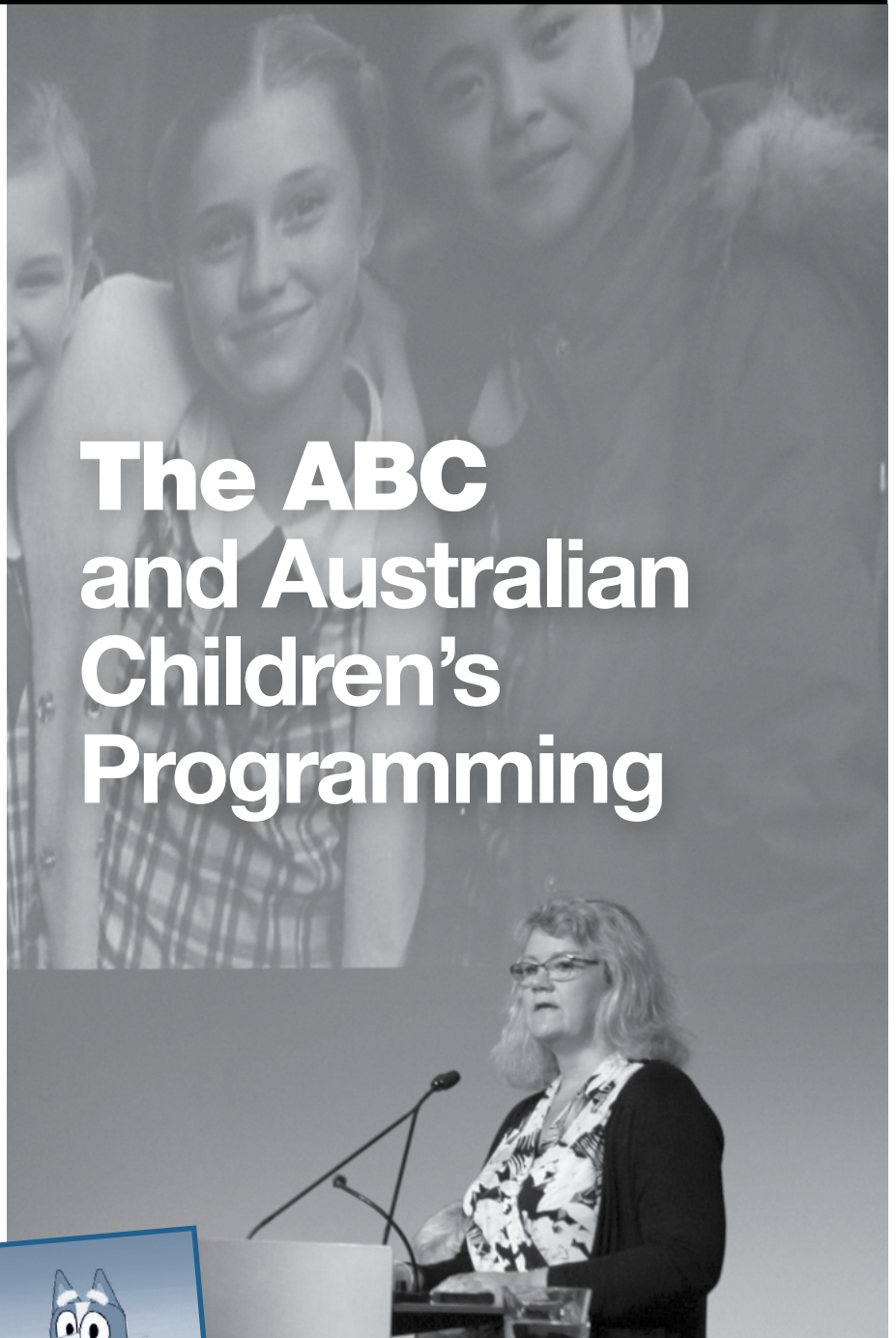
I'd like us
to think for
a moment
about what
public service
broadcasters are
doing in other
parts of the world
to make sure that
their own versions
of shows like Bluey
are available to children.

In Canada for example, the new Chair of
the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation,
Catherine Tait, began her tenure last year
by stating that the most important priority
of a national broadcaster was news and
current affairs, and that the second most
important priority is children's television.
Tait has announced a doubling of the
CBC's children's offerings, with a focus on
Canadian content.

In the UK last year the government
gave the BBC an extra £34m in funding



The ABC and Australian Children's Programming



for children's
television, to
help the BBC
fend off threats
to its children's
audiences posed by

Netflix and YouTube. That will bring the
BBC's spending on children's TV up to
£124 million pounds a year. The UK also
just introduced a £60m contestable fund
for children's television, that all producers
can apply to, to increase supplies of public
service television. The fund will start in April
this year.

Why are the BBC and CBC putting so
many resources into children's television?

Three reasons:

1. The provision of high quality locally-
produced children's television is

a defining characteristic of public
service broadcasting. Public service
broadcasters including the ABC must
be adequately resourced, in order to
be able to supply a diverse range of
offerings for children of all ages and
backgrounds

2. Public service broadcasters are also
losing children, particularly older children
to YouTube and Netflix. UK children are
now more familiar with YouTube's brand
than the BBC's.
3. Today's children are tomorrow's
audiences. They will largely determine
the future of public service broadcasting.
If they don't engage with public service
broadcasting as children, why would
they want their taxpayer dollars to
support it when they grow up?

So, what's happening in Australia to ensure that children have access to identifiably Australian programs as well as terrific television from other parts of the world?

Well, in the last 15 months the government has conducted no less than three reviews looking at ways of supporting Australian content, including children's television, and the industries responsible for their production. We're currently waiting for the biggest of these reviews, the Australian and Children's Screen Content Review, to deliver its findings.

The commercial broadcasters 7, 9 and 10 used these reviews to argue, with gusto, that their Australian content quotas for children's programming should be removed. They are particularly keen to see children's drama quotas (which currently stand at 32 hours a year per channel) scrapped, because if they're going to air children's programs, they'd prefer to rely on cheap cartoons from overseas.

Before we all roll our eyes at our commercial friends' behaviour, let's put ourselves in their shoes for a moment. Advertiser funded broadcasters are competing in a highly disrupted media environment, but they are the only ones that have a requirement to invest in expensive local content including children's. Foxtel, Stan, YouTube, Netflix and the public broadcasters don't actually have any formal obligations to meet minimum Australian content levels or to screen any Australian children's television.

And when it comes to children's television, the commercial broadcasters are also arguing very pointedly that the ABC should be left to do the job. And as huge supporters of the ABC, I imagine that you might even agree with the commercial broadcasters: why not leave kids content to the ABC? Aren't they the leaders in this space? And isn't their commitment to children's television one of the fundamental things that we value about the ABC?

So, should the commercial broadcasters be let off the hook?

And should we just leave kids TV to the ABC?

What could possibly go wrong in such a scenario?

Again, it is useful to look at the UK example.

When the UK removed children's content quotas from their commercial networks in 2003, production levels of local children's television dropped by 93%. That was pretty bad, in fact it was disastrous for

the industry. But the BBC stepped up, because its Children's Department is well funded, and because the British regulator OfCom has oversight of the BBC's performance in relation to the children's audience. OfCom sets a minimum level of 70% British content for children, and requires the BBC to achieve high levels of originality and distinctiveness, and minimum hours of new, UK produced content. The BBC reports transparently on its achievements and expenditure in the children's area in its annual reports.



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What all this means is that Children's content on the ABC is vulnerable. It's not just at the mercy of the government of the day, and the overall ABC funding envelope. It's actually at the mercy of the particular ABC executive group at the time.

”

Well, that's okay you might think, because just as the Brits have got the BBC, we've got the ABC, which is making brilliant shows like Bluey, for Australian kids.

Surely if the commercial networks quotas were removed, the ABC could pick up the slack, because that what the ABC is so good at, making kids television. It has its own children's channel for goodness sake.

Unfortunately, it's not quite as simple as that.

You might be surprised to hear that the

ABC has no Australian content quotas and no formal requirements to screen any children's television.

The much-vaunted ABC Charter, doesn't even mention children. The ABC says we should just trust that it transmits appropriate levels of locally produced children's content, because Australian content and children's television are “in the ABC's DNA.”

Yes since 2009, the ABC has had the children's channel ABCME, or ABC3 as it was first named. The additional funding allocated to the channel for its first three years of life effectively tripled the ABC's children's budget. The ABC set an ambitious target of reaching 50% Australian content on the channel within a year.

That funding transformed children's television in Australia.

Since 2009, the ABC has invested in some of the best Australian children's television ever made. While Bluey is one terrific preschool example, the ABC has been making superb school age programs too, including drama, comedy, factual programs and news. Like, Mustangs FC, about a girls' soccer team, where the girls come in all shapes and sizes and from very different cultural and social backgrounds. Like Little Lunch, the school-based mockumentary, voted the Best Children's Television show of 2017 by The Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts.

Shows like What's It like to Experience a Disability? and First Day, about a transgender girl's first day at school have won prestigious international awards while representing Australian children in all their diversity.

The ABC Children's Department now commissions special content for days like International Day of the Girl; it deployed a rookie kid reporter during the last Federal election to interview the candidates and report on the issues from a 12 year old perspective; and it's insisting the children cast in its shows reflect multicultural Australia.

The ABC has also ensured its children's programs are available on demand and on the move, through the use of its children's apps, which have been downloaded 3.8 million times. And half of all the content viewed on iView is children's content.

Unfortunately however three years after the channel's launch, the ABC began steadily reducing the children's budget.

New Australian content levels dropped to around 30%.

The ABC blamed the Abbot Government's budget cuts but the de-funding of children's programs had actually occurred before they were announced.

Organisations like the Australian Children's Television Foundation began pointing this out, people like me wrote newspaper articles sounding the alarm bells. And we understand that the ABC's commitments to children's content in the 2017-2018 financial year actually increased. Temporarily. With no guarantees. Sadly, though, the levels of Australian content on the ABC children's service are still very low, and when you turn it on, you'd be forgiven a lot of the time, for thinking the ABC kids service is one imported cartoon after another. That's because Australian content now accounts for less than 30% of the overall children's schedule.

What all this means is that Children's content on the ABC is vulnerable. It's not just at the mercy of the government of the day, and the overall

“

**... the children of today
will become the ABC's
audiences – and friends -
of tomorrow.**

”

ABC funding envelope. It's actually at the mercy of the particular ABC executive group at the time, and the extent to which they prioritise the children's audience. Because there is nothing at all in the ABC Charter that protects or speaks of an obligation to children, and there is no legislated or regulated requirement that the ABC even provide children's television. And when the going gets tough, the ABC has shown repeatedly that it will reallocate spending from children's to other parts of the organisation.

Clearly then the ABC should be properly funded to commission high levels of Australian content in a range of different genres for children of all ages. And that

should involve tied funding I would suggest, so that money allocated to children's television can't then be spent on other areas like lifestyle websites. There should be mandated expectations around minimum levels of distinctive, and diverse Australian content, for children of all ages, as Canada and the UK have introduced. And a transparent reporting system for children's spending should also be put in place.

Quite a lot of people, including ABC Friends I believe, are suspicious of tied funding for the ABC. I understand why. They see it as an infringement on ABC independence, amounting to Government interference in the way the ABC operates.

But without those safeguards, Australian children's television on the ABC remains at risk.

The ABC must prioritise the adequate resourcing of minimum levels of original and diverse children's television. Because Australian children deserve it, and because the children of today will become the ABC's audiences – and friends - of tomorrow.



