

Update



Mal Hewitt OAM and Dr Diana Wyndham. Photographer: Dr Tess Howes.

Farewell...

continued on page 2.

Update

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From the Editor

Reflecting on what I should write about in my final Editorial for Update, I took a trip down memory lane. I joined Friends of the ABC in 2001, and I have in my Friends filing cabinet almost every Update since. The **Howard government** was in power, **Richard Alston** was Minister responsible for the ABC and frequently on the attack with accusations of bias, supported by Senators **Santo Santoro** and **Concetta Fierravanti-Wells**. It was a dramatic year: 10,000 ABC supporters marched on Parliament House in Canberra on 11 February and heard actress **Ruth Cracknell** say: "The ABC holds up a mirror to the whole country. It is a unifying agent – the most important cultural institution in the country". How true! Thousands met on the steps of **Sydney Opera House** on 29 April to support the ABC. NSW Friends was under the inspiring leadership of **Penelope Toltz**.

I joined the NSW Committee of Friends in 2004, when **Gary Cook** was a strong President. There was an extended campaign from the right wing of politics to commercialise the ABC. The Howard government ABC Board appointments were politically conservative, and the position of Staff-elected Board member was abolished. Under pressure from the board, the ABC screened "The Great Global Warming Swindle", a British program which alleged that climate change was a hoax. In 2007, I accidentally became NSW President and editor of Update. As a result of a reduction in funding from the government, we saw the loss of many programs across all ABC networks.

2008 saw two positive events for the ABC – the appointment of **Mark Scott** as Managing Director (a frequent speaker at Friends events), and the election of the **Rudd Labor government**. However, ABC funding never quite returned to the level of pre-Howard days, and the election of the "No cuts to the ABC" **Abbott government** in 2014 presented enormous challenges to ABC Friends in the struggle to achieve what we wanted most for the ABC – sufficient funding to allow the ABC to operate as a truly independent national broadcaster, free from political and commercial influence. Nine years of **Abbott/Turnbull/Morrison governments** saw the loss of \$800m in annual operating funds and over 1,200 staff. The Albanese government has stemmed the loss of funds, but not restored those which have been lost.

Our Branches, Our Strength

An honour and a privilege throughout my 10 years as NSW President was to work closely with our NSW branches. I believe that the branches are the heartbeat of ABC Friends. Their work in local communities is vital in maintaining local

support for the ABC and raising awareness of the need for “no strings attached” funding, especially as elections are approaching. A highlight was the State Conference, hosted by a different branch each year, where branch representatives gathered to share ideas, experiences, and plan strategies for the year ahead. ABC staff welcomed invitations to speak at local branches, often attracting audiences in the hundreds. Speakers have included **Andrew Denton, John Highfield, Julie McCrossin, Philip Adams, Paul Barry, Heather Ewart, Jonathan Holmes, Geraldine Doogue, Andrew Ford, Margaret Pomeranz, Tim Bowden, Jane Hutcheon, Jeremy Fernandez, Gaven Morris, Joe O'Brien, Richard Glover** and **Matt Peacock**.

Broadcasting Excellence Awards

With the support of ABC Management, the Annual NSW Friends Christmas Party became a welcome opportunity for Friends to celebrate another year together and gather in the mezzanine level of the Ultimo headquarters with ABC staff to present the annual Broadcasting Excellence Award. The list of recipients is a true Honour Roll – **Caroline Jones, Stephen Rapley, Robyn Williams, Play School, Tony Delroy, Dr Norman Swan, Margaret Throsby, Geraldine Doogue, Philip Williams, Sean Dorney, Jim Middleton, Marian Arnold, Four Corners (Quentin McDermott), Matt Peacock**. Covid caused an interruption, but I believe that the NSW Committee is planning an event early in 2024. I congratulate **Jason Lowe** and his Events Committee for creating these events over many years.

Changes to Update

Since 2016 Update has been a National journal, serving the needs of all State Branches of ABC Friends. When I announced my retirement early in 2023 there was every expectation that Update would continue and Assistant Editor **Diana Wyndham** would be the new editor; however, it will now be produced by an editorial committee. The National Committee recently decided not to continue its support of Update as a thrice a year newsletter. This December edition has been funded by the NSW ABC Friends committee. I understand that in 2024, NSW Friends will fund two state editions of Update and National Friends will produce a single newsletter. These matters are now in the hands of NSW Friends and ABC Friends National.

My Thanks

I am deeply grateful to the hard-working Friends who have supported me as Editor so strongly over the past 17 years (and compensated for my inadequacies) – I could not have done the job without you. To **Chris Cartledge**, your IT skills and support were invaluable. To **Angela Williamson**, your years as Production Manager were much appreciated. To **Diana Wyndham**, you have been an indispensable Assistant Editor. To **Sue Zeckendorf** and **Raul Arregui**, thank you for bringing your skills to our team in 2023. Our brilliant and

creative Layout Artist since 2007 has been **Paul Martens**, and Resident Cartoonist since 2001 has been **Phil Somerville**. To all of you, thank you for giving so generously of your talents to ABC Friends.

Mal Hewitt OAM

ABC Friends

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Tribute to Phil Somerville

If Lewis Carroll dropped in upon Earth today, he would probably say, "I told you so". Alice's mirrored world, where up was down and mad was sane, is now ours. In such an era the ABC is a vulnerable whipping post of the angry Right more than ever. Culture wars create walking wounded and FABC is Médecins sans frontières to our national broadcaster. My commitment to both is simply a belief in a rational, compassion based public discourse in this wide, but narrow, brown land. The ABC is a beautiful gizmo that converts tax dollars into zest. It continuously vivifies arts, journalism, public conversation. It's an egg: it binds us. - **Phil Somerville**

We celebrate 25 years of Phil Somerville's wit and wisdom as Update's resident cartoonist – that is an amazing record, and we salute your commitment to the ABC as essential to the health of our Australian democracy. Thank you, Phil.

Twenty-five years ago, Phil drew "Growing up with the ABC" – it's just as relevant today. Look for the spots of colour.

Mal Hewitt
Update Editor



Phil Somerville. Photographer: Lyn Bevington

Paul Martens – Layout Artist Extraordinaire

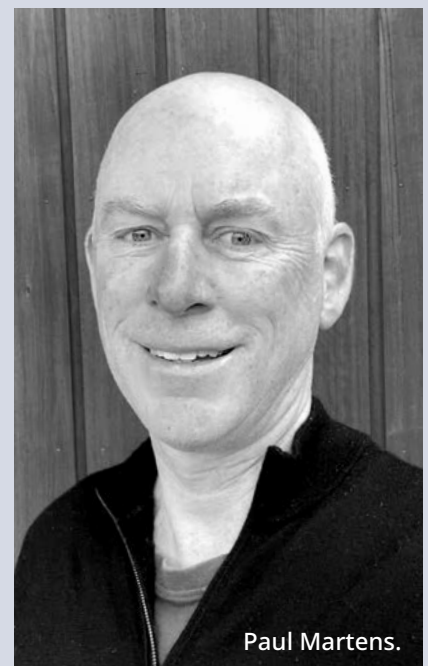
Elsewhere in this Update I refer to, in 2007, becoming "accidental" President of ABC Friends NSW. At the same time, I became "accidental" editor of Update, as no-one else was available, with no knowledge or experience – totally green!

I instantly discovered how vital it was to have a competent Layout Artist for any publication, particularly one with such varied content – photos good and bad, all manner of text and type, cartoons, drawings, handwriting, etc. etc.

In 2008 my saviour appeared in the form of **Paul Martens**, an artist with infinite capacity to make the ordinary look extraordinary, to solve the insoluble, to make the impossible fit, an artist with creativity, imagination and vision.

Throughout the ensuing 16 years, Paul has served ABC Friends with brilliance and professionalism, and we have a newsletter that always looks wonderful.

Mal Hewitt
Update Editor



Paul Martens.

Growing Up with the ABC

- drawn by Phil Somerville in 1998

Somerville

My earliest memory of hearing about the ABC was my father's spiritual tutorials on public broadcasting...

Only listen to 2FC, son.
Commercial radio is the Devil's work!



At age 4 I was confined to a darkened room with Scarlet Fever for a week. Nightly plays on ABC provided shards of light.



By 8 I was an afternoon addict of 'The Argonauts'.



In the mid 60s Dad brought home a used B&W television from a client who couldn't pay in cash.

Only watch ABC2, son.
Commercial channels are the Devil's work!



An early beach-head of satire and absurdist humour was planted by Spike Milligan on 'Idiot's Weekly'. It inspired my own dreams.

So, master Somerville, what vocation do you wish to achieve in life?



Over the decades it was instructive seeing the national broadcaster help unite the 2 major parties.

Right wing scumbags!

Elitist termites!



In his autumn years my father still had pearls of wisdom to offer...

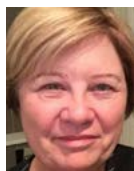
Only interface with the ABC website, son.
All other URL domains are the Devil's work!



Recently I had a dream of a world where the ABC was gone. It was also a world without poetry, colour or old winding country roads.



From the National President



Cassandra Parkinson
National President,
ABC Friends

Strategic Plan

In October the ABC Friends national committee met in person to finalise our strategic plan and agree on priorities through to the next federal election and beyond. The national committee consists of representatives of each State and Territory ABC Friends organisation. As the governing body of ABC Friends, we meet by Zoom every two months and hold one in-person meeting each year.

At national level ABC Friends develops policy and strategy, advocates to government and the ABC, coordinates national campaigns, communicates with our supporters and the general public, and provides support services to our members.

The strategic plan, which complements plans developed by State Friends, includes goals, strategies and priorities for five key areas of activity, described below.

Advocacy and campaigns

Goal: To advocate in support of our vision for a fearless, independent ABC valued by all Australians and fully supported by government.

Strategies

- Lobby key decision makers, particularly in government
- Communicate with the ABC on how ABC Friends might support its funding priorities
- Conduct research
- Campaign in federal elections

Members and supporters

Goal: To bring together and engage members of the community in support of the ABC.

Strategies

- Grow membership, and retain as many members as feasible
- Facilitate people of all ages to join and stay engaged in ABC Friends
- Increase membership income
- Increase the total number of supporters of ABC Friends

Communications and engagement

Goal: To communicate with and engage our supporters and the general public about the value of the ABC and our work in support of an independent fully funded public media organisation.

Strategies

- Understand our audiences and the best ways of communicating with them
- Reach new demographics and promote discussion about critical issues affecting the ABC
- Engage our members and supporters and keep them informed about, and involved in, ABC Friends activities
- Promote ABC Friends' messages to the general public and key decision makers.

Goal: To advance ABC Friends' effectiveness as a not-for-profit volunteer organisation.

Strategies

- Strengthen our base of existing and new supporters
- Run fundraising appeals to pay for our ongoing operations and specific projects
- Better understand our supporters and their reasons for engaging with ABC Friends
- Improve our processes for reporting to and thanking donors

Governance and accountability

Goal: Establish and maintain robust and transparent processes to govern ABC Friends and manage its finances

Strategies

- Strengthen ABC Friends' governance and accountability framework
- Ensure full accountability for members' and supporters' funds through the use of rigorous financial systems, and public reports to the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission and other government instrumentalities

We have identified priorities for each goal, but as a volunteer organisation, we must be realistic about how much work we can undertake. Once priorities have been confirmed for the next two years, we will post the plan on our website.

Outcomes in 2023

After the 2022 election ABC Friends agreed to focus on improving our internal governance and reporting arrangements while continuing to advocate for funding and ABC independence. In 2023 we:

- Advocated (with some success) to government, the cross bench and other parliamentarians for improved funding for the ABC
- Entered into a formal service agreement with ABC Alumni
- Developed policy and made recommendations to government on ways of strengthening the ABC's independence

- Began the task of amending the ABC Friends constitution to strengthen our governance – this work is close to completion.
- Improved our processes for managing data and signed MOUs between individual States and the national organisation to formalise these arrangements
- Held discussions with the ABC about its funding priorities, an ongoing process
- Improved our communications with members and supporters with a regular monthly newsletter

But some activities have yet to be implemented. In particular, we need to:

- Seek specialised expertise to give advice on transmission and technology issues and set up a working group to develop recommendations to government. Most of remote Australia has no radio signal – no AM, no FM, no satellite, no emergency broadcast signal. Before the 2019 election, Labor promised to restore shortwave for the ABC.
- Build partnerships with like-minded organisations.
- Survey our members and supporters to gain a better understanding of who they are and what they expect of ABC Friends.
- And, if time and funds permit, hold a national conference on public media.

We need a Murdoch Royal Commission

compiled by Dr Diana Wyndham

Australians for a Murdoch Royal Commission (AFMRC), a coalition of journalists, activists, unionists, political staffers and at least one former prime minister, stands for truth and accountability in its campaign to challenge **Rupert Murdoch's** insidious power over journalism, governments and our future.

In the December 2020 issue of Update **Margaret Reynolds** (then ABC Friends National President) and **Cassandra Parkinson** (then ABC Friends NSW & ACT President) urged Friends to make submissions to the Senate Inquiry into Media Diversity. Many did, including an excellent analysis by Gayle Davies (submission 244).

The Senate Inquiry took 13 months, held five public hearings and received close to 10,000 submissions. On 16 November 2021 AFMRC National Director **Sally Rugg** began her 41-page submission: "On 28 October 2021, tens of thousands of Australians joined together to launch Australians for a Murdoch Royal Commission, the official campaign tasked with advancing the objectives of the Petition launched by **Kevin Rudd** in 2020".

On 9 December 2021 the **Senate Inquiry into Media Diversity** recommended that a judicial inquiry with the powers of a royal commission be established to examine whether the existing system of media regulation is fit for purpose and to investigate the concentration of media ownership in Australia. The majority report of the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee further recommended a number of measures to be implemented in the meantime to ensure a diverse news media landscape and to protect public interest journalism and our democracy. The inquiry was established by Greens Senator **Sarah Hanson-Young** in response to the huge

public demands for the establishment of a royal commission into the Murdoch media dominance in Australia.

On 16 June 2003 Hanson-Young introduced a bill to establish a royal commission into the Murdoch media empire and the state of media diversity in Australia. She said:

The influence of the Murdoch media on Australian democracy is unaccountable and dangerous. It is time politicians stop being afraid to question the Murdoch press. Only an inquiry with the powers of a Royal Commission can uncover the extent of the Murdoch media's influence and control over our democracy and fully examine media concentration in Australia.

ABC Friends rallied in 2020 – now it's time to campaign with Australians for a Murdoch Royal Commission.

Visit the AFMRC website to see

Who we are:

<https://murdochroyalcommission.org.au/who-we-are/>

Our goals:

<https://murdochroyalcommission.org.au/our-goals/>

Contact:

<https://murdochroyalcommission.org.au/contact/>

Download murdoch watch: <https://murdochroyalcommission.org.au/download-murdoch-watch/>

or email them at: hello@murdochroyalcommission.org.au



From the NSW & ACT President



It has been another very busy year for the **Friends of the ABC (NSW&ACT) Inc.** I would like to offer my sincere thanks to our wonderful Branch Presidents, convenors, secretaries and members for sustaining our volunteer activist network in 2023. For example, **Blue Mountains** scheduled a political conversation with the **Hon Susan Templeman**, Member for Macquarie, at its July meeting; **Northern Rivers** hosted a dinner at Wollongbar TAFE with **Kerry O'Brien** as guest speaker; **Northern Suburbs of Sydney** (NSoS) organised an extensive 2023 guest speaker program including our own **Ross McGowan** and **Mal Hewitt**, concluding with **Tracey Kirkland** and **Gavin Fang** in November. **Central Coast** hosted a number of events throughout the year including a guest lecture by **Helen Grasswill** on ABC International in August (see Update, August 2023). Congratulations to you all.

Our major event of 2023 was the Winter Dinner held on 20 July in Sydney (reported in Update, August, p.20). We were fortunate that our Guest Speaker, the Hon **Michelle Rowland** MP, Minister for Communications, announced the commencement of a formal Communications Portfolio 'Review of Options to support national broadcaster's independence at this event, attracting some valuable media attention.



Dr Tess Howes
President, ABC Friends, NSW & ACT

The Friends of the ABC (NSW & ACT) Inc. Strategic Plan 2023-2025

Extracts from the President's Address to the NSW and ACT AGM 18 November 2023:

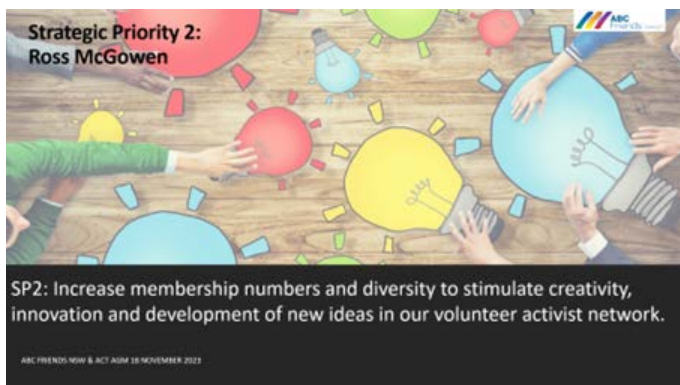
During 2023, the NSW & ACT Committee has been working collectively on the development of a Strategic Plan 2023-2025. We are a large volunteer activist community with limited resources. The purpose of the Strategic Plan 2023-2025 is to clarify our objectives and to focus resources and activities on priority areas to achieve maximum impact.