Call to Action for ABC

to All who Value their ABC

www.mycause.com.au/page/198208/donate-to-make-the-abc-central-to-the-election

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a fundraising page on the MyCause platform. The browser's address bar shows the URL: www.mycause.com.au/page/198208/donate-to-make-the-abc-central-to-the-election. The page header includes the MyCause logo, a 'Like 12K' button, and 'help' and 'login' links. The main heading reads 'DONATE TO MAKE THE ABC CENTRAL TO THE ELECTION'. Below this, a progress bar shows '\$1,825 raised' (2%) towards a 'GOAL \$100,000'. It also notes '23 donations' and 'since Mar 2019'. A prominent 'donate now' button is visible. On the left, there are social sharing options for Facebook, Email, Twitter, and LinkedIn, along with a '7 shares' count. A video player features a woman in a vest with the text 'HELP US CROWDFUND TO STOP OUR ABC BEL...'. The right sidebar identifies the fundraiser as 'ABC Friends National Inc.' with its logo and a description: 'ABC Friends National Inc. is a lobby group that works on behalf of listeners and viewers of ABC radio and television as well as users of the various ABC digital platforms. We aim to ensure that the ABC is properly funded to meet its Charter obligations, and to preserve its editorial independence.' Social media icons for email, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are present. At the bottom, a section titled 'Share this campaign' includes buttons for 'SHARE ON FACEBOOK' and 'COPY LINK'. A paragraph at the very bottom explains the campaign's goal: 'If we can raise \$100,000 speedily, we can ensure ABC Friends are active in the Federal Election Campaign nationally to ensure that restoration of Our ABC is firmly on the Political Agenda. We are up against an unsympathetic Government, the Murdoch media machine, the Institute of Public Affairs and aggressive ideological commentators. Already, the ABC has been severely damaged by \$254 million cuts with resulting massive job and programming losses, with endless repeats of British programs instead of more Australian content, with the removal of the'.

mycause

The Giving Network Pty Ltd

Like 12K help login

DONATE TO MAKE THE ABC CENTRAL TO THE ELECTION

7 shares

Help this campaign succeed - SHARE NOW!

SHARE EMAIL

\$1,825 raised
2%
GOAL \$100,000
23 donations since Mar 2019

donate now

Fundraising for
ABC Friends National Inc.

Friends NATIONAL

ABC Friends National Inc. is a lobby group that works on behalf of listeners and viewers of ABC radio and television as well as users of the various ABC digital platforms. We aim to ensure that the ABC is properly funded to meet its Charter obligations, and to preserve its editorial independence.

Share this campaign

SHARE ON FACEBOOK

COPY LINK

Our ABC is under attack and desperately needs the help of its supporters.

If we can raise \$100,000 speedily, we can ensure ABC Friends are active in the Federal Election Campaign nationally to ensure that restoration of Our ABC is firmly on the Political Agenda. We are up against an unsympathetic Government, the Murdoch media machine, the Institute of Public Affairs and aggressive ideological commentators. Already, the ABC has been severely damaged by \$254 million cuts with resulting massive job and programming losses, with endless repeats of British programs instead of more Australian content, with the removal of the

Kerry O'Brien Keynote Address



Walkley Award winning journalist and former host of the ABC's 7.30 Report and Four Corners

I'll bet everyone here has a story of the ABC in their early life. For me it was listening to Blue Hills from the age of four whenever I stayed with my grandparents; I can still hum the theme, and Jason and the Argonauts.

For my parents it was hearing of the rise of Nazism in Europe after ABC radio was launched in 1936...hearing of Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia and Poland, and Churchill and Menzies declaring war on Germany; the shattering news of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour, its unstoppable advance through South-East Asia and the Pacific, and its arrival in New-Guinea on Australia's doorstep. These were some of the most critical days for Australia, and the ABC was there, in the living rooms of our parents' and grandparents' homes.

As Australia was cut off, the voices of the ABC kept our parents and grand-parents connected to the rest of the world: they could hear the disbelief and the fear in the voices of the announcers and, as the tide turned, they could hear the hope.

Australian troops fought back and forth along the Kokoda Track, and the ABC's first war correspondent, Chester Wilmot, walked the track with our fathers or uncles, reflecting the conditions, and in North Africa and the Middle East. Like so many ABC journalists who came after him, Chester Wilmot saw things as they were, not just as the Australian military

wanted him to see them, reported them fearlessly and accurately, critical of some of the decisions of General Blamey, had his credentials withdrawn, but was backed by his bosses at the ABC, as he should have been.

No doubt the government in Canberra didn't like it, as governments ever since haven't always liked what they have heard and seen on the ABC, including my old boss, Gough Whitlam, but as prime minister he still passionately supported it, because he understood the fundamental importance of public broadcasting and its genuine independence, even from him.

Malcolm Turnbull once told me he understood the importance of public broadcasting too, and its independence. I was at an ABC function in Parliament House when Malcolm Turnbull arrived. He simply said the ABC has never been more important than it is today, referring to the destructive way the digital revolution was impacting on what we now quaintly call legacy media, mostly newspapers. Less than a year later as the Minister for the ABC in the Abbott Government he announced a cut to the ABC's budget of \$254 million.

Every Liberal government for the past 40 years has held inquiries into the ABC. The Fraser government: the Dix Inquiry. The Howard Government: the Mansfield Inquiry. The Abbott government: the Peter Lewis inquiry into the ABC's efficiency. The Turnbull government: another two inquiries into the ABC, one of them after constant complaints from Rupert Murdoch's News Ltd and the Fairfax group, and in a horse trade with that well-known supporter of public broadcasting, Pauline Hanson. Then

Turnbull as Prime Minister gave the ABC a second inquiry into its efficiency and SBS. This time the government wants them to share their back-office functions. But there's no merger coming...

Two inquiries into the efficiency of public broadcasting in four years. The latest headed by a Peter Tonagh. So who is he? Former boss of Foxtel, a direct competitor with the ABC and SBS. A former senior executive of News Corp, a harsh and constant critic of the ABC.

News Corp and the Fairfax media group, now part of the Nine group, complained about the ABC providing unfair competition to them as they struggled and failed to maintain the newspapers' profit levels in the disruptive digital age. That inquiry found nothing of the sort. It said the ABC and SBS were not causing significant competitive distortions beyond the public interest and were simply abiding by a best endeavours approach to competitive neutrality.

The background for all the inquiries I've mentioned, by conservative government after conservative government over 40 years, has been the constant claim of bias. This is not about bias by the ABC against conservative governments. It's bias by conservative governments against the ABC!

I've seen that prejudice close up: with *Four Corners* in 1976, the first year of the Fraser government, and along with everyone else at the ABC, felt the sting of significant budget cuts in that first year. I was with the *7.30 Report* in 1996, the first year of the Howard government, and like my colleagues saw and felt big budget cuts in

its first year. The mood in the government at the time was one of punishment, and we were given Jonathan Shier to run the place, a man who, in my considered view, trampled through your broadcaster like a bull in a china shop before he was shown the door by an embarrassed board. I was back with *Four Corners* for the first year of the Abbott government, with its significant cuts to the ABC in its first budget.

Then the Turnbull government announced more cuts last year, \$83.7 million over the next three years, and created a further funding hole of \$43 million for the ABC by discontinuing funding for news and current affairs investigative reporting and regional coverage.

So how good is their word leading up to elections? I still remember sitting on the ABC panel on election night 1996, watching Richard Alston, who was about to become our Minister, as he promised that the ABC budget would not be cut, reiterating an earlier pledge.

Yet it was his recommendation to Cabinet that saw the ABC budget slashed by *more than 10 percent*. Not only that, Alston actually acknowledged in writing to his Cabinet colleagues, in his draft budget that the cuts he was recommending would be in breach of the government's election promise. Remember John Howard's core and non-core promises? Well that was one of them. And then in an interview on 7.30 which he kept denying the undeniable, that the cuts were indeed an obvious breach of faith.

In 2013, Tony Abbott's pledge on the eve of the election: "No cuts to the ABC or SBS."

The ABC's digital platforms, whose future was placed in doubt by Malcolm Turnbull's competitive neutrality inquiry, are now fundamentally a part of the life blood, relevance, and future of public broadcasting. Any impediment to its place on those platforms in direct competition with its commercial rivals, would be a kiss of death if the ABC can't properly cement its place in the media landscape of the future.

We saw that revealing debate at last year's conference of the Liberal Party's Federal Council, the peak body of the Liberal Party, on a motion to privatise the ABC. It was moved by the Young Liberal leadership. It took a lot more votes than a few Young Liberal members to pass the motion. Julie

Bishop, Mathias Cormann and two Liberal State Premiers were in the room.

The Communications Minister, Mitch Fifield, spoke against it, the only minister to do so. He had to: he was the ABC's minister after all. He knew how it would be reported if he didn't, and he knew that potentially it would be politically toxic for the government. Mitch Fifield remains a member of the Institute of Public Affairs, which has, coincidentally, just brought out a book arguing for the privatisation of the ABC.

Its opening stanza reads:

'The Australian Broadcasting Corporation is a \$1.04 billion public policy program. This book treats it exactly as that: A government intervention into the market for news, entertainment and communications. Policy interventions are costly. The ABC represents a billion dollars taken out of taxpayers' pockets and not used on other government priorities.'

“

The background for all the inquiries I've mentioned, by conservative government after conservative government over 40 years, has been the constant claim of bias. This is not about bias by the ABC against conservative governments. It's bias by conservative governments against the ABC!

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'Policy interventions are also costly in a non-monetary sense. They can have unintended or counter-productive consequences. They can crowd out non-government activity. 'Stifle entrepreneurship or technological innovation, distort the marketplace, systematically favour political interests and ideologies, and create fiefdoms of unaccountable bureaucrats.'

And then the following line.

'We argue in this book that the ABC is an anachronism.'

So, in its opening pitch, not a single positive word or phrase for the ABC or public broadcasting.

Of course, they regard it as anachronistic. They are Chris Berg and Sinclair Davidson,

two unfettered, ideological, free market economists. Their closing line to the book is a ripper.

'The ABC should be privatised and freed to flourish in the new media marketplace.'

Yeah, sure....

- Let's say the much celebrated, much decorated *Australian Story* was unable to survive in the marketplace of Christopher Berg and Sinclair Davidson. Are we going to find anything remotely like it on commercial television or YouTube?
- Would *Foreign Correspondent* ever get a look in without the ABC, the program that reports the rest of the world to Australia from Australian eyes?
- Would *Gruen Transfer*, a program that critiques the advertising industry with all the exploitative tricks of its cynical trade, ever get a look in on commercial television, surrounded by ads?



- What about a specialist program for the bush, like *Landline*?
- Heather Ewart's *Back Roads*, bringing country communities alive for the rest of the nation enjoying better services along the coastline?
- *Media Watch*? On commercial television, with someone like Paul Barry fearlessly questioning the ethics of his own network?
- Or, over on SBS, Jenny Brockie's high quality *Insight* program. (The SBS has a target on its back too.)

Like all the other usual suspects, the IPA's book also carries on about institutionalised bias in the ABC. In earlier times, people working in the ABC used to laugh at some of the more ludicrous accusations of the

powerful socialist cabal of program makers who were supposed to be running an insidious culture of systemic bias in the place.

When those attacks fell on deaf ears for the vast bulk of ABC audiences, because they judged us with far more maturity and clarity, the critique shifted beyond claims of a knowing conspiracy of the Left to something a little more amorphous, but still, apparently insidious.

'Not calculatedly partisan', as Tom Switzer wrote in the much-diminished right-wing magazine *Quadrant* in September, 2013, but with an entrenched 'Left-liberal bias, or perhaps *mindset*'.

“

We've got an election coming up in the next couple of months. The ABC will once again be zealously scrutinised by its enemies, and I have no doubt it will once again pass any fair test with flying colours.

”

Tom Switzer likened the ABC to its British parent, the BBC, where, he said, senior journalists and executives had conceded that staff were drawn disproportionately from 'the liberal (small l) metropolitan classes and this means that editorial output is all too often shaped by the creed of political correctness'. To the extent that political correctness is used to identify genuine zealotry, it has some validity, but those who use the epithet most, tend to apply it to anything they don't happen to agree with.

Yes, it's true, the ABC does cover more stories on Aboriginal issues than commercial broadcasters. More stories on indigenous issues than *A Current Affair* or *Sixty Minutes*. Is that really so remarkable? Unlike the ABC, ratings are the first priority in a highly competitive commercial world. Commercial network executive producers are highly sensitive in their story selection. They have very firm and limiting views about what rates for them and what doesn't. If they were being honest, commercial television executive producers would tell you most stories on indigenous issues don't rate by commercial benchmarks.