The strategic development process

A survey of branch representatives was conducted at the end of 2022 to identify current challenges and opportunities. This data was analysed, and the emerging themes formed the discussion framework for the ABC Friends NSW & ACT Planning Day, held in Sydney on Saturday 18 February 2023. A summary of the insights generated by the attendees, together with a synthesis of data collected in the ABC Friends survey, was presented in the Friends of the ABC NSW & ACT Strategic Action Plan 2023-2024.

I was fortunate to be able to appoint project leaders to continue to develop the five Strategic Priorities in consultation with branch members and supporters. These priorities were also discussed at the NSW & ACT Committee meetings in 2023, resulting in a number of revisions and inclusions.

The five Strategic Priorities were presented at the Annual General Meeting, 18 November 2023, commencing an open consultation process with our members and supporters, and summarised here:



Two images from the President's Report delivered at the AGM 18 November 2023. Images taken at the NSW & ACT Planning Day by Tess Howes

SP1: Increase campaign momentum to educate the public on the importance of the ABC and demand secure, reliable, non-partisan funding for our national public broadcaster, the foundation of our democracy. Project lead: **Tess Howes**.

SP2: Increase membership numbers and diversity to stimulate creativity, innovation and the development of new ideas in our volunteer activist network. Project lead: **Ross McGowen**.

SP3: Unleash the power of our collective communication potential to increase our influence and sustain the ABC Friends volunteer activist network into the future. Project lead: NSW&ACT/National supported by Blue Mountains.

SP4: Increase administrative support to branches to strengthen and sustain our local activity. Project lead: **Bruce Stevenson**.

SP5: Increase our strategic political engagement strategy to broaden our executive support base and secure connections to people with power. Project lead: **Cassandra Parkinson**.

I would like to thank and acknowledge the Project Leaders for their hard work and involvement in this large project for and on behalf of our members and supporters.

Open consultation process: 18 November 2023 - 14 January 2024

The changes recommended by the project leaders were consolidated and published as a draft Strategic Plan 2023-2025 for distribution at the Annual General Meeting on 18 November.

The consultation period will conclude on 28 January and the changes incorporated in a final Strategic Plan 2023-2025 to be launched in March 2024. Please contact **Susan Scott**, Membership Officer, for access to the draft Strategic Plan 2023-2025 and the ABC NSW & ACT Strategic Action Plan 2023-2024 [email: membership_nswact@abcfriends.net.au].

I would like to encourage all members of ABC Friends NSW & ACT to contribute to the consultation process. The most productive way would be to discuss the draft plan at your branch meeting and request your branch representative send consolidated feedback to: president_nswact@abcfriends.net.au

Retirement of Mal Hewitt OAM as Editor, Update

On behalf of all the members of The Friends of ABC (NSW & ACT) I would like to offer my congratulations and sincere thanks to **Mal Hewitt OAM** who is stepping down after 17 years as editor of Update and 20 years of membership on the NSW (& ACT) Committee.

This represents an extraordinary record of service for which Mal was awarded Life Membership in 2016. Congratulations, Mal, from us all.

Update - once again the NSW & ACT Newsletter

I am pleased to announce that the NSW & ACT Committee assumed responsibility for Update at its meeting in October 2023 and is currently working with the editorial team to re-establish Update as the NSW & ACT newsletter. This provides an opportunity for us to work together to position Update within the National communication strategy.

Increasing the membership age range and cultural diversity of the Friends of the ABC (NSW & ACT) membership base is essential to ensure the sustainability of Friends into the future. The current ABCF membership base is primarily comprised of members of the Baby Boomer generation

(born between 1946-1964). This membership base is also ageing, and our membership numbers are in decline. Attracting support from Generation X (1965-1980) and Millennials (1981-1996) will be essential to keep our activism relevant and focused on contemporary issues of concern relating to the ABC.

The communication landscape has also changed significantly since Update was launched as the Friends of the ABC (NSW) newsletter in 2001. We are now in the digital and social media communication age. Most information, in both professional and personal contexts, is communicated via electronic and/or digital media and/or technology platforms in short information grabs, SMS, social media apps, etc., together with online publications with structured digital architectural layers.

The change in editorial responsibility provides an opportunity to ensure Update is positioned to contribute to the National, State and local branch communication strategies, yet maintain a strong focus on local issues of concern and activities within our fabulous branch network.

As a result, we are currently preparing a survey to collect ideas and suggestions from our members so that we can ensure Update continues to meet our communication needs but also helps us to attract a multicultural and multigenerational membership base. I would like to urge ABC Friends (NSW & ACT) to complete the survey and share your ideas on Update when the link is circulated in January 2024.

Dr Tess Howes
President, ABC Friends, NSW & ACT

Some of the Tributes to Update

Ross McDowell, President ABC Friends Queensland, in an email to Mal: "There were many times over the last 10 years that Update was the only communication of FABCQ information to our members. It was also used by us to introduce ourselves to non-members. I convey the thanks of the Queensland ABC Friends committee as well as my personal thanks to you for such valuable work."

Michael Henry, President ABC friends Vic, in an email to Mal: "We would like to acknowledge our great respect and admiration for your contributions to Update over the 17 years, and thank you for all you have done to advance the professional standards of ABCF's communications. Your legacy is very tangible – we have copies of almost every edition in our Victorian office – and you can be very proud of what you have achieved."

Ross McGowen, Convenor, ABC Friends Central Coast in an email to Mal: "Many thanks Mal for your dedication and professionalism in editing Update over a considerable period of 17 years, a remarkable effort. Thank you also Diana for your contributions to the magazine and in providing such great support to Mal as Assistant Editor. Update has allowed our membership to remain fully informed not just about the ABC but also about our own organisation."

Bev and Barry Redshaw, Co-Convenors, Western Suburbs of Sydney: "We found the Update very useful and especially at market stalls around Election times. It attracted interest and provided information to those who showed interest in saving our ABC.

What it really does is encourage interest and understanding of the ABC Friends, what we are fighting for and sometimes membership. It has also proven useful as a handout at Branch meetings to visitors to encourage membership.

Chris Cartledge (formerly National and NSW & ACT Web Manager, Membership Secretary, Update Assistant Editor, Liaison for Access Databases etc., awarded Life Member ABC Friends in December 2018): "I think it vital that all federal politicians continue to receive Update - it keeps ABC issues in front of them and their staff in hard copy".

Gayle Davies, Armidale Branch (formerly ABC Friends Secretary and Membership Secretary): "Update is the historical record, compared with the ephemerality of the e-newsletter".

Angela Williamson, Southern Highlands Branch (formerly Secretary and Membership Secretary, ABC Friends NSW & ACT and first, Assistant Editor, then Production Manager, Update): "The hard copy version is the one that we, in the branches, hand out at our market stalls to the public who express serious interest in our cause, as we know it is a gold mine of information. Diana's compilations on any matter in the last several issues are a superb source for discussion and problem addressing. We need the tools to interact with the public and Update is brilliant at this."

Drusi Megget, Mid North-Coast: "It's been a wonderful magazine, especially news from the branches. Mal Hewitt has done an awesome job. Thanks for all you do."

Israel-Gaza War Coverage

Compiled by Dr Diana Wyndham

On 7 October 2023 **Hamas** terrorists launched an unprecedented surprise attack on Israel and infiltrated the country by air, sea and land. A month later, 200 ABC journalists met to criticise the broadcaster's coverage of the resulting war in Gaza. At first the ABC remained silent, but details of the meeting were provided by **Osman Faruqi** and **Calum Jaspan** on 9 November in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The meeting was initiated by **Mark Maley**, the ABC's editorial policy manager, who sent an email to staff: "Our coverage of the war in Gaza is one of the most important and difficult stories imaginable to cover. It affects many of our staff in a deeply personal way and raises complex humanitarian, legal and journalistic issues." The meeting was as an opportunity to discuss and get feedback on the "editorial challenges this story poses and how we have navigated it so far, and how we can continue to in coming weeks".

On 10 November Faruqi and Jaspan reported that: "ABC News Director **Justin Stevens** has urged staff to avoid applying personal convictions to reporting on the unfolding conflict in Gaza, as he introduced a new Middle East coverage advisory panel to advise on language and editorial policy. [He] said the senior editorial group would meet regularly from next week, advising the national broadcaster's news staff as it reports on the Israel-Hamas conflict [and that] controversial views can be ventilated, but we must challenge and question them."

ABC Friends made the news when ABC Managing Director **David Anderson's** address to them at the ABC Friends Victoria's annual dinner on 17 November was reported in the ABC News. Anderson disagreed with recent accusations of bias and said:

It is possible for the ABC to accurately describe the shocking attacks in Israel while also providing coverage of the shocking conditions being experienced by civilians in Gaza, as well as appropriate historical context. More broadly, without the careful interrogations provided by the ABC, the partisan bubbles on either side would float free, intact, and undisturbed.

He said impartial reporting was a tough discipline. "It means that the ABC can be in the position of putting

views to the public that some, or many, may not want to hear. I've noticed this in our coverage of both the Israel-Hamas war and the Voice to Parliament referendum. The ABC does not ban people based on their political beliefs, and our guidelines require that the ABC is not seen to be condoning or encouraging prejudice or discrimination." He also said impartiality did not require every perspective to receive equal time nor every aspect of an argument to be presented. "We do not simply give interviewees an open platform and carte blanche to say whatever they want. Often when people say our editorial policies are in decline, they usually mean we aren't taking a side. In fact this means our editorial policies are working exactly as they should."

Anderson had joined ABC Melbourne host **Raf Epstein**, fielding live talkback questions from the show's listeners, including on the broadcaster's hesitation to use the words "genocide" and "apartheid" when covering the conflict in Gaza. Jaspan gave details in the *Herald*:

"When it comes to the use of those terms, the ABC won't report using them ourselves. What we do is report other people using them, so for instance, genocide is a claim that's been made. It's a serious crime. The Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and Israel reject that. We do report on other people using those words. "Same with apartheid. Again, when people are talking apartheid we'll report other people's use of that. We won't use that ourselves." However, Anderson said the broadcaster will continue to challenge all information coming from Gaza, given the difficulty associated with verifying all information and sources, again responding to a claim that the ABC is over-reliant on the IDF in its reporting. "I'm not sure that that's the case."

"In war, truth is the first casualty" is a truism attributed to the Greek tragedian, Aeschylus, and examples of fake news are rife in the reports about this conflict. ABC management has shown great leadership with the measures it has taken to handle this delicate situation to avoid bias and to provide guidance to ABC staff who are involved.

Editor's Note: David Anderson's 17 November speech is available on: <https://www.abcfriendsvic.org.au/abc-md-dines-with-abc-friends>

The ABC: Comparative Statistics and What should Friends be Doing?

Professor Ed Davis AM

Extracts from his address to the NSW and ACT AGM 18 November 2023:

How is the ABC travelling in 2023 and what should Friends be doing to support and advance the cause of our treasured national public broadcaster? It is instructive to compare the plight of the ABC in 2018 with its situation in 2023.

Five years ago, in 2018, the ABC was under extraordinary pressure. Attacks were launched on multiple fronts. The budget presented by then Treasurer **Scott Morrison** and backed by then Prime Minister, **Malcolm Turnbull**, cut funding to the ABC by \$84 million. These debilitating cuts were on top of earlier savage cuts in the 2014 budget, which infamously broke the promise of **Tony Abbott** in the run-up to the 2013 election that there would be “no cuts to the ABC; no cuts to SBS”.

2018 and the years around it saw frequent government attacks on the ABC. When PM, **Tony Abbott** had accused the ABC of being un-Australian, Liberal Senator **Eric Abetz** was convinced the ABC was a “lefty love-in” and senior minister **Peter Dutton** was always good for a quote on the failings of the ABC

2018 witnessed the establishment of a stream of government inquiries (Competitive Neutrality, Salaries, Fair and Balanced and Efficiency), all designed to harm and weaken the ABC. There was the **Institute of Public Affairs** (IPA) campaign, supported with gushing enthusiasm by **News Corp**, to privatise the ABC. The case was fleshed out by **Chris Berg** and **Sinclair Davidson** in their book, *Against Public Broadcasting- Why we should privatise the ABC and how to do it*. I had the pleasure of reviewing the book in Update (July 2018, pages 6-7) I wrote: “The book is a sour and bitter brew. It is laced with inconsistencies and ill-intent.... There are so many better things to do than read the latest rant from the IPA.” I am not sure that I would be as kind today. At a meeting of the Liberal Party National Council in June 2018 a motion to support the privatisation of the ABC was passed and has not been rescinded since.

Other features of this period include evidence of attempted government interference in the ABC- most obviously the texts from PM Turnbull to then Chair of the ABC, **Justin Milne** indicating which leading ABC journalists should be

sacked; appalling Board appointments and a general air of crisis as then Managing Director **Michelle Guthrie** was sacked followed swiftly by the exit of the ABC's Chair.

Five years later, in 2023, the picture is much more encouraging. The **Albanese government** restored the \$84m cut in 2018 and implemented a series of other measures which will boost the ABC's funding. The ABC remains however woefully underfunded. The bigger picture is that the ABC has lost a third of its funding since the mid-1980s and yet it does much more. Four TV stations now instead of one then; more national radio stations and digital production now, not even dreamed of then. Former ABC Editorial Director **Alan Sunderland** welcomed the increased ABC funding in the 2023 budget; however, he cautioned that, “The bleeding has been stemmed, but the wound remains”.

PM **Albanese** and his senior ministers have emphasised their support for the ABC and their view that a strong and independent public broadcaster is essential for a healthy democracy. And the announced goal of the inquiry established in 2023 by Communications Minister **Michelle Rowland** has been to identify paths to greater financial stability and certainty for the ABC and measures to protect its independence. Minister Rowland has underlined her support for the ABC and for Friends.

There are no signs of any slackening in the IPA-News Corp campaign to attack and undermine the ABC. Their success in defeating the Voice Referendum will have given them added confidence and certainty of support from a future Coalition government. There is some comfort to be drawn from the establishment of *Australians for a Murdoch Royal Commission*. There are compelling reasons for Friends to link up with this organisation and explore how overlapping goals can be best pursued.

What should Friends be doing?

Above all, Friends must keep the faith and remain active in the fight for a strong and independent ABC. The lull in attacks from government and improved funding are certainly to be welcomed but the ABC remains chronically underfunded and its role is more important than ever. There are tidal waves of misinformation and disinformation. The giants of social media- **Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix** and **Google** - have served as channels and the outcome has been seen in global events such as the Brexit debacle, the election of **Donald Trump** in 2016 and his continuing prominence in US politics and, at home, in the defeat of the Voice Referendum.



Ed speaking at the AGM.
Photographer Nizza Siano.

It is vital that Friends and particularly our leaders at national and state levels continue to build and maintain good relations with Labor, the Greens and the Teals, all supportive of a strong ABC. We should continue to look for moderates in the Liberal and National Parties' ranks who will stand up for the ABC. Building Friends' organisational strength- members, supporters, active branches- will assist in getting our message across. Also important will be building and fostering alliances with all those organisations that share our passion for a strong

ABC. Most obviously, the **ABC Alumni** and unions covering ABC staff, but also organisations with a stake in the arts, education, health, science and sport who deeply value the ABC.

Friends and our leaders must maintain good relations with the ABC. The ABC needs to know that it has fearless Friends. Within this context, our leaders will be able to relay and press Friends' concerns. All the while, our bullets will be kept for the enemies of the ABC, those organisations dedicated to the termination of public broadcasting in Australia.

Friends of the ABC (NSW & ACT) Inc. Annual General Meeting

Sincere thanks to Emeritus Professor Ed Davis AM for giving an informative and insightful Guest Lecture at our AGM on Saturday 18 February - see extracts from his speech in this edition of Update.

Congratulations to the new ABC Friends (NSW & ACT) Committee duly elected at the AGM as follows:

- **Tess Howes**, President
- **Cassandra Parkinson**, Vice-President
- **Sharon Ooi**, Treasurer
- **Jan Febey**, Secretary
- **Robert Gubbins**
- **Jim Harding**
- **William Howes**
- **Ross McGowen**
- **Gia Metherell**
- **Tim Mulroy**
- **Paul Reid**
- **Bruce Stevenson**
- **Susan Tregeagle**

We are also very grateful and appreciative of the support of our retiring members:

- **Peter Lindenmayer**, Secretary
- **Mal Hewitt OAM**, Editor, Update; Blue Mountains
- **Jennie Hicks**, Northern Rivers
- **Sue Noske**, Blue Mountains
- **Jenny Trowse**, Northern Suburbs of Sydney
- **Margaret Whealy**, Eastern Suburbs
- **Dr Diana Wyndham**, Assistant Editor, Update



ABC Friends NSW & ACT new committee.
Photographer: Nizza Siano

Thank you also to **Nizza Siano**, Returning Officer, who ensured the nomination and election process complied with our Constitution and that refreshments were readily available for our attendees.