One reason there are more of 'those' stories on the ABC is that the broadcaster has so many radio and television news and current affairs outlets. I don't remember John Howard complaining about *Lateline's* political correctness when their stories on child abuse allegations in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory gave him a rationale to launch his controversial intervention across the territory.

Over the years *Four Corners* has produced three stories of scandal relating to indigenous issues in which *Aboriginals were the victims*, that prompted governments to call Royal Commissions. The question is this: Which of those stories should *Four Corners* not have done on the grounds that they

those allegations of political interference in the ABC.

Scott Morrison has done what Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull both did before him on board appointments: ignored his own advisory panel's recommendations in appointing a new chair. What on earth did they bother to set it up for?

Ita Buttrose is to be the new Chair. As an innovative magazine editor for Sir Frank and then Kerry Packer, she became a household name—and in the public's eye it's a trusted name, and that's a good thing for the ABC, even if they way she was appointed wasn't, and before we know the outcome of a senate inquiry which may well conclude on evidence that the previous board was tainted by political interference. Ita Buttrose may be a great chair and we should all wish her well.

Scott Morrison, not long after becoming prime minister, told Barrie Cassidy on *Insiders* after the latest board turmoil that he would be watching the ABC. Not a particularly wise choice of words given the events he was responding to, including the evidence of political interference that had already been made public, let alone what may emerge from the senate inquiry. He needs to understand that while he's watching the ABC we'll be watching him.

We've got an election coming up in the next couple of months. The ABC will once again be zealously scrutinised by its enemies, and I have no doubt it will once again pass any fair test with flying colours. After the 2010 federal election, my last year at 7.30, and the one where Julie Gillard scraped into minority government, I received a note from the ABC chair, Maurice Newman, appointed by the Howard government, and a friend of John Howard's, thanking me for 7.30's even-handed coverage of the campaign. I was very pleased to get the endorsement because I thought it was an exact reflection of every other campaign covered by 7.30 in its 15-year existence to that point.

I would suggest that all Australians should apply the same scrutiny to both sides of politics with regard to their claims and pledges on behalf of the ABC, as is applied to the ABC itself. Because this is a critical crossroad for the future of public broadcasting in this country. And we all know, and unlike Malcolm Turnbull, mean when we say it, how important the ABC is in turn to our future as a nation and a healthy democracy.



were politically correct? We know the answer. None.

I find it hard to believe that this anti-ABC hostility is genuinely representative of the majority of people who traditionally vote Liberal or National Party around the country. Of course, the ABC doesn't please everyone all the time. But smart people of all political persuasions see the bigger picture and understand the enormous value the ABC has been adding to the richness of Australian life for 80 years, and has brought to them personally.

And now we come to the ABC of 2019. An ABC that has seen in the past few months its MD sacked and its chairman forced to resign at a time of substantial internal upheaval brought on by a major operational structure right through the broadcaster by the MD who was then sacked. The chairman who presided over the sacking was then accused of having succumbed to political pressure from the Turnbull Government to sack staff the government didn't like. We look forward with interest to the senate inquiry into



Message to Our Elected Representatives

Our message as Friends, on behalf of the ABC and of all thoughtful Australians, to Federal politicians of every political flavor is a simple one.

Work together to Restore the ABC –
restore its funding to allow it to do its job,
restore its voice to Asia and the Pacific,
restore short wave radio to service northern
parts of this vast land of ours and, also the
neighboring countries who complained
when broadcasting services were abruptly
discontinued.

The recent appointment of a new ABC
chair (though yet another 'captain's choice')
may well bear fruit.

Ita Buttrose is a respected media executive
and to date has made the right noises,
except for saying that she wanted to get
the ABC "functioning again".

What has the depleted staff with depleted
funding been doing every day for the last
5 years since the Abbott Government
determined to take \$254 million in funding
away and also break the Australia Network
contract?

The next item of news will be the choice of
the next CEO.

There are a number of 'captain's choices'
on the ABC board, which theoretically will
be selecting the best of the best.

Those with long memories remember the
reign of former ABC managing director
Jonathan Shier – scarcely an apolitical
appointment – and he had to be paid
off with \$1million dollars in 2001 after a
tumultuous 19 months.

Some of the current board determined
that Michelle Guthrie was the best choice
as CEO in 2015 – yet, she has received a
payout just revealed of \$1.63 million.

A disappointing appointment, and an even
more disappointing result.

Maybe the board members will
(hopefully, without government backroom
'assistance') do better this time.

The new ABC team will need the dollars
and cents to be able to provide what
is required of it through its Charter –

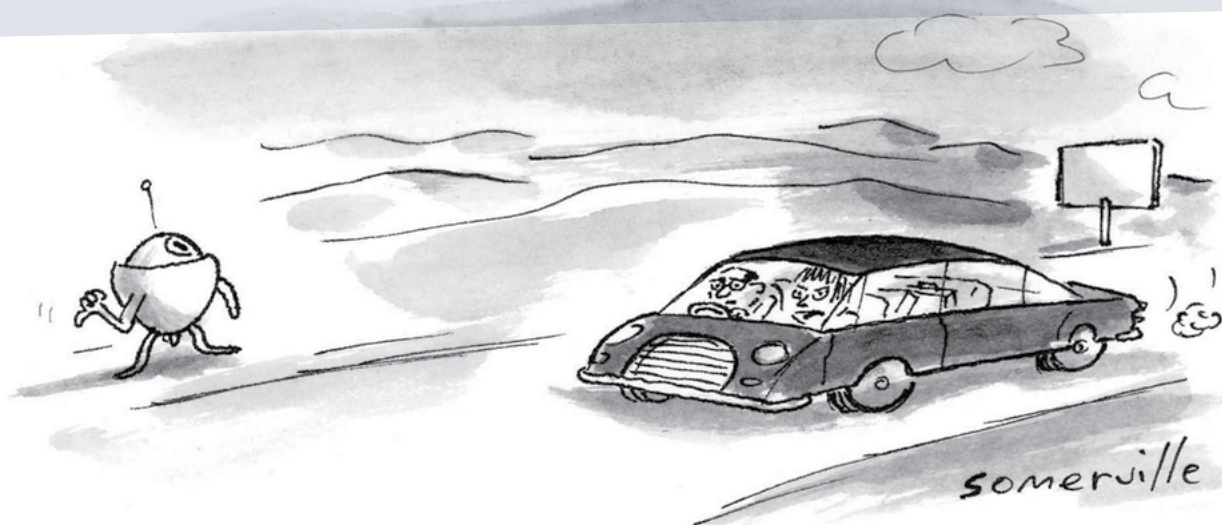
Australian content, an Australian voice,
courageous, independent journalism and
quality broadcasting through its 56 radio
outlets, four digital television channels and
its much used – particularly for childrens
programs – iview.

During the election campaign – ABC Friends
will be active nationally and in every State
and Territory to make certain the ABC,
its restoration and its future, is part of the
election discussion.

Please join us and spread the word.

We need more supporters, we need
generous donors through our Friends crowd
funding program – just about to be released
– and we need all political candidates to be
reminded that public broadcasting is a vital
part of our democratic way of life.

To even consider privatising, selling the
ABC off or further reducing its funding
is a sacrilege. Our next government, of
whatever hue, can – and must –
do better.



*"Jeeze...it's either an extra-terrestrial invasion or yet
another Independent campaigning on the Upper House ballot."*

WELCOME TO
QUEENSLAND'S ABC
FRIENDS AND
SUPPORTERS

ABC Friends at The Edge

Dr Mark Hayes
Media Officer,
ABC Friends, QLD



The Edge isn't named after U2's famed user of the Infinite Guitar.

It's a Queensland State Library managed facility tucked in behind the State Library and between the Library proper and the Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) on the southern bank of the Brisbane River, an easy amble from the city across Victoria Bridge and west from the ABC Queensland studios and newsroom at South Bank with the Channel 7 badged Ferris wheel outside.

Probably named The Edge because what's facilitated there is supposed to be edgy, 'out there', pushing boundaries in digital and mixed media creation and development, with several well-equipped technology, recording, meeting, and development labs and studios, and a 300-seat auditorium.

Perhaps a metaphor for the current state of Australian public broadcasting? If not teetering on the edge of abolition, then the edge of enforced irrelevance or impotence can be seen in the distance if continuing attacks aren't strongly resisted and fought off.

I'm barely into the complex when I see Kerry O'Brien and a colleague from ABC Friends Queensland lugging a couple of large boxes of Kerry's tome into the bookshop. Of course, I grab a box from Kerry and dump it on the bookshop counter.

Then come across a table with Ranald Macdonald, Margaret Reynolds, soon joined by other ABC Friends Queensland folks, and Kerry, for some pre-gig finalisation and caucusing.

Off to the auditorium to scope out the place and secure my 'spot', and UQ's UNESCO Professor of Communication, Peter Greste, walks by, resplendent in his motorbike leathers with helmet in hand. We've met a few times since his return from that awful Egyptian jail, and I reintroduce myself.

How stupid of the Egyptian government to let this convicted terrorist loose to become an internationally indefatigable media freedom campaigner with impregnable credibility now based at a major Australian university under the aegis of UNESCO. Maximum blow back against dominators trying to silence journalists, though they never give up, damn them.

Outside, ABC Friends Queensland colleagues are at merchandise tables, checking off attendees who've paid \$5 each to attend, and soliciting donations. GetUp! are outside also politely accosting people.

Wandering around to get a feel for the vibes I see Juris and Lois Greste. Such lovely people, with spines and wills of steel displayed during the campaign to free their son. They came independently because they're strong supporters of public broadcasting.

Back to my 'spot', psyching myself into

the zone of maximum concentration where professionals go when working, press the red record buttons on my devices, and forget about them.

Proceedings kicked off with ABC Friends Queensland President, Ross McDowell, welcoming the packed audience to country of the Yugarabul and Jagara Nations, paying respect to the elders past, present, and emerging.

Ranald Macdonald showed a series of promotional videos prepared by supporters of public broadcasting, making the point that several contributors had difficulties with their 'day job' employers in participating or giving of their talent and time.

Some are clever and cutting, some wry, some hilarious, some bitter, but I'm thinking the plight of public broadcasting has gotten beyond parody or ridicule, which have their places when confronting dominators who loathe it, and detest being ridiculed too, and needs some more anger and focused resistance.

'Focus. Zoom in. Frame and track the subject. Waiting. Waiting. Do something! Eyes open, mouth open, hands raised. Look this way. Press and click. Gotcha! And again... Glance around for any wider shots.'

National Vice-President, Prof. Ed Davis, waves a copy of Kerry's tome and then introduces him.

In calculated, measured, tones, first-

hand experienced, Kerry O'Brien holds the attentive crowd with his recitation of attacks on and responses to the attacks on the ABC.

"I've said to every ABC Friends' group that I've addressed going back over a very long time, ABC employees owe you all an enormous debt of gratitude for the unfailing support and loyalty that you have shown us, and for the trust that you continue to place in us," he said.

"We all have a huge stake in this. Our democracy is struggling. This is the point where the ABC should be audited, not where it's continually under attack," he concluded.

Rousing applause from the packed auditorium.

It was as if Australia held its breath and then exhaled with relief when the next speaker was released from the Egyptian prison, Prof Davis said, introducing Peter Greste.

Any ABC loather who reminded their tiny audience that UQ's Professor Greste is a convicted terrorist and thence must not be taken seriously would simply look or sound like a complete idiot, but the fact is Prof. Greste is just that. At least in Egypt.

Professor Greste sketched the crucial differences between state and public broadcasters, adding that commercial media also has its places in a healthy media landscape.

His major point being that politicians and public broadcasters are paid for and work for the public.

"In political debates we tend to forget something fundamental. Politicians work for us. We hire them when we cast our votes, and every time we pay our taxes, we pay their wages. Whatever they do is in our name. It is on behalf of us. That's how democracy works.