What are the responsibilities of the NSW & ACT Committee?

The Friends of the ABC (NSW & ACT) Management Committee plays an important role in our governance processes. The current membership reflects broad representation of branches from Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Northern Rivers, Northern Tablelands and the ACT.

The committee provides governance, management and leadership to ABC Friends NSW & ACT branches and members. Members understand that they must be able to work as a team, ensure compliance with relevant legislation and regulations, meet the terms of the operational requirements detailed in the Friends of ABC (NSW & ACT) Inc. Constitution and be willing to make new Friends and connections both internal and external to ABCF NSW & ACT.

Thank you and congratulations to our returning and new members for 2023-2024.

Dr Tess Howes
President, Friends of the ABC, ACT & NSW Inc.

Friends of Friends

by Angela Williamson
Vice-president Southern Highlands
Branch and former Update
Production Manager

ABC Friends is blessed with many intelligent and articulate volunteers. Two of them are deservedly recognised here for their commitment to our ever-more-challenging cause. I have been privileged to work closely with them both: for sixteen years with Mal and five years with Diana.

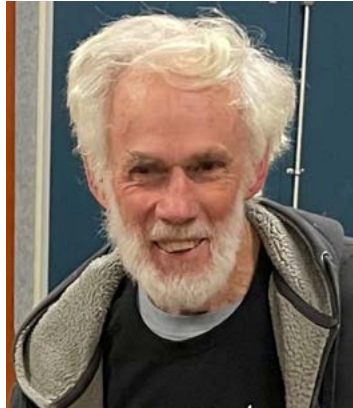
Malcolm Hewitt, OAM, Editor Update

In July 2014 I sneaked a story into Update, bypassing the Editor's Desk, when Mal was awarded an OAM for his services to the community, much of them for his abiding love and passion: music, and bringing it in its various forms to as many young and not-so-young people as possible.

From a musical family, Mal was trained at "the Con" (Sydney Conservatorium of Music) to become a music teacher, then he was Head of Music in various schools. He's sung in choirs, he's attended most of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra concerts, he's been an Argonaut, he plays the violin, he's formed bands, choirs, orchestras, and put on a musical production each year. In the mid-70s, through the advent of Federal funding for disadvantaged schools, he helped get musical instruments into the hands of half of the children in his school, and I remember him saying "music changed the lives of these kids". Advocacy for the power of music to help children's brains develop and for it to be available to all young people drives Mal to this day.

In 1993, Mal initiated "Celebration Sing Out" which raises funds for **Westmead Children's Hospital** with an annual concert usually at the Sydney Town Hall. To do this, with other like-minded people, he's created TOPS (The Occasional Performing Sinfonia), and they pull together children from primary and secondary schools as well as enthusiastic adults (yes, I managed to sing there once) to sing a huge variety of songs. Thus, for 30 years an annual presentation has been made to the Children's Hospital for use in the Music Therapy department. This year the amount transferred was for \$36,000, bringing the total amount raised to over \$1 million!

Mal's upbringing regarding the importance of helping reduce injustice to the disadvantaged saw him take work parties to the remote Aboriginal communities west of Alice Springs, helped build 300 homes over several years, and supported the work that his builder brother did there.



Mal Hewitt. Photographer:
Angela Williamson

With his wife Alison studying to complete her PhD, Mal became very hands-on with their three boys, all of whom are accomplished musically. Alison's field work takes her away occasionally and Mal is then mum-n-dad to the boys.

Mal has been an ABC Friend for over 30 years. He joined the NSW executive in 2004 and was President of NSW&ACT from 2007 until 2016, when he was awarded lifetime membership. He has served on the National Committee since its inception in 2016 until 2020 and has been Update Editor since 2007, overseeing the transition from a state-based quarterly magazine to the National publication, received by members, politicians and libraries either electronically or via the post. As NSW&ACT President, he routinely attended state branches' regular or inaugural meetings whenever he could, and spoke passionately without notes to defend the ABC from the unrelenting attacks of the ridiculous Right. He hosted the annual branch conferences in various regional locations. His inclusive diplomatic style has been a hallmark of his leadership.

Friends National and in particular Friends NSW&ACT are very much the richer for the dedication of both these volunteers. Update has grown immeasurably in depth of coverage of the issues that beset our ABC under the astute guidance of both Editor, Mal Hewitt, OAM, and Assistant Editor, Dr Diana Wyndham. Following this issue, they are both stepping down: when Mal announced his retirement in early 2023, Diana was set to become the new editor. This will not happen because in future there will be an editorial committee. Our heartfelt appreciation to them both for their hours, days, weeks, months, and years of voluntary commitment to our ABC.

Dr Diana Wyndham, Assistant Editor Update

What a wealth of professional skills and smarts has this extraordinary woman unfailingly brought to the role she has played in ABC Friends over several years. With painstaking research into each contribution and compilation to Update, Diana cross-checked details, referred to other news sources to flesh an item out, pressed me to ensure we regularly satisfy our Legal Deposit obligations, and has single-handedly created a cumulative index for all items that have appeared in Update since it became a Friends National publication in 2016. She saw to our ISSN identification, details for footers, and sought permission to use photos or replicated items.



Diana Wyndham.
Photographer: James
Ashburn

So, who is this Assistant Editor? From a strongly medical family, both parents and siblings, Diana broke the mould and became a qualified librarian, initially working for the CSIRO. During a stint in the UK, she was a librarian at the Board of Trade. On return to Australia, Diana completed her BA at UNE, qualifying top in her year winning the sociology prize. Her next major contribution to society was as the media contact for the Women's Electoral Lobby (NSW), where she co-edited their newsletter, wrote articles, reviews, submissions and spoke on radio and TV.

Diana set up the Family Planning Association NSW library, then co-wrote "Populate and Perish: Women's Fight for Birth Control" and has since written two more books. When a conference entitled "Man, Drugs and Society" overlooked women, Diana filled the gap; another paper was included in a book "Women, Class and History". Her next role was as Head of Research and Information at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School.

Diana has spoken with Phillip Adams on Late Night Live and, with Robyn Williams on the ABC Science Program, discussed "Why study working mothers and ignore working fathers?" – her boss was furious. Her campaigns against sexist advertising made The Right to Life declare her a "threat to the family", much to the amusement of her children. When it got risky to say where she worked, she said she was a WEL member. Has anything changed?

Diana's studies continued while she was working, culminating in her Masters in Librarianship at UNSW, followed by a PhD in History at USYD. Diana has edited several newsletters and belongs to Bush Care and historical groups. There is so much more to Diana's working and voluntary life that informs her dedicated contribution to Update as Assistant Editor but space precludes...

How fortunate has Friends been to have such a talented and committed member on the team.

Ten Years of Fact Check

Compiled by Dr Diana Wyndham

After 10 years of fact-checking journalism at the ABC, the verdicts given to politicians say a lot about our political system. Details were published in *ABC News* on 17 August 2023, by **Matt Martino**, ABC Fact Check managing editor. This is a summary of his comments about the 600 verdicts:

An analysis of all verdicts delivered by Fact Check in the last decade shows that Labor and the Coalition notched up similar proportions of (negative), positive and — most commonly — in between. More recently, the Voice to Parliament debate has proven fertile ground, with the National Indigenous Australians Agency a particularly frequent target of misinformation. All of this shows why it's so important that fact-checkers continue to hold politicians to account and provide the public with the necessary context to interpret what they say. And it's equally important to establish whether governments follow through on what they said before being elected.

In 2014, Fact Check launched its Promise Tracker, which kept tabs on 78 promises made by the Coalition



government before the 2013 election. At the end of that term in 2016, there were 30 promises delivered, 21 still in progress, eight stalled and 19 broken. Funding cuts and a global pandemic prevented Fact Check from tracking promises in the two subsequent election cycles, but the project was recently relaunched to track 66 of the Albanese government's promises. So far, 19 have been delivered, with 41 in progress, five stalled and one broken.

Editor's Note: Update, July 2020 page 17, published a book note on *"Is That a Fact?"* By **John Barron** (ABC Books, 2014). It includes the verdict on the notorious claim **Tony Abbott** made on the eve of the 2103 election: "No cuts to education, no cuts to health, no change to pensions, no change to the GST and no cuts to the ABC or SBS". In a media release, former ABC Managing Director **Mark Scott** said "The Government gave repeated commitments before and after the election that funding for the corporation would be maintained". Verdict: **BROKEN**.

This important partnership between RMIT University and the ABC provides a powerful antidote to fake news.



"ABC Chair Ita Buttrose defends broadcaster as essential to democracy", **Rob Harris**, *SMH*, 23 November 2020"

Ita Buttrose Will Step Down

Compiled by Dr Diana Wyndham

On 22 August Communications Minister **Michelle Rowland** announced that ABC chair **Ita Buttrose** will not seek reappointment when her five-year term ends next March. Rowland thanked her for her "exemplary service", saying she was a "giant of Australia's media industry [and] the right chair for the right time". Despite being former Prime Minister **Scott Morrison's** "captain's pick" on 28 February 2019, Ita Buttrose defied his government and stood up for the ABC. "Ita Buttrose – ABC Chair", by **Matt Peacock**, journalist, author, former Staff-elected Director on the ABC Board, Co-Convenor ABC Alumni [extract]

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.... She grew up knowing and loving the ABC. Almost certainly, she will have the passion to make it greater. (Update **April 2019**, page 5)

"Ita and Friends", by **Professor Ed Davis AM**, President of NSW ABC Friends [extract]

ABC Chair, Ita Buttrose AC and OBE, was guest and speaker at the Annual Dinner for ACT and NSW Friends in Sydney on 6 September 2019. She began with warm words for the Friends: I'd especially like to thank you for the work you do in your own communities, being the boots on the ground for the ABC at local shops, the markets and other community events, and in Canberra, reminding people of the importance of a strong and effective broadcaster" and mentioned the challenges facing the ABC and stressed her commitment to the fight for a well-funded, strong and independent ABC. (Update **December 2019**, pages 6 and 7).

This is an extract of the speech in which she warned against growing attempts of intimidation towards public broadcasters around the world, saying countries that have popular, well-funded public sector media encounter less extremism and corruption and have greater press freedom... Taking thinly veiled swipes at the Morrison government, commercial media rivals such as **News Corporation** and the **Australian Federal Police**, Ms Buttrose described the 5 June 2019 raids on the ABC's Sydney offices as a "calculated move" that was "clearly designed to intimidate". Ms Buttrose's speech was recorded days after the broadcaster was heavily criticised by the government for a Four Corners episode of the "highly sexualised" atmosphere of the "Canberra bubble". She attacked criticism of the ABC's flagship program as "malicious garbage" saying that it had exposed corrupt practices and shonky behaviour for almost 60 years. (Update, **December 2020**, p. 4)

Three weeks after "Inside the Canberra bubble" was aired, Communications Minister **Paul Fletcher** tweeted 15 questions he intended to send Ita Buttrose. *Guardian Australia's* **Amanda Meade**, outlined the draft she's seen of Ms Buttrose's response in which she detailed patterns of behaviour which she described as very disrespectful" from a minister of the crown. Every one of the 15 complaints was rejected and the letter corrected some of the assertions made by Mr Fletcher. It was his third attack on the ABC: previously he had proposed moving the ABC headquarters and had asked for staff pay rises to be paused. (Update, **April 2021**, p. 10)

State News. Tasmania. On 1 May 2021 ABC Chair Ita Buttrose, AC, OBE, joined with ABC Friends Tasmania to highlight the importance of media freedom. (Update, **August 2021**, p. 11)

After the ABC launched an independent review into the complaints handling system on 18 October 2021, Senate Communication Committee chair, **Andrew Bragg** announced on **Sky News**, that a new government inquiry would also examine the complaints handling system on the ABC and SBS. An inquiry was established and, on 23 November 2021, in a vote passed by 23 votes to 22, **Labor** and **Greens**, with cross-bench support, derailed a push to suspend a government-backed Senate inquiry. As **Michelle Grattan** noted in *The Conversation* "Ita isn't saluting the captain who picked her." The government's political interference was soundly condemned by **Margaret Reynolds** (then ABC Friends National President), **Ronald McDonald** (former ABC Friends Media Adviser and ABC broadcaster) and by **Quentin Dempster** who described it as a "hideous" attack from the **Liberal Party**, the **Institute of Public Affairs** and the **Murdoch media**.

As ABC chair, Ita Buttrose stood up for the broadcaster's independence. It's time others did the same." This view was put by **Denis Muller** Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Advancing Journalism, The University of Melbourne, in *The Conversation* on 23 August. He said: "There have been many analyses of how nine years of Coalition government attacks

demoralised the ABC. But with Buttrose's departure now on the horizon, it is time for others at the top to stand up."

On 26 August the *SMH* cited many positive evaluations of her tenure: **Kirstin Ferguson**, who was a board member from 2015 to 2020, and Acting Chair until Buttrose took office, said: "It was clear she meant business. From day one, she brought a deep understanding of what the ABC does. There are a lot of acts, as well as the charter and the ABC Act itself, and she was all across that in my first meeting with her. She was very clear about the role of the board, the role of independence - that was obviously very important".

For selection of the new ABC chair, **Alan Sunderland** (*SMH* 24 August) strongly recommends that the chair is chosen by

the selection panel and not by the government. As a former editorial director of the ABC who has worked with 11 ABC boards, he warned that "the independent, merit-based panel introduced a decade ago to ensure ABC board members are chosen on merit can be (and has been) easily ignored". With the exception of Ita Buttrose, who has "been [a] shrewd, capable and a fierce defender of ABC independence", many choices of ABC board members by the government of the day, against the panel's advice, have been poor. Sunderland recommends that the Albanese government should let the panel recommend the best candidates, purely on merit, and select one of those.

Brava Ita Buttrose, who plans to accomplish even more before her term ends on 6 March 2024.

Chasing the Youth Market

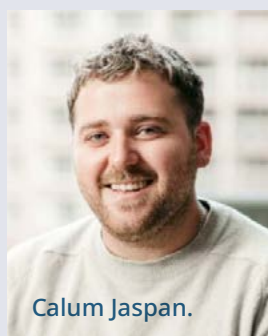
Compiled by Dr Diana Wyndham

In June 2023 the ABC promised in its new Five-Year-Plan:

We will prioritise investment in making it easier for audiences to discover ABC content, products and services. We will invest more to increase awareness and use of the ABC's content and services, enhancing value and trust in the ABC. This will include more external promotion, as well as cross-platform promotion, stronger branding across ABC touchpoints and better metadata and personalisation to support recommendations across ABC digital products. We will have a clear focus on ensuring that younger adult audiences, in particular, are aware of the content the ABC has to offer them.

On 15 June 2023 *Sydney Morning Herald* media writer **Calum Jaspan** quoted the ABC's **Andrew Probyn** who struggled to understand the direction of the national broadcaster as it made his political editor role redundant, along with up to 120 other roles as it prepares for its digital future.

On 24 July **Jaspan** explored the ramifications of this in his article "The ABC chases the fountain of youth in a shallow funding pool". At the same time as the ABC was cutting jobs, it was shifting the focus from TV and radio to digital. Jaspan quoted former host of *Media Watch* and ABC journalist for 35 years **Jonathan Holmes** who said that even with a refreshed strategy, getting younger Australians to connect with the ABC will be an uphill



Calum Jaspan.

struggle. "The biggest challenge for the ABC has always been being a visible part of young people's media habits. It has always skewed old, with Australians coming back to ABC television in their 40s." The difference now, Holmes says, is that young people are not watching TV at all, with streaming baked into their media habits".

Angela Stengel is the ABC's head of digital content and innovation at the **Innovation Lab**, which is part of the ABC's strategy division. Her role attracted little attention until the announcement by **Kishor Napier Raman** and **Noel Towell** in the *Sydney Morning Herald's* CBD News on 21 November, with the title "**Aunty's Influencers**".

After years of commissioning yet more shows from young up-and-comers such as **Shaun Micallef** and **Annabel Crabb**, and somehow failing to appeal to the under-60 market, the ABC is finally getting serious about its youth problem. The solution: **TikTok**.

Yesterday, the public broadcaster put up an advertisement for four six-month positions as part of its "creator program", hoping to bring social media stars into Aunty's stable. Competitive candidates will have more than 10,000 followers on **TikTok**, **Instagram** or **YouTube**, or have created a vertical video with more than 100,000 views. [The] salary range is between \$93,000 and \$114,000 pro rata for the six-month period. Meanwhile, the budding young journalists who land one of the ABC's highly coveted cadetships for 2024 will earn \$61,327, just about enough to make do in a capital city.

These new roles are being created after massive redundancies were made across the whole of the broadcaster. They are not going to be producing news, but will provide "entertainment, music and comedy".

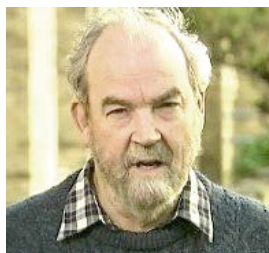
In the ABC during the 1940s, Labor Prime Minister **John Curtin** disliked "too much talking and too much serious music", so staff dutifully obliged with lightweight programs to "cheer people up". Is Aunty under the influence if she is turning to TikTok to attract younger audiences? If so, she needs to sober up and remember that the ABC is meant for all of us.