"As responsible employers, we need to know what's going on, and while some commercial news services do a very good job of covering politics, ultimately, we need a well-funded news service that is also accountable to us, working on our behalf, to keep watch over those in power," he said.

Another rousing round of applause.

Associate Professor Anna Potter, a scholar of children's television policy and content, would have surprised many by pointing out that, despite its much-lauded Charter, the ABC is not obligated to produce or broadcast children's television

content, though it obviously does. From a noticeable high in the earlier 2000s, in large part due to incessant budget



Top: Kerry O'Brien.
Right: Prof Ed Davis.
Below: Margaret Reynolds.





cuts, ABC children's programmes are shrinking. Dr Potter touched on the need for tied funding for the ABC to increase its children's output, acknowledging unease about any challenge to the ABC's independence by outsiders dictating how it spends or deploys its funding.

ABC Friends' National President, and one-time Queensland Senator still very well regarded up north, Margaret Reynolds agreed: "We cannot just walk away from this afternoon and say that was a great opportunity to hear Kerry O'Brien, Peter Grete, and Anna Potter," she said. "It was fantastic and they really motivated us to understand how serious the challenge is in the lead up to the federal election."

"ABC Friends is developing our campaign around marginal seats around Australia to encourage people to think about the serious risks to the ABC. It's not just a matter of defending the ABC," she said. "It's about voting for the candidates you trust with your ABC."

A dramatic, drumming advertisement for the ABC Friends crowd funding campaign was shown.

After a short break, a panel discussion with the speakers and some Q & As.

Prof Davis listed support for the ABC from the expected political parties, but asked Kerry O'Brien why there was no apparent support from the National Party, given the ABC's essential rural and regional broadcasting.

Mr O'Brien replied that, over the years, several senior National Party politicians had been quiet supporters of the ABC in Cabinet, despite periodic complaints about bias and similar. He recalled the legendary Paul Lockyer, tragically killed with two other ABC employees, on assignment, who was loved and respected by Rural Australia. The example of Paul Lockyer and others speaks volumes for the ABC in Rural Australia.

Above: The assembled speakers onstage. Right: Ronald McDonald.

"I've always said that the best response to our critics is to speak through our actions as programme makers," Mr O'Brien responded.

"Let National Party MP's explain themselves in their electorates as enemies or harsh critics of the ABC," he said.

"One of the key reasons why you are now seeing conservative independents doing so well. Because they know better," Mr O'Brien concluded.

Prof Davis sketched out ABC Friends' experience during the Wentworth by-election, where many voters in that bluest of safe Liberal electorates explained that while they've always voted Liberal, they hated what they're doing to the ABC. 'I'm voting for a candidate I trust with the ABC,' many voters said.

Margaret Reynolds observed that it may well be that the ABC is more reflective of mainstream Australian opinion than many politicians from the right and hard right of politics, and that's what rankles and provokes allegations of bias against the ABC because it doesn't reflect their views.

Loud applause.

Kerry O'Brien cautioned that, at times, the ALP, while apparently more supportive of the ABC than conservatives, had also been critical of the ABC, including imposing budget cuts, leading to then MD David Hill's 'the ABC costs Australians each eight cents a Day' campaign.

One question was asked about the ABC's overseas broadcasting, or lack



thereof, but Ms Reynolds, from her experience in government, suggested that an announcement might be made to restore shortwave services to at least the Northern Territory and remote Australia generally. This would be welcome but she also cautioned that attention remain focused on what the current government has already done to the ABC's overseas operations.

Proceedings were closed by Queensland ABC Friends President, Ross McDowell, who noted that no commercial media organisation could bring out so many people on a Sunday afternoon in its defence.

An excellent event at The Edge, a packed house with very informative speakers, and I was able to get heaps of good photographs on the day from my 'spots'.

And Kerry O'Brien couldn't autograph my copy of his tome because mine is an electronic version.

Before his retirement Dr Mark Hayes worked as a researcher, reporter and producer with ABC TVs 7.30 Report in Brisbane and Darwin. He also taught media and journalism at five Australian universities and the University of South Pacific.



ABC Funding: A Key Federal Election Issue

Professor Neville Jennings
Former President, ABC
Friends, Northern Rivers



With a federal budget due in April, and a federal election looming in May, the issue of funding for the ABC is likely to be a hot topic. Will the government make more cuts to the ABC, maintain the current level of funding or increase funding? The electorate at large should be arguing for an increase in funding to ensure that the ABC is able to fulfil the key functions outlined in its Charter.

Broadly speaking, the ABC's key obligations under its Charter are to broadcast high quality and innovative programs that inform, entertain and educate the Australian community, and contribute to a sense of national identity whilst reflecting our cultural diversity. This role includes expansion of its digital media services. The ABC is expected to engage internationally by transmitting programs that reflect an Australian perspective on current affairs and issues. It is expected to showcase Australian culture and values to the world, particularly in our Asia Pacific region. It is required to encourage and promote the development of Australian musical, dramatic and other performing arts.

With reference to these key functions, additional funding is required:

To provide an innovative, high quality and comprehensive service

Regional stations in particular need more funding to service their far-flung audiences. This is particularly so in times of emergency when regional ABC stations play a vital role during floods and bushfires as we have seen over this past summer. The government itself instructs people to tune in to local ABC radio but

what does this mean for poorly resourced regional stations? Sometimes it means that reporters in these regions work extraordinarily long shifts, even sleeping on the station premises because they are unable to get home and because they are dedicated to keeping the lines of communication open. Due to a lack of office staff in regional stations, it is often up to journalists to take phone calls. Increased staffing for regional stations should be a priority.

To enhance the ABC's contribution to our sense of national identity

One of the main ways of helping to build a sense of national identity is through broadcasting national sporting events. While ABC Grandstand performs a valuable role through its radio networks, budget cuts in past years have caused ABC TV to almost abandon the broadcasting of sporting events by our national teams. One often has to resort to Pay TV to watch our national teams in action. The ABC needs to be properly funded so that it can broadcast such events.

The ABC already broadcasts programs like Back Roads and Landline on TV and Australia All Over on Local Radio. These programs are very important in maintaining a sense of national identity. The ABC needs adequate funding to produce such programs that are unlikely to be aired by commercial media outlets.

ABC documentaries such as the recent program commemorating the Black Saturday Bushfires in Victoria are important in building a shared sense of community and identity. The broadcaster needs to do more of this.

To boost the ABC's assistance to Australians living or travelling overseas

Budget cuts in recent years have caused a very serious decline in the provision

of ABC programs to Australians living and travelling overseas. The federal government closed down the Australia Network in Asia and the Pacific in September 2014 and Radio Australia was closed down in March 2017 after providing 37 years of service to Pacific Nations. Both need to be restored.

To expand the provision of digital media services

The ABC has been very successful in expanding digital media services including the very popular iView service but this has been at the cost of other services. If the corporation was properly funded, it would not be necessary to cut other services. To have an influence in the Asia-Pacific our national broadcaster needs to employ 21st Century technologies.

To help the ABC encourage and promote musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia

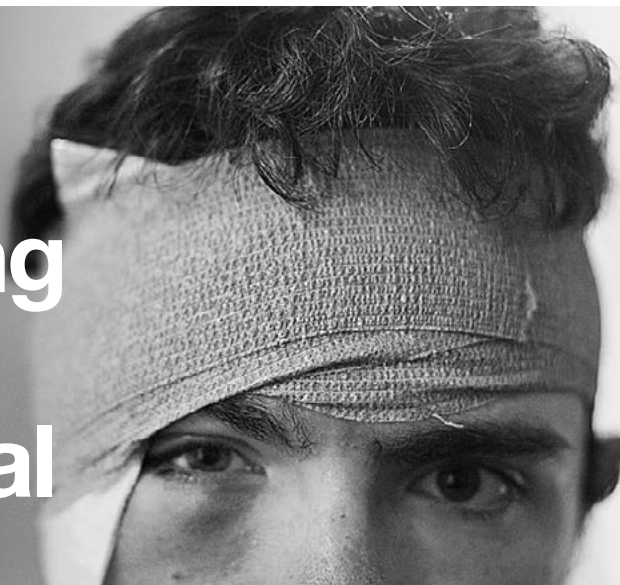
The ABC has had some success in broadcasting concerts by Paul Kelly, Crowded House and Missy Higgins and some Opera performances on TV as well as classical music concerts on ABC Radio. However a lot more could be done in this area. In recent years the ABC has produced some highly successful TV Drama with programs like Harrow and Mystery Road but these have been jointly funded. The ABC no longer has the drama production facilities that it had in the past. It can no longer provide cadetships for aspiring production staff. The ABC's ability to produce in-house drama should be enhanced and the Sunday afternoon Arts program that was successful in the past should be restored.

Whenever funding of public broadcasters is mentioned, the government responds in a bureaucratic manner by ordering an efficiency review. The argument is that these entities should be more productive with the funds that they receive. Such reviews rarely uncover any serious wastage. These are stalling tactics which may apply well to profit-making organisations but don't readily apply to public organizations such as the ABC with broad social charters.

Funding of the ABC is indeed a large expenditure item for the government but the corporation provides value for money and more funding is needed to ensure that it adequately fulfils its Charter.



ABC: Fighting for its Survival



Quentin Dempster
Former ABC broadcaster
and public broadcasting
advocate



Quentin spoke at a Politics in the Pub event in Sydney on 8 February. He began with a discussion on the usual attacks on the ABC that it is “biased and full of lefty journalists”. He pointed to the lack of evidence, the overwhelming confidence reflected in independent surveys that the ABC is fair and balanced and to the array of avenues for allegations of bias to be investigated. He went on to reflect on the enormous contribution made by ABC investigative programs which have exposed malpractice and corruption over the past few decades. The following are extracts from his address.

There is now a Royal Commission into Aged Care in this country following *Who Cares*, the Four Corners’ exposure, showing what may be systemic malpractice, failed quality assurance and under-servicing. Before the Productivity Commission and the South Australian Royal Commission, Background Briefing on Radio National last year broadcast two investigative specials *Best Laid Plans* by journalist Sarah Dingle exposing the first concerns about what’s known as “regulatory capture” of the Murray Darling Basin Authority. Who can forget Linton Besser’s Four Corners’ exposure of water theft from the Murray Darling?

Money for Nothing, another Four Corners program, shone a light on the AMP’s less than tender mercy for its trusting investor clients. *Weather Alert*

showed how the farmers of Australia were already dealing with and adapting to climate change, well ahead of political leaders who can hardly bring themselves to utter the words. Adele Ferguson, Fairfax and the ABC’s Four Corners exposed Comminsure and bad banking, and the negligible enforcement by regulators ASIC and APRA leading to the Hayne Royal Commission whose findings were published this week.

When then Prime Minister Julia Gillard saw ABC *Lateline* reports showing police cover up of child sexual abuse allegations within the Maitland-Newcastle Diocese of the Catholic Church she called state Premiers (Labor and Coalition) to set up a royal commission into responses of all institutions, not just the Catholic Church.

Friends, the public benefit which comes from your taxpayer investment in the ABC is clear for all to see. Institutional culture in relation to sexual abuse is changing to ensure that in future Australia’s children will be better protected from predators.

In my time at the ABC in Queensland and New South Wales the code of silence that was behind corrupt police culture was smashed. The cops didn’t fight crime, together with their criminal associates, they organised it. They verbed people and lied under oath in the witness box. It was vicious. A corrupt political culture in Bjelke-Petersen’s Queensland and the Sussex Street branch of the Labor Party in New South Wales was exposed. The polity now knows what really goes on behind so many closed doors thanks to the ABC, its journalists, in-house lawyers and its courageous informants.

The entrenched disadvantage of Aboriginal Australians has been brought to light fearlessly by the ABC from the 1960s with the conclusion that dispossession lies as its root cause. We particularly remember the work of the late Liz Jackson. May she rest in peace.