The ABC and the Pacific

Compiled by Dr Diana Wyndham

In 2014, the ABC shut off its regional TV and radio services at the direction of the then Liberal/National Party government. Under the heading "Our Government has failed our regional neighbours" Update Editor **Mal Hewitt** deplored this in page 3 of the April 2019 issue of Update.

Rodney Tiffen, Emeritus Professor in Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney, has comprehensively covered this political folly in - "Transmission interrupted: Australia's international television broadcasting" (*Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Issue 1, 2023, pp. 85-106). This is the abstract:



Emeritus Professor Rodney Tiffen.

Australia's efforts to pursue public diplomacy through a government-funded international television service have been sporadic and ineffectual. The reasons for failure lie in the way such efforts have been pawns in other political conflicts and relationships – conflicts between Coalition governments and the ABC; conflicts between **Kevin Rudd** and **Julia Gillard** that dominated the Labor government from 2010 onwards; and the wish of key players in both major parties to please **Rupert Murdoch** and **News Corp.** The **Abbott Government's** 2014 axing of the ten-year contract with Australian Television slashed Australia's international broadcasting capacity. Domestic agendas have repeatedly trumped what should be a tool of international policy.

Here is link to the article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2022.2152427>

"The Struggle for Radio Australia" (Update, December 2021, pp. 14-15) outlined the steady erosion of political support for this vital service and notes the contributions by ABC's Foreign Correspondents such as **Sean Dorney**.

On 3 December 2022 Australian House of Representatives and Senate passed the *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Community Radio) Bill 2022*. The Hon **Michelle Rowland** MP, Minister for Communications, said: "The bill's passage was a glowing one for community broadcasting. Political support and funding are also needed for *Radio Australia*".

On 5 April 2023 ABC Alumni deputy chair **Helen Grasswill** outlined developments in "ABC International spreads its wings: An ABC dove among the hawks". She reported: "This expansion of ABC International promises to remedy three decades



Helen Grasswill.

of misguided government policy and achieve a great deal in the national interest. Under the leadership of **Claire Gorman**, ABC International has wasted no time in utilising additional funding from the Labor government's Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy to extend its operations and influence across Asia and the Pacific. A new TV program, *The Pacific*, [launched on 6 April] heralds a dynamic new era of engagement with the region ... this expansion of ABC International promises to remedy three decades of misguided government policy and achieve a great deal in the national interest."



Claire Gorman, Head International Services ABC.



Promo for The Pacific – ABC Presenter: Tahlea Aualiitia

The Pacific is broadcast on ABC Australia on Thursday at 7pm AEST (6pm in PNG). Domestically it will be available on ABC iView and ABC News Channel at 9.30pm AEST on Thursday and on ABC TV at 10.30am AEST each Friday.

Editor's Note: The full range of services offered prior to 2014 have not been restored. We thank **Dr Mark Hayes**, ABC Friends Qld, for details about two very relevant books:

1. Dr Phil Kafcaloudes, "Australia Calling: The ABC Radio Story" (more details are in Update April 2023, pp.10-11).
2. **Dr Geoff Heriot** (a former ABC corporate executive), "International Broadcasting and Its Contested Role in Australian Statecraft: Middle Power, Smart Power" - <https://www.newsouthbooks.com.au/books/international-broadcasting-and-its-contested-role-in-australian-statecraft-161757/>

In view of last year's signing of the **China-Solomon Islands Pact**, the ABC's decision to restore links with our Pacific neighbours is very welcome. It occurred on 28 March when the ABC signed a historic new agreement with the **Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation** [SIBC]. ABC Managing Director **David Anderson** said, "The ABC is delighted to continue its partnership with the SIBC. The agreement strengthens media collaboration and exchange between the ABC and the SIBC through training, sharing media expertise and providing technical and program support. We will learn from each other as we seek to serve our audiences better."

NSW Branch News

Blue Mountains Branch

Three of our members participated in two Branch Zoom meetings this year. We wish to thank **Bruce Stevenson** (Northern Tablelands) for his major role in convening these very productive and practical meetings, which focussed on branch activities, challenges facing branches, communication with branch members and other branches, and how branches can help each other. We hope to participate in NSW /ACT Friends Zoom Meetings in 2024.

Next year, our branch is introducing Coffee Chat mornings, (in between our two-monthly branch meetings). We'll be meeting at various venues in the Blue Mountains (Upper, Lower and Mid), to attract more of our members. We hope to generate lively discussion in relaxed settings. We plan to visit Bathurst Friends for a Coffee Chat!

We will continue to support our sister branch, Western Suburbs of Sydney, (WSoS) based in Penrith, launched, prior to Covid, by **Barry and Bev Redshaw**. The hope is that eventually, this branch will expand, and other branches will form to better reflect the growing population and huge area that is Western Sydney.

This year we hoisted our tent at the **Lawson Magpie Markets, Katoomba Winter Magic Festival, Springwood Spring Festival** and recently, **Glenbrook Rotary Market**. We expand our Supporters list by an average of 20 people per market/festival event. Visitors to our stall often relate positive ABC stories with us. In one such story, **Kathy Faccin** shared her account of the assistance provided by ABC during the awful bushfire emergency in Woodgate, near Bundaberg Queensland.

In this final issue of Update (to be followed by the proposed two NSW Updates per year) and as the final Update with Mal Hewitt as Editor, our branch wholeheartedly thanks and applauds Mal for his 17 years of outstanding leadership and editorship of Update. This fantastic production has always delivered enlightening, provocative and entertaining items for ABC Friends. We knew we were being fully Updated! We have proudly handed out Updates at markets and at other ABC Friends events. We are indeed fortunate that Mal is a member of our Blue Mountains branch. And we wish him the very best in ALL of his present and future endeavours. Thanks Mal!

Philippa McDonald was the Guest Speaker at our AGM

Philippa McDonald, was an ABC News and Current Affairs reporter for three decades. As an award-winning journalist, she has been at the forefront in coverage of major events, from political upheaval to natural disasters. Philippa began her



Philippa McDonald speaking at the AGM.

talk with a thank you on behalf of ABC staff to ABC Friends, telling us

You have no idea the difference you've made to us ... knowing that you are there ... a powerful and committed force fighting for the ABC. As ABC Friends, you remind us of, and reinforce that the public broadcaster is appreciated and valued – indeed needed. She mentioned the tangible support ABC Friends have provided to ABC personnel: "During disasters you have offered me sandwiches and a cuppa, even a place to stay."

Philippa emphasised how the objectives of the **ABC Alumni** mesh with those of **ABC Friends**, noting "We are kindred spirits, publicly advocating for the protection of the ABC's independence and integrity." Philippa is unequivocal when it comes to the importance of the ABC as an emergency broadcaster. As a key reporter on the 2019-20 bushfires, she was struck by peoples' gratitude for the ABC's coverage and how they had relied on the ABC for up-to-the-minute bushfire information. Philippa has a love for the Blue Mountains and has on-the- ground experience of what people have been through during past fires and other emergencies. One of Philippa's last reports was "The Anatomy of a Mega Blaze", which went viral on Youtube. The 2019 **Gospers Mountain** fire was considered one of the largest bushfires the world has ever seen and Philippa recalls getting actual footage of the tree that was struck by the lightning that started the fire! [In February 2020, Update issued a special extra edition about these fires].

A distinguished career of reporting on some of the most important national and international stories of our time has led Philippa to her current role working with **ABC International Development** in **Timor Leste** to establish the

NSW Branch News

first English speaking newsroom at RTTL, the young country's public broadcaster. She spoke with great passion about this new international project by Australia's national broadcaster. Reflecting on her 30-year career with the national broadcaster, Philippa stated: "The ABC encouraged me to ask the tough questions and tackle the difficult stories."

For more details go to the Blue Mountains webpage:

<https://fabcnswbm.org.au/>

Sue Noske
President, Blue Mountains

Central Coast

On Thursday 17 August our branch of ABC Friends, Central Coast, hosted an event featuring **Helen Grasswill**, former Co-chair of the ABC Alumni. She presented a talk on the organisation within the ABC that not only reports and produces stories internationally, but also mentors and supports local international journalists and media organisations.