The ABC is committed by its legislated Charter to strive for excellence in its independent, without-fear-or-favour journalism and its programming across all genres. If that’s not worth eight cents a day I don’t know what is. The ABC strengthens Australian democracy. As part of a free media it safeguards the separation of powers. And now the ABC is evolving and breaking new ground through the digital revolution. More people are accessing content through smart phones and digital devices. This is the content-on-demand era and the ABC must be on all platforms where audiences are hungry for quality and engaging video, audio and text.

2019 ABC’s Future at Stake

There are contemporary allegations of political interference at the highest level; these are now being explored by a Senate Inquiry. For audiences, the defunding of the ABC has been devastating. The most recent round of defunding was initiated in 2014. Then PM Tony Abbott dishonoured his election commitment that there would be “no cuts to the ABC or SBS” and inflicted cuts of \$254 million on the ABC. Let’s examine the impact:

- Lateline is gone. Stateline is gone. Four Corners’ budget has been hacked into.
- The Drum, a text based online publication to facilitate the clash of ideas with opinion, research and analysis to inform and engage Australians has been closed down.
- The original Fact Checking specialist staff unit has been axed.
- ABC television productions in Brisbane, Hobart, Adelaide and Perth have been closed down.
- Radio news bulletins and radio current affairs shows have been defunded, staff slashed and broadcast time reduced.
- Foreign Correspondent has been reduced to ever fewer outings.
- The ABC drama budget and output has been slashed.
- Documentaries are increasingly cheap and low quality buy-ins.

- Radio Australia is now just a website with podcasts.

Then Foreign Minister Julie Bishop destroyed the ABC's Asia Pacific broadcasting effort in 2014 when she unilaterally terminated the DFAT Australia Network contract. The ABC lost the great Sean Dorney and 80 wonderful international broadcasters operating out of Melbourne and in situ correspondents throughout the region. Vandalism.

There are forces in this country out to destroy the ABC and public broadcasting. The Liberal Party peak council carried a resolution on June 15 last year to privatise the ABC. The parliamentary Liberal Party says it is not bound by this. But neither the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, nor the Communications Minister, Senator Mitch Fifield, nor any other prominent voice in the Liberal Party has said they will seek to have the party rescind this policy.

The National Party has been mute. Even though many National Party MPs know the ABC's services and programs are vital to their rural and regional constituents, no one in the Nationals has gone in to bat for the ABC. Where's Barnaby? Where's Michael McCormack? We seem to have lost Pauline Hanson. She didn't take kindly to the ABC's exposure of One Nation's own distressed members, branch treasurers and executive officials who went on camera to complain about her dictatorial administration of their party.

At this very moment the \$41.4million provided over three years for what's called the ABC Enhanced Newsgathering Program is soon expected to be discontinued. Senator Fifield has yet to pronounce its termination. If and when he does the ABC will have to restructure its regional digital state-based news gathering.

The \$83.7million so called 'indexation pause' announced in Mr Morrison's 2018 budget will apply from July 1 this year. The loss of these funds is likely to result in the retrenchment of around 400 broadcasters and support staff and yet another constraint or restructure of program output. This comes on top of defunding of \$254million in operational base funding since 2014 with the termination of 1000 full time equivalent staff.

The ABC desperately needs to be refunded to rebuild its capacity. Bring back Lateline. Bring back Stateline.

Rebuild Foreign Correspondent to 46 weeks a year. Build more specialisation into Radio National, not less. Every piece of distinctive audio and video can be used to much greater and cost effective audience engagement through digital devices. Reverse the ABC's Sydney-centrism which has resulted from defunding. Rebuild regional and state-based radio and digital programming. Rebuild science and educational programming. More live broadcasts from Australia's great orchestras on Classic FM. More original Australian music

composition broadcast on Triple J. Rebuild ABC international broadcasting before Xi Jinping and the politburo in Beijing win all the hearts and minds of our Pacific neighbours. Build innovative content creation to take the ABC into the digital future so that its great contribution to the success of Australia as a functioning cohesive democracy is guaranteed.

Friends, we now have to stand up for the ABC and all it provides to the Australian people.



MEDIA RELEASE

The Appointment of Ita Buttrose to the ABC Chair

The Federal Government has again ignored proper process in announcing the appointment of Ita Buttrose as ABC Chair. While Ms Buttrose is a well-respected Australian with wide experience in print media, she comes to this leadership role with no specific broadcasting or digital skills so essential to overseeing the future of the ABC.

The Government referred the ABC Chair vacancy to a recruitment firm last October and shortlisted names recommended by the Nominations Panel were sent to the Prime Minister's office for consideration in January. It appears the appointment of Ms Buttrose has been made outside this standard process..

Furthermore, the ABC legislation requires the Prime Minister to consult the Leader of the Opposition on the appointment of the ABC Chair, yet no such advice has been sought from Bill Shorten.

It is unfortunate that Ms Buttrose commences her term in such circumstances.

ABC Friends hopes Ms Buttrose will send strong signals to all Australians that she will uphold the independence of the ABC and become a passionate advocate for the national public broadcaster developing new directions within Australia and the Asia Pacific region.

After the last few years of controversy, severe funding cuts and allegations of political interference it will be essential that the new ABC Chair Ms Buttrose develop close links with the vast majority of Australians who trust the ABC and want to see it better respected and enabled to meet its Charter obligations to provide diverse programming and a wide range of services.

Margaret Reynolds

National President, ABC Friends



State News

Victoria

Many of the Victorian groups have been focusing on campaigning in the marginal seats. However there has been much activity besides.

Visiting Labor MP and candidates

Local groups have visited the following Labor MPs or candidates in quite safe Labor seats: Lisa Chester (MP Bendigo), Richard Marles (MP Corio), Kate Thwaites (new candidate for Jagajaga), Ged Kearney (MP Cooper) and Peter Khalil (MP Wills). We have all received a good reception, though they were not always as well informed about ABC matters as we had hoped. With the recent visits, the candidates/MPs have also satisfactorily completed the questionnaire. One MP commented that it was good that we visited her, as it meant that she could go back to Bill Shorten and say that the ABC was important to her constituents.

As Kate Thwaites (identified in photo), who was a former ABC reporter, did not have a campaign office, the Northern Melbourne group met her at a local café.

Helping with marginal seats

Groups were also helping with the marginal seats campaign. Twice the Northern group have risen in the dark to travel over to the Chisholm electorate to hand out 'When you vote...' flyers at railway stations to catch people on their way to work.

Fundraising/group building

Those groups that have had successful fundraisers in the past have continued. Geelong group has had film nights and the Southern Bayside group has had it theatre afternoons at Mordialloc Theatre. Both groups have commented that besides raising money these events have given members a way of introducing ABC Friends to their relatives and friends as well as being a means of group building.

The Southern Bayside group also sold over 400 of the 2019 calendars. Neville Bartlett, who produced the calendar using his photos of birds, donated his work at cost price and Southern Bayside did the hard work of distributing them.

Speakers

Ivor Donohue from Southern Bayside group has spoken about the ABC and ABC Friends to Torquay Probus and to U3A Kingston. Other people have spoken to community and other U3A groups.

Street and other stalls

Many groups have had stalls at markets, festivals and on the street. At some of these, hundreds of signatures to a brief letter to Fifield (Minister of Communication) were collected. These were sent off with a covering letter indicating the number of signatures and when and where they were collected. Even though he has received at least six lots of these, as yet there has been no acknowledgement.

We have also started sending a letter to Michelle Rowlands (Shadow minister for Communications) and to the local MP giving the same information.

We have also given out a number of handouts, especially the *Fact Sheets* that have been largely well received. It is rare to receive a negative response, and at a Castlemaine stall there were only positive responses.

The Northern Melbourne group always has Mr Squiggle at their stalls. He is greatly admired, even by the children who have not seen him on TV.

Up to the elections at least eight stalls are organised to be held in various locations (and the Castlemaine group are having them in various towns). This is over and above the ones to be held in the marginal seats.

Furthermore

Mr Squiggle sits up straight on a bookcase at the home of one of our members. One morning during the troubles with the ABC board and CEO he had fallen over. Is that his comment?



Left: Meeting with Kate Thwaites (end right). Right: Handing out fact sheets. Above: Mr Squiggle out for the count.



Victorian Marginal Seats Campaign Swings into Action

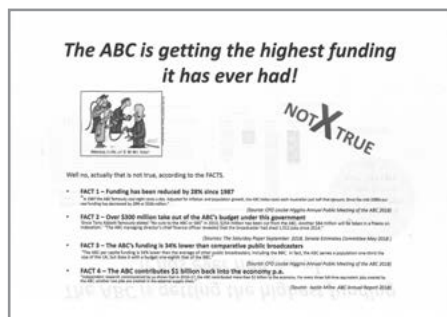
The Victorian Marginal Seats activity has really started to build through our wonderful ABC Friends' Local Groups in each of the marginal electorates. The 2018 year ended with a great effort by ABCF volunteers led by Sally Moseby to hand out thousands of flyers at the internationally famous Boxing Day Test at the MCG. Using a purpose built flyer Sally's group made a big impact, with most of the crowd very pleased to see them and receptive to the message.



The New Year kicked off in January with a Briefing Day for about 35 of our local group leaders. Beginning with National Media Adviser, Ranald Macdonald, and President Peter Monie bringing the group up to date with national news, events and plans, a session that was warmly welcomed and stimulated active discussion, the session went on to discuss the best ways to conduct meetings with political sitting members and candidates and how to handle and counter statements that misrepresent the 'facts' about our ABC, such as the reality of ABC recent funding, independence and criticisms.



This was a great opportunity for our locals to meet the committee members, engage with each other, and swap success stories. Every attendee was given a parcel of relevant information to take away, including an expanded 'FACT' manual with real answers to common mistruths that are banded about frequently – Scott Morrison's "The ABC is getting the highest funding it's ever had" is one you might have heard recently; a bald faced lie.



In fact the day was so well received that additional briefing days are already planned in the run up to the election campaign proper - the next one on 30 March.

Meanwhile a huge amount of 'grass roots' activity in each of the marginal electorates has been planned and is now taking place, from stalls at prominent and local festivals and markets through to banner waving on major road overpasses at peak traffic time.



in Victoria are also putting pressure on the Opposition to come up with firm commitments in support of the ABC.

All that frontline action is being backed up by strategically placed, prominent strong messages that have been booked on trains and billboards with good visibility in the right places – across the road from sitting government members with slim margins for example. Those messages will be in place through the months and weeks prior to the federal election that we expect to take place in the second half of May.

Watch out for an avalanche of marginal seats activity in Victoria over the next



Letter writing and emailing programs will be made over coming weeks to the PM, Communications Minister and nervous MP's vulnerable to a small swing away from the Coalition. Demonstrations in front of Ministerial offices will attract attention from the public and from independent media and highlight the ABC as a real election issue. Face-to-face meetings with Labor shadow Ministers resident

three months! Not just billboards, but flyer handouts, banners, meetings outside key ministerial offices, candidates' forums, direct meetings with candidates in Chisholm, Corangamite, Deakin, Dunkley, La Trobe and Macnamara.

Marcus May

Convenor, Victorian Marginal Seats Campaign Group, ABC Friends Vic

Tasmania

In Launceston recently ABC Friends conducted a survey about community attitudes to the ABC. Working from their stall in the central city mall, the Northern Tasmanian Branch focussed on assessing just how well the general public understood the threats to our national public broadcaster.

They found a majority of passers by were keen to stop and talk about the ABC and their detailed recognition of issues was more than expected.

92% of people approached were totally opposed to privatisation and a similar number knew the ABC Budget had been dramatically reduced in recent years.

70% were sufficiently concerned to say their vote at the next Federal Election would be influenced by how candidates and their parties promised to treat the ABC in the future after several years of political interference.

In this survey people identified funding cuts, staffing levels and support, Australian content, rural services and privatisation as their major concerns.

In addition, the survey revealed that people were worried about the way ABC Board appointments had been made with little regard for following the rules to ensure relevant media and communications expertise was prioritised in establishing an ABC Board skilled in tackling current challenges.

ABC Friends considers that this survey reveals that Australian Public Broadcasting will be on the agenda as people consider their vote at the May election.

Tasmanian ABC Friends is preparing its marginal seats campaign in Bass, Braddon and Lyons, as well as the Senate to remind all candidates of their responsibility to value and protect the ABC.

Margaret Reynolds

President, ABC Friends National Inc

South Australia

Last year, our end-of-year luncheon was held on 18 November at the Public Schools Club. Guest speaker was the ever popular author and ABC Defender, Mem Fox. The tenor of Mem's talk is exemplified by part of her introduction.

"I'm an ABC fanatic. If I had my way, I'd have a Radio National digital chip inserted behind my ear, so it was with me at all times, with one simple press of my finger."

Mem went on to applaud the work of ABC Friends and to talk about the importance of the ABC and how her career path was influenced by our public broadcaster. Mem held the audience spell bound with her humour and insights.

November 16 to 18 saw us representing ABC Friends National at the National Labor Conference at the Adelaide Convention Centre. Not having been involved in one, it was quite an eye opener.

The fee paid for our exhibition space provided our name ABC Friends National prominently displayed, power, two tables, chairs and wall space for use. The day

before we had to adhere to strict time frames for delivery of our stall materials to a docking bay. We were fortunate that 17 of our members volunteered to help us run the stall over the three days, Sunday to Monday.

This year there were 400 delegates representing branches and the Labor leadership across Australia. Before the conference, voting delegates are able to propose amendments and resolutions to Labor's draft National Platform which is circulated to delegates one month prior to Conference. At the conference there were three days of continuous plenary sessions in which delegates voted on changes to refine and finalise the Party Platform - Labor's Agenda. We were provided with two Observer passes for the plenary sessions, so we could see how things were run. Whenever the ABC was mentioned (e.g. Bill Shorten's introductory speech), the audience showed support. ABC Friends made some gains re changes to the National Platform on the ABC. The changes are what we would all consider improvements, including a change from "adequate funding" to "significant and increasing funding". There was also a commitment not to privatise the ABC.

Our booth was in a prime position, just outside a door into the plenary sessions. This meant that many people came up to our booth in a show of support, including delegates and politicians. We were pleased to sell a lot of our merchandise.

A "Fringe Program", like a festival of ideas, ran alongside the plenary sessions which for \$10 (concession)/\$30 members of the public could access. Amongst others, I



Guest speaker Mem Fox at the end of year luncheon.



Top: Members Ann Inglis and Bill Kidd helping out at the National Labor Conference Middle: Kristina Keneally and Sandra Kanck at the National Labor Conference Bottom: NC Committee outside Hotel Kurrajong.



attended a session on “Australia’s Role in the Pacific. A new era under Labor” with Gareth Evans, MPs Penny Wong and Richard Marles, and hosted by Jemima Garrett. Jemima has had more than three decade’s experience reporting on the region for the ABC. This session was of especial interest as last year, on behalf of ABC Friends National, I had written a submission to the Government Review: Australian Broadcasting Services into the Asia-Pacific. The government is currently considering the findings of the long-awaited report but has not revealed when they might be made public.

Aussie Kanck and I represented SA/NT at the ABC Friends National Conference in Canberra on 2 and 3 February, held at the historic Kurrajong Hotel. This conference was an opportunity to discuss, face to face, our activity as a national organisation over the past year, our strategy leading into the federal election and there was a very useful session on governance in which our responsibilities as “board” members were explored.

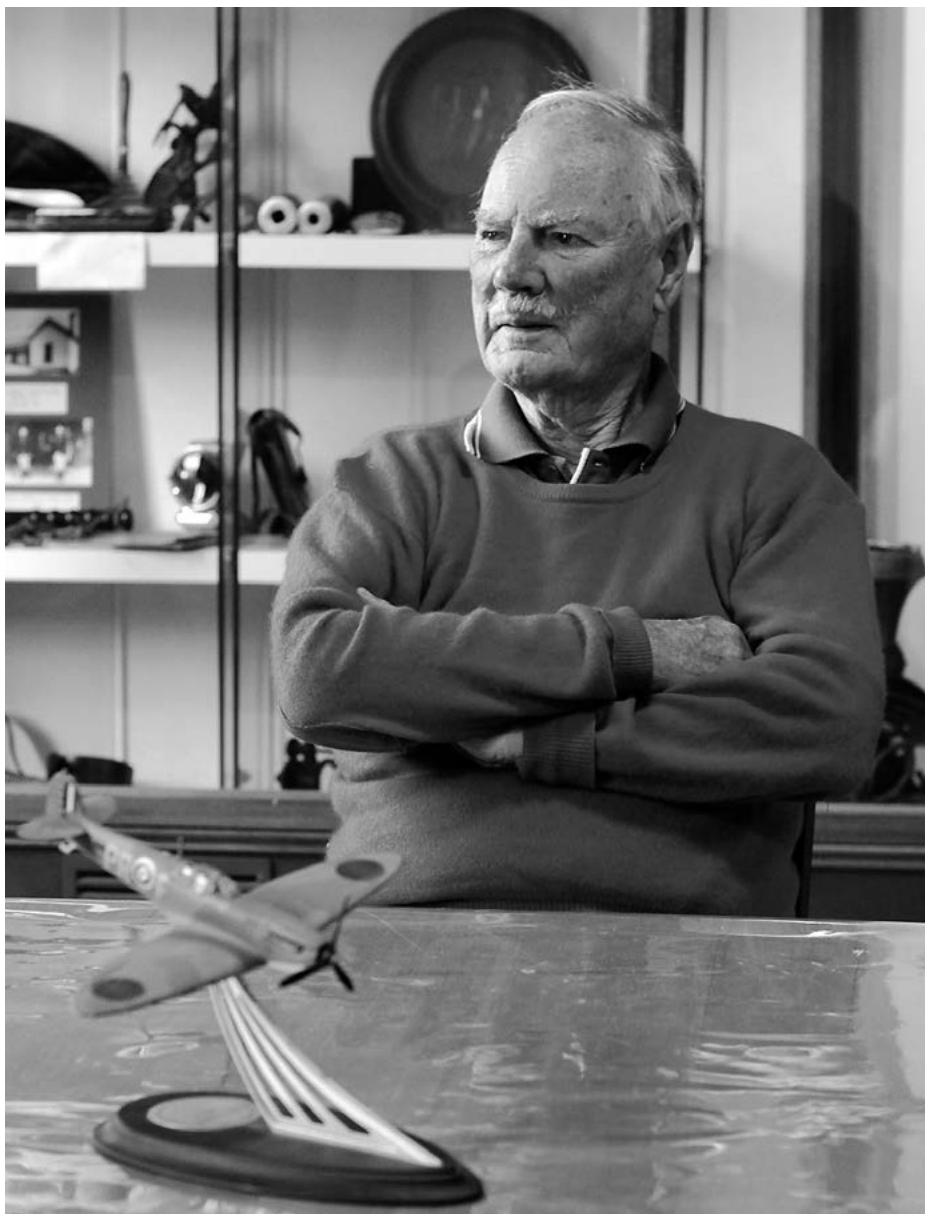
In the coming election Friends of the ABC SA/NT will be working in the electorates of Boothby, Grey, Mayo and Sturt. One major focus will be surveying candidates in these electorates about their support for the ABC. We will then analyse responses and group candidates as high/moderate/low/no support for the ABC and urge voters in these electorates to “Vote for the candidate who best supports your ABC”. We will also attend candidate meetings, hold stalls where we can, and attend, on polling and pre-polling days (except for Grey), the busiest booths in electorates to hand out our “How to Vote” cards.

Our SA committee has been heartened by the response of members to help out during the election.

The ABC Adelaide’s Gardeners’ Market is on again on Saturday 13 April. The Gardening Australia gang will be there as part of their 30 year celebrations. See you at our Friends stall!

Sue Pinnock
President, ABC Friends SA





Mile-high Charlie listened to the ABC

Rowley C. (Charlie) Miller, OAM, a member of ABC Friends SA/ NT, has been listening to the ABC for many years. His family moved to Mt Gambier in 1938 and used to listen to the ABC based in Horsham, preferring it to the Mt Gambier-based station. In the war, he joined the air force and was trained in Kitty Hawks which he said were much more comfortable than the Spitfires he later flew in WA and the Borneo Campaign. While training Charlie could link the plane radio to ABC and listen to programs while he was doing aerial loops and other manoeuvres. He could get 3WV at 15000 - 20000 feet in a fighter plane and listen to classical music. At 95 Charlie (whose email name is spitfirecharlie) is still an avid supporter of the ABC!

Sue Pinnock
President, ABC Friends SA

Western Australia

We are gearing up for the federal election campaign coming soon. As you know, ABC Friends is politically unaligned, but we can inform our members and the public in general which parties and candidates have the most positive attitudes towards our ABC. As candidates become known, we will be sending them a questionnaire asking a range of questions: about privatisation, funding, the independence of ABC board and management, services to rural and regional areas, broadcasting into Asia and the Pacific region, keeping the ABC free of political interference, and whether they believe the ABC should be providing a high standard of programming. Responses will be posted on our website – as will non-responses!

We are seeking volunteers to hand out flyers anywhere people gather, such as outside train and bus stations, and at polling booths on election day, concentrating on the most marginal seats. We will be providing white t-shirts with the slogan 'I love my ABC and I vote' to all volunteers. This has proved to be an effective strategy at recent elections in other states, such as the Wentworth by-election in NSW.

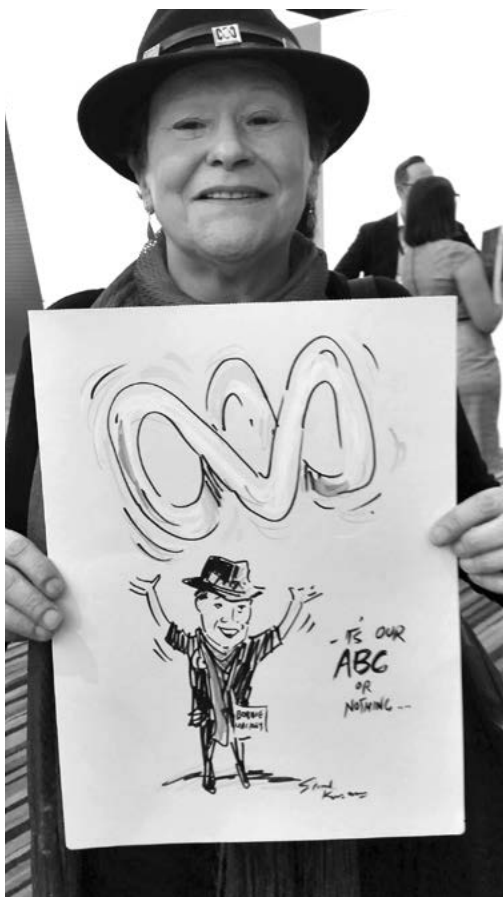
The WA marginal seats are (margin % in brackets):

Cowan (0.7), Hasluck (2.1), Perth (3.3), Pearce (3.6), Swan (3.6), Stirling (6.1) and Canning (6.8).

If you would like to volunteer to help with our election campaign, please email us at wa@abcfriends.org.au or call me on 0422 489 711 (office hours only please – though the 'office' is a small room in my home).

During the last few AGMs, and in emails, we have been alerting members that fees will increase to bring us in line with ABC Friends in other states: a requirement if we want to take advantage of membership services that will be available via our new website - now only a matter of weeks away (at last!). As a result, the WA committee has determined that fees will increase from 1 April this year. This will not affect you until the time comes for you to renew your membership – for most of you, that will be at the end of June; for the rest, the anniversary of the date you first joined. The fee increase – the first in way more than a decade - is very modest and there will be a new option of a reduced three-year renewal. There will also be easier payment options.

I visited Adelaide in December, for personal



Bobbie at ALP National Conference
Cartoonist: Simon Kneebone (SA)
Photo: Aussie Kanck (ABCF-SA)



WA Committee 2018/19. L-R: Janet Matthews, Jenny Meyrick, Cathy Bardon, Bobbie Mackley, Terri Brown, Bevan Carter, Michael Dowling (absent: Elizabeth Long, Leuba McMaugh) .

reasons and also to assist ABC Friends SA with their stall at the ALP National Conference. The three-day conference was a very interesting, informative and useful experience (see ABCF-SA's report and the photo included here). I travelled at my own expense and stayed with the very hospitable SA president, Sue Pinnock.

On behalf of your committee of volunteers, thanks for your continued support – the ABC needs the public's support more than ever!

Bobbie Mackley
President WA

Queensland

8,600 ABC Lovers Show Support at Woodford Folk Festival

The annual Woodford Folk Festival, now in its 25th year, briefly becomes the 15th largest Queensland 'town', attracting as many as 25,000 people a day and 140,000 over the four days it runs.

For once, the 2018–2019 Festival wasn't burdened by torrential rain.

It was also probably the last Woodford Festival to be attended by regular

'Woodfordian', former PM, Bob Hawke.

ABC Friends mounted a stall for the duration of the Festival, often staffed by ticket-holding Festival attendees who had to miss some of the performances on the several stages.

"We would like to thank the Woodford Festival management team for providing the space for our stall at no cost to us," ABC Friend, Richard Proudfoot, said.

"The large crowds and good weather helped provide a steady stream of



State News

visitors to our stall," Ms Fiona Proudfoot, once known as Thelma 38 in the Argonauts, added.

"The response from the public on the ruthless treatment of the ABC by the Howard, Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison governments was the most telling and focussed, and in many instances, emotional, that many of us have ever encountered," she said.

"The overwhelming responses of anger, disappointment, hurt, loss and frustration were almost universal from people of all ages and across the political spectrum.

"Not surprisingly, many of those most upset were country people," Mr Proudfoot said.

"In many instances, the first words expressed by stall visitors were along the lines of 'I love the ABC', Ms Proudfoot said.

"This led to the collection of 1,061 email addresses from people who expressed interest in joining Friends or receiving information on what they can do to 'stop the rot'," he said.

"In addition, people donated (unsolicited) many hundreds of dollars to Friends," he said.

ABC Friends at Woodford Folk Festival attracted a stream of concerned ABC devotees.

Dr Mark Hayes

Publicity Officer, ABC Friends Qld

New South Wales

Late last year I was invited to talk to a number of organisations about the crisis facing Australian public broadcasting. I addressed meetings of the Retired Telstra Members in Sydney and the Parramatta Teachers Association. The Telstra members declared on the spot that they would join the Friends as an associated organisation and presented me with a cheque for \$120. In late November, Friends joined with Gleebooks in launching Kerry O'Brien's *A Memoir* and I was asked to introduce Kerry and RN's Fran Kelly, who played her familiar role of interviewer. Kerry's book is a fascinating account of his career in the media and his observations on the characters that he interviewed. It makes a very powerful case for public interest journalism as essential for the health of Australian democracy. It deserves a place on your bookshelf!

I attended the launch of ABC Alumni at the ABC. There were stirring speeches by Matt Peacock, Kerry O'Brien, Professor Fiona Stanley and ABC Acting Managing Director, David Anderson. The function was well-attended and engaged a Who's Who of ABC producers and presenters. Matt, among other things, stressed his appreciation of the work done by Friends and his anticipation that the ABC Alumni and Friends will work closely together in their shared mission of seeing well-funded and independent public broadcasting.

I met with David Anderson soon after the

launch and was very impressed by his obvious and deep commitment to the ABC and his determination to fight for increased funding to enable the ABC to deliver high quality services; indeed, to fulfill its Charter obligations.

Recent events supported by NSW Friends include a Politics in the Pub discussion, which featured talks by Quentin Dempster and Senior Fairfax writer, Deborah Snow on *The Independence of the ABC and Australian Democracy* (extracts of Quentin's speech are reproduced in this Update) and a discussion between Julian Morrow (Chaser and Checkout) and Kerry O'Brien at the Giant Dwarf Theatre.

The last month has been particularly busy with addresses to the ABC's Advisory Council; to the Voices for Warringah Forum on Protect the ABC (the other speakers were former ABC presenter Anne Maria Nicholson, former Head of ABC TV Sandra Levy and Quentin Dempster); and, to a meeting of the ABC Alumni on Friends' plans and strategy for the forthcoming federal election. I also attended the compelling Brisbane launch, covered elsewhere in this Update.

Events to come at the time of writing include a forum in Wentworth on The Arts and Public Broadcasting on 26 March and the launch of ABC journalist and former presenter of *Media Watch* Jonathon Holmes' new book, *Aunty*, at Gleebooks on 27 March.

Prof Ed Davis AM

NSW Friends President

NSW: Getting Ready for the Federal Election

ABC Friends NSW&ACT are working hard on their '**Save the ABC**' campaign for the 2019 federal election. The campaign will focus on as many marginal seats as possible. All NSW branches and the ACT Regional Branch are planning a range of activities including:

- Engagement with key candidates via a survey and where possible through meetings with candidates, to assess their stand on ABC funding and independence
- Developing and distributing materials at market stalls and at community events; these will highlight the damage being done to the public broadcaster by current and previous government's cuts and attacks.

Voters will be urged to '**Vote for the candidate you trust with our ABC**'.

- Contacting other groups who are going to be active in supporting the ABC during the election, and trying to engage the media to amplify our messages around the need to Save the ABC
- Preparing How to Vote cards, and organising volunteers to distribute these during the polling period
- Attending key candidate forums to ask questions about the ABC's future
- Promoting the campaign through social media and public events
- Preparing advertising around the campaign.

The key seats we hope to cover in NSW will be:

Page and Richmond (Northern Rivers branch); Robertson and Dobell (Central

Coast Branch); Armidale (New England Branch); Eden-Monaro, Gilmore and Canberra (ACT Region

Branch); Lindsay and Macquarie (Blue Mountains); Wentworth, Reid, Banks and Warringah (Sydney Branch).

NSW Friends should watch out for **email blasts** as we get closer to the election. We will be sending information to all NSW Friends and asking for help as we get closer to the election. Please get in touch with us if you would like to participate in our activities and if you have any useful contacts in the targeted seats.

NSW Friends should **watch out for our new NSW campaign Facebook page** – it will keep you informed about what's happening and things you can do. Please like us and share the stories and information with all your friends, family and contacts!

NSW Branch News

ACT

ABC Friends ACT Region group's election activities will run from Yass in the north down to Eden and the Victorian border, and from Tumut in the west across to the southern NSW coast, picking up Canberra on the way. It will cover two marginal electorates, Eden-Monaro and Gilmore, as well as the three in the ACT – Fenner, Canberra and Bean. While most of our election effort will go into the marginals, we also see the election as an opportunity to ensure that all candidates (and the community at large) are aware that ABC supporters are a political force that can't be ignored.

Thanks to some talented group members we've produced a great banner (above, thanks Viv Lightfoot) and a set of three slim

ABCF bookmarks that succinctly raise awareness about ABC issues. (Thanks to Gia Metherell for design, and to Jenny Cameron for sponsoring some of these.) The bookmarks are popular and a bit more versatile than larger leaflets, so very good to hand out to people going to concerts and at other events. They also work well as conversation starters at local markets and festivals, which have provided good opportunities for us to speak about the ABC to a broad cross section of the population. (Well over 90% of people we approach respond positively, so we reckon that the often-quoted 80% level of trust in the ABC must be an underestimation of people's attitudes!)

As we move from general awareness-raising into election campaign mode, our group has contacted local

candidates to let them know that we'll be seeking meetings to capture their views on key ABC issues – and that this information will be used in our campaigns. Following advice from more experienced campaigners, we don't plan to organise our own election forums (a lot of effort, only attract the converted, etc) but will try to attend other forums to hand out our material and ask pertinent questions.

Campaigning will be a lot of work – but we also think it can be fun, and an opportunity to meet and talk with lots of interesting people. If you'd like to join us on the (various) hustings – Gilmore, Eden-Monaro, or the ACT - do get in touch at abcfriendsintheactregion@gmail.com. We'd love to have you on board!

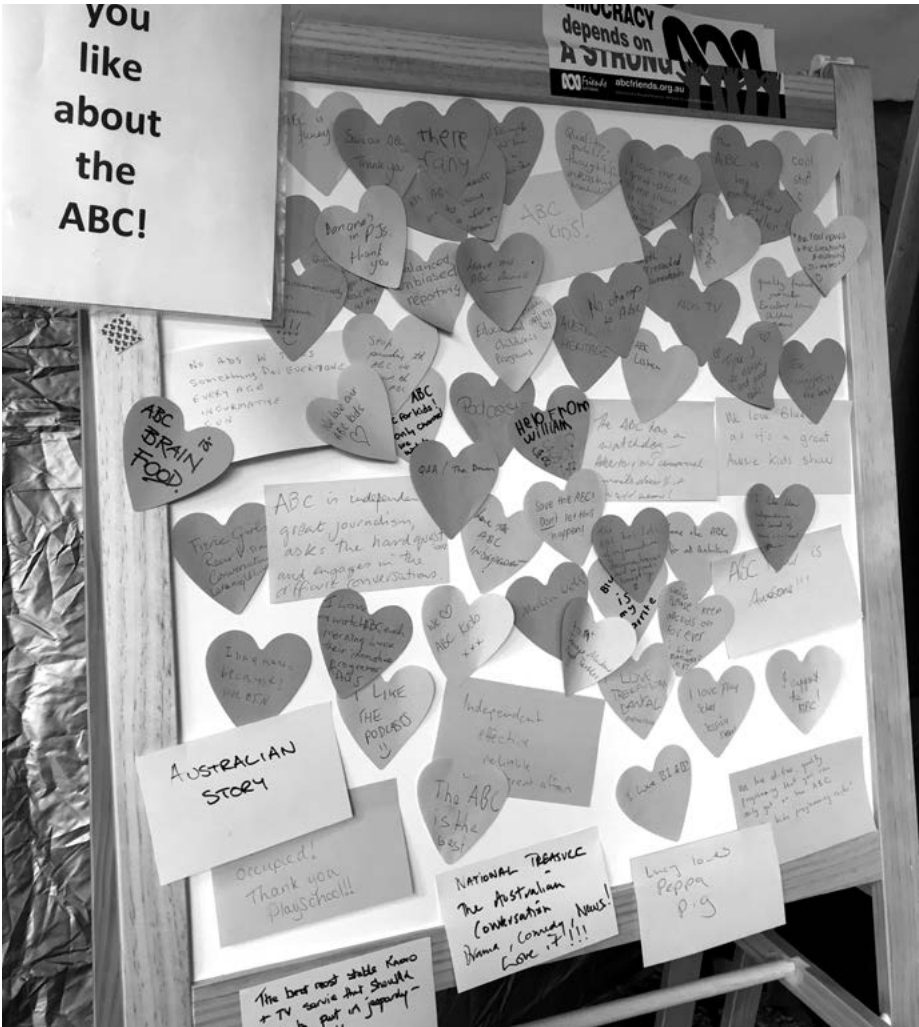
Peter Lindenmayer
President, ABC Friends ACT



Left: ACT's banner. Below: ACT Members man their streetstall. Overleaf: Another great idea from ACT.



NSW Branch News



Hunter

In February the Hunter Branch's first meeting for the year was well-attended by members who expressed their concerns about the lack of adequate funding support and constant Government interference in the national broadcaster.

Members reviewed the boundaries of the various electorates in the Hunter region, their profiles and the current political party representation. It is anticipated that there will be no change of the representatives in the four nearest Hunter regional electorates.

While it appears that there are no “swinging seats” in this region, members nevertheless voted to establish a Federal election sub-committee to prepare a campaign agenda. This will include holding meetings with all lower house candidates to raise their awareness of the ABC and its current needs, as well as to seek their views about the ABC’s future role in providing news services both at a national and international level. Hunter

members are also keen to contact Senate candidates so that voters are also made aware of their attitudes about the national broadcaster.

The Hunter Branch's campaign sub-committee will start its planning schedule shortly after the NSW State election. Hunter members also expressed their willingness to assist other ABCF branches which are located in electorates with potential changes of representation.

Margaret Conners
Publicity Officer, ABC Friends Hunter

Central Coast

Our branch on the Central Coast has started planning our campaign in the electorates of Robertson and Dobell. The main proposal is a function featuring John Cleary on Friday 3 May. John is a former ABC broadcaster, most notably on ABC Radio National's Religion Report and the Sunday Nights program on ABC Local Radio. As a former federal president of the staff union and staff-elected director,

John has been a vigorous and forthright advocate for public broadcasting. He continues to maintain that commitment as a member of the ABC Alumni and his presence will be of enormous assistance to us leading up to the election. The Central Coast branch has forwarded the ABC Friends questionnaire to the members for Robertson and Dobell seeking their views about independence and funding for the ABC. This has also been emailed to the ALP candidate for Robertson and we will forward questionnaires to all other candidates who announce their intention to stand. Once we receive their responses, we can prepare our advice on voting. Our intention is to distribute brochures rating each candidate at community events and functions, including the Gosford markets where we have promoted our functions last year. They will also appear in local newspapers and online platforms. On Saturday 16 March I will be attending a forum convened by GetUp! The event enables like-minded community organisations to explain their purpose and strategies for the election, it will take place at the Gosford Anglican Church, the parish of Father Rod Bower. We plan to defend public broadcasting at other community events over the coming months, particularly those where candidates are present. On Saturday 9 March some of our members attended a social morning where ideas and opinions were exchanged about local advocacy, the ABC and its future challenges. We hope to meet with as many members as we can at events such as this to explain our approach and hear their thoughts.

Ross McGowen
Convenor, ABC Friends Central Coast

Northern Rivers

Northern Rivers Friends held their AGM at Bangalow in late November last year; our Executive remains the same and our three-sector structure continues as listed in the back of Update.

Participation at the AGM was enhanced by our speaker Mark Swivel, local lawyer, clean energy company executive, stand-up comic and choirmaster of a fake all male Russian choir, the Dustveskies.

Since that time, Mark has established the *Together Party* and he's running for the Senate in the Federal Election. He is a fervent supporter of the ABC and has a stated policy to preserve the ABC's independence and dramatically enhance its funding. Any ABCF Branch looking

for an entertaining and knowledgeable speaker would do well to contact Mark (email: hello@thetogetherparty.org.au).

As is our practice before each budget, in late February we lobbied the incumbent National Party member for Page, seeking to redress the ABC's budget cuts and maintain its independence. We also asked that the government desist from further "captain's picks", but let's hope Mr Morrison got it right with Ita. We also sent Mr Hogan an article about the link between proper funding for the ABC and its Charter, prepared by stalwart ABCF member Neville Jennings, just in case Mr Hogan was thinking of joining the Parliamentary ABCF.

As a lead up to increased activities prior to the upcoming Election, a market stall was held in February in Ballina which resulted in positive feedback and a bundle of signed letters of protest being forwarded to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Communications.

Currently we are gearing up for the marginal electorates campaign (Richmond and Page) where we'll focus on surveying the candidates and publicising their responses.

Peter Dickson

President, ABC Friends Northern Rivers

Armidale

In Armidale we have a number of new people on our committee for 2019, which adds more spring to our step and some of our activities for later in the year have already been planned. In the few months since the start of the year we can report on a couple of activities. In what is now becoming a regular feature, we provided a speaker to another Armidale community group, this time a Rotary Club. The focus of these talks is on the importance of public broadcasting for a healthy democracy. Something which sounds somewhat trite, but still provides an opportunity to make points which are often forgotten, or otherwise deserve review. In this case there was an added bonus where, in response to our talk, the Rotary Club provided 50 international polio vaccinations, which was matched by another 100 vaccinations from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. We also collected 139 signatures on a petition at the Armidale February market, requesting that the Australian Parliament contact the appropriate people to increase the transmission strength for Radio National

in the Armidale area. This reflects a key point in the ABC Charter, to provide ABC broadcasting to as many Australians as possible. One only has to be a few kilometres outside of Armidale and Radio National is lost, not to be regained until one has travelled into another broadcasting area. Before the end of March we also look forward to presenting our 2018 Friends of the ABC Media Prize (\$500) to the most outstanding graduate from the Bachelor of Media and Communication at the University of New England. Our attention has now turned to the upcoming federal election, where we intend to replicate activities from the Wentworth by-election here in the seat of New England, beginning with a request that each candidate describe their level of support for public broadcasting.

Bruce Stevenson

President, ABC Friends Armidale

Blue Mountains

We are currently busy planning and conducting our local campaign in our marginal seat of Macquarie. NSW Friends committee has pledged to generously support the Friends' campaigns in marginal seats such as ours and our neighbouring seat Lindsay, helping us to meet the costs associated with our campaign.

Our dedicated members Barry and Bev Redshaw are planning to open a new Friends' branch after the Federal Election, based in Penrith in the Lindsay electorate. Barry and Bev have been incredibly active members, manning market stalls, creating fantastic ABCF posters, producing the monthly Blue Mountains branch newsletter, maintaining media coverage of all things ABC in their "Dramas in Pyjamas" folders, which are passed around at our monthly meetings at Wentworth Falls, and the list goes on. Barry and Bev joined our Blue Mountains branch in 2013. Barry has served as President and committee member, currently sharing the role of Vice-President with Margaret Foy, Life Member. They moved to Cranebrook, near Penrith, around three years ago. They are thus very well placed to launch a new much-needed ABCF branch in Western Sydney. Of course, they will be so missed - we'll just have to attend their meetings as well!

The annual Penrith CBD Festival, a big event on the Penrith calendar, provided the opportunity to initiate a timely ABCF presence in the Lindsay electorate itself.

With their car packed to bursting point with posters, banners, membership forms, chairs and ABCF merchandise, Barry and Bev were ready to set off for the Festival very early on Saturday 16 March, along with other keen volunteers. Unfortunately, bad weather prevailed, and the event was cancelled. The time and effort spent preparing for our stall was not totally wasted. We'll consider it a dress-rehearsal for next year!

At least 15 of our members have volunteered to hand out ABCF flyers at railway stations and shopping centres, in the lead-up to the election. Once we have secured completed Questionnaires from the candidates, we will be able to develop a "How to Vote for the ABC" scorecard, which we will hand out at pre-polling centres in both Macquarie and Lindsay, and outside polling booths on Election Day.

A great pre-election opportunity for our Blue Mountains branch will be Springwood Foundation Day on Saturday 27 April, very close to the Federal Election in May. This is a big event in the Blue Mountains, and attracts thousands of people. We have secured a stall, centrally located in the main street of Springwood, and will be handing out "Vote to Save Our ABC" cards, ABC Friends flyers, joining up new members, selling ABCF merchandise (such as the very useful tote bag, "Imagine life without your ABC") and attracting attention with our Bananas Without Pyjamas banner, "Hands off Our ABC". We have ordered very large posters for display at our stall, with powerful ABCF messages, such as "I Love Our ABC and I Vote".

This participation in local community events such as Springwood Foundation Day would not be possible without the enthusiasm and dedication of our many volunteers. Face-to-face engagement with fellow locals is clearly a very effective way of raising awareness of the serious threats facing the ABC. This is grass-roots campaigning, and we anticipate having a productive, enjoyable and cloudless day!

We are also planning to host a Candidates' Forum, where the Macquarie electorate candidates will have the opportunity to express their views about, and commitment to ensuring the ABC is a strong, properly funded and independent broadcaster. Our Blue Mountains branch hosted a successful Candidates' Forum prior to the 2016 Federal Election, with all but one candidate attending. We hope for an equally rewarding event for 2019.

Sue Noske

President, ABC Friends Blue Mountains

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.

State Branches

Victoria/National Office – ABC Friends

GPO Box 4065 Melbourne VIC 3001
Phone: 03 9682 0073
office@abcfriends.org.au

Queensland - ABC Friends

Ross McDowell
5 Dunn Ct Bunya Qld 4055
Phone: 0418 291 350
kookaburrapa@gmail.com

Western Australia – ABC Friends

Bobbie Mackley
PO Box 534 Subiaco WA 6904
fabcwa1@hotmail.com
T: 0422 489 711 (office hours only)

NSW & ACT – ABC Friends

Ed Davis
FABC NSW PO Box 1391 North Sydney 2059
Phone: 0438 166 986
president_nswact@abcfriends.org.au

South Australia & Northern Territory – ABC Friends

Sue Pinnock
PO Box 7158 Hutt St Adelaide SA 5000
Phone: 0407 035 701
sa@abcfriends.org.au

Tasmania – ABC Friends

Kate Durkin (Secretary)
55 Feltham St North Hobart Tas 7000
Phone: 0447 645 345
tas@abcfriends.org.au

NSW/ACT Regional Branches

ACT Region

Peter Lindenmayer
Phone: 0497 976 945
abcfriendsintheact@gmail.com

Armidale

Priscilla Connor (Secretary)
41 Judith Street
Armidale NSW 2350
Phone: 02 6772 2217
priscilla.connor@iinet.net.au

Blue Mountains

Sue Noske (President)
Phone: 02 4751 8320
Mobile: 0421 020 610
sue_noske2002@yahoo.com.au

Central Coast

Ross McGowen
11 Weemala Cres
Terrigal NSW 2260
Phone: 0439 440 955
ross.mcgowen61@gmail.com

Eastern Suburbs

Nizza Siano (Secretary)
16 Holland Rd
Bellevue Hill NSW 2023
Phone/Fax: 02 9327 3423
nizzamax@gmail.com

Hunter

Allan Thomas
7 Cantwell Road
Lochinvar NSW 2321
Phone: 02 4930 7309
allan.thomas2@bigpond.com

Publicity Officers

Margaret and Robert Connors
4 Wattle Street
Bolton Point NSW 2283
Phone: 02 4959 8464
margaret.connors@bigpond.com

Illawarra

Jan Kent (Secretary)
PO Box 8
Keiraville 2500
Phone/Fax: 02 4271 3531
gunthorpe44@gmail.com

Mid North Coast

Drusi Megget
24 Arncliffe Ave
Port Macquarie NSW 2444
Phone: 02 6583 8798
fabc.midcoast@gmail.com
Harry Creamer
PO Box 1888
Port Macquarie 2444
Phone: 02 6582 6187
Mobile: 0431 158 252

Northern Rivers

Jennie Hicks (Secretary)
Phone 0431 958 911
northernrivers@fabcnsw.org.au

Byron sub branch

Jill Keogh
Phone: 02 6688 4558
jilldkeogh@gmail.com

Tweed sub branch

Sandy Copley
Phone: 02 6677 1570
aco9780@gmail.com

Lismore sub branch

Therese Crollick
Phone: 02 6624 2289
therese.crollick@bigpond.com

Victorian Groups

Like to join a local group or be on their mailing list in Victoria?

We have many local groups. To find out more about one in your area: →

Not in these areas?

Contact Margaret
0421 338 155 as we are setting up new groups.

Southern Bayside

Ivor, 9580 6402
ivor_donohue@hotmail.com

Geelong area

Michael, 03 5271 1222
kinnane.m.c@bigpond.com

Northern Melbourne

Margaret, 0421 338 155
margaret@nashcc.com.au

Inner Melbourne

Russell, 0401 080 762
huntingtonrk@gmail.com
or Margaret 0421 338 155
margaret@nashcc.com.au

Castlemaine area

Geoff, 0402 262 261
cord-free@hotmail.com

Eastern Melbourne

Neil 0411 487 348
jenbneillb@gmail.com

Boroondara

Gael 9859 5185 or
barretts75@gmail.com

Inner Western Melbourne

Anne-Maree
annemaree.newbold@gmail.com

Latrobe electorate

Peter Fleming 0418 557 808,
Irbrain1896@gmail.com