Helen wrote a paper for the Alumni titled: "ABC International Spreads its Wings". Helen's presentation was excellent and very well received with a great deal of positive feedback from our audience. She gave a comprehensive account of the history of ABC reporting internationally, particularly in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, and of the shortsightedness of Federal Government cuts and cancelled contracts, often awarded to inexperienced and sometimes uninterested commercial media organisations. This has had a detrimental effect on Australia's influence and diplomatic efforts in the region. Helen emphasised how much more could be achieved with additional funding for ABC International programs. Developing its work and reach could extend relationships with the governments, officials and populations of our neighbouring countries, and increase our own understanding of their cultures and the issues that affect them.

Although this event did not achieve all its objectives in attaining a more diverse audience, we did generate interest from audience members who had not had an association with ABC Friends in the past. They are now aware of our role in the community and hopefully have developed a greater appreciation for the role and contribution of ABC staff and divisions such as ABC International. We exceeded the target audience number of 50 people and managed to make a small profit in addition to covering all our expenses for the event.

Our branch's final event for the year will feature the former Federal MP for Macquarie, adventurer and ultra marathon runner, **Pat Farmer**. On 11 October Pat completed a run around the country. His ultra marathon was undertaken to raise awareness, support and engagement for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament. He covered each state and territory, commencing from the Hobart Town Hall

on 17 April and reaching his destination of Uluru on schedule on 11 October before the vote on the referendum took place, a marathon of 14,400 km over 176 days.

Pat will speak about his remarkable effort, on 14 December at the

Everglades Country Club

in Woy Woy. His talk will include a visual presentation and will be followed by a question-and-answer session. Other guests will include Pat's wife, Tania who accompanied him across the country as one of his support staff, and the Federal Member for Robertson, **Dr Gordon Reid**. Some of the ABC Friends audience will then join us for lunch in the dining area of the club afterwards.

Ross McGowen

Convenor, ABC Friends, Central Coast

Editor's Note: The full text of Helen Grasswill's paper "ABC International Spreads its Wings" is available on <https://abc alumni.net/2023/04/05/abc-international-spreads-its-wings/>. See also "The Struggle for Radio Australia", Update, pages 14-15, December 2021 and "Australia Calling: The ABC Australia Story", by Dr Phil Kalcaloudes, Update, pages 10-11, April 2023 and "Asia and the Pacific", compiled by Dr Diana Wyndham on page 18 of this issue.



Pat Farmer

Northern Tablelands



Dr Gael Jennings AM.

Our annual public presentation for 2023, on the evening of 7 September, featured the respected broadcaster, TV presenter, journalist and author **Dr Gael Jennings AM**. Her title was "The good, the bad and the ugly: Will politics, AI or Murdoch kill the ABC?" Optimistically, none will, but the ABC faces some traditional challenges, such as pressure

from commercial and political interests, and some novel ones, such as emerging so-called artificial intelligence, which can undermine trust in news and potentially threaten the livelihoods of journalists. We are grateful to Dr Jennings for fitting a visit to Armidale into her busy schedule, and for bringing us fresh insights into the work and workings of the ABC based on her extensive media experience which spans four decades with the ABC.

We held our AGM on 9 November. The following folk were elected as office bearers for 2024: Convenor, **Brian Byrne**; Deputy Convenor, **Narelle Clarke**; Secretary, **Vic Wright**; Treasurer, **Greg Clarke**; Facebook Manager, **Liz O'Hara**.

At the meeting, Brian Byrne presented a summary of the University of Canberra's Digital News Report, Australia 2023. This report is part of a world-wide survey conducted by the Reuters Institute, based at Oxford University. Although interest in news is declining, both world-wide and in Australia, there was some encouragement for the ABC in the survey. For one, the ABC and SBS were confirmed as the most trusted sources of news; for another, a majority of people across the political spectrum, from left-leaning to right-leaning, value "public service media" (ABC and SBS); thirdly, there is across-the-board scepticism about personally-curated news offered by various social media sources, with most people considering that they would be missing out on important and challenging ideas if that became the norm; fourth, high levels of concern about misinformation goes hand-in-hand with higher levels of trust in public service media. The survey also included information on news avoidance, and showed that news about local events (region, city or town) was just about the least avoided. In contrast to most commercial media, the ABC does maintain local offices, and we hope that this aspect of the survey is noted so that local services are bolstered as finances permit.

In 2024, we hope to hold a public meeting that focuses on the new world of AI and its threat, or otherwise, to public broadcasting. If we do, we also hope to be able to make the proceedings available on Zoom, possibly in real time.

Brian Byrne,
Convenor, ABC Friends Northern Tablelands

Northern Rivers AGM

The 2023 AGM for ABC Friends, Northern Rivers was held at Bangalow on 4 November. The meeting elected office bearers for 2024 and received the Annual Report of Branch activities.

Members attending listened to an inspiring address from our guest speaker, local **Bundjalung** woman **Charline Emzin-Boyd**, about her involvement in the cause of reconciliation and the rights of indigenous people, drawing upon her life experience in the Northern Rivers and southern Gold Coast.

Charline's role as the NSW coordinator for the **Yes23** campaign provided focus for the strategies used in campaigning and engaging people at the *Splendour in the Grass* festival.

Charline also provided some thoughts on the future recognition of our First Nations people, given the outcome of the referendum. Members enjoyed the opportunity to have more conversations with her over lunch after the meeting.

Discussions about the role of the traditional media as well as social media platforms, and of the reporting tactics used, focussed our need to continue to press for an independent well-resourced ABC as a public broadcaster on the many platforms available today and into the future.

Other matters mentioned at the AGM were:

- ABC funding and governance;
- The issues raised in Zoom meetings held to promote



ABC Friend Sonia Bertram with Charline Emzin-Boyd.

cooperation and support among the various branches within NSW and ACT;

- Finances of branches; and
- Deciding to hold a TAFE dinner in 2024 in line with the successful one held earlier this year.

Members were thanked for continuing to press for support of the ABC in letters to MPs, local news outlets and by engaging in social and political topics on the local ABC North Coast programs.

Tim Mulroy
President, ABC Friends, Northern Rivers

Northern Suburbs of Sydney (NSoS)

ABC Friends Northern Suburbs of Sydney Branch (NSoS) has achieved a very high community profile by means of its monthly guest speaker program, community engagement and creative teamwork, all of which inform, educate and inspire the public on the importance of the ABC.



Janine Kitson.

In 2023 guest speakers in NSoS' monthly program were:

- Former Powerhouse Museum curator **Margaret Simpson** celebrating United Nations World Radio Day;
- Wildlife photographer **Jan Latta** celebrating World Environment Day;
- Professor Emerita **Robyn Ewing** OAM from the University of Sydney's CREATE Centre, celebrating World Creativity Day;

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- **Paddy Manning** on *The Successor*, Manning's biography of **Lachlan Murdoch**, celebrating Media & Information Literacy Week;
- **Helen Grasswill** from ABC Alumni on the need for more funding for the ABC;
- **Dr David Smith** on why the ABC is necessary for climate action;
- ABC journalists **Gavin Fang & Tracey Kirkland** on their book *Pandemedia* - How COVID Changed Journalism;
- The final 2023 speaker, on 14 December, is renowned journalist and broadcaster **Geraldine Doogue**.

NSoS also invited guest speakers from ABC Friends branches: **Ross McGowan** (Central Coast Branch); **Angela Williamson** (Southern Highlands Branch) and **Mal Hewitt** OAM, Update Editor, 2006-2023.

At this meeting NSoS noted that the Update newsletter is being discontinued nationally and expressed support for the continuation of the Newsletter in NSW and ACT, with a motion passed unanimously "that ABC Friends Northern Suburbs of Sydney Branch calls on the ABC Friends NSW & ACT Committee to ensure that Update is published at least three times a year (with additional special editions if required) and that it be distributed to financial ABC Friends NSW & ACT members by email and/or by post as well to Members of Parliaments, MPs, libraries and other relevant people and organisations."

2024 NSoS Guest Speaker Program - held at the Roseville Club, 64 Pacific Highway, Roseville, from 11:45am-1pm. Stay afterwards and meet other ABC Friends at lunch at the Roseville Club Bistro (reasonably priced).

8 February — **Dr Phil Kafcaloudes** on his book *Australia Calling, The ABC Radio Australia Story*

14 March — World Poetry Day — local poets **Alan Clarke**, **Krystyn Haywood**, **John Clair** and **Charles Murray**

11 April — **Lynne Malcolm**, former ABC radio presenter and author of *All in the Mind*

9 May — The **Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance** (MEAA) will celebrate World Press Freedom Day (TBC)

13 June — **Dr Antony Howe** and the protest that persuaded the ABC to continue broadcasting *Dr Who* (TBC)

11 July — **Luke Wallace**, NSW Department of Education's Arts Unit on *The Schools Spectacular* and the ABC.

NSoS has benefited from the musical talent of **Loosely Woven** and the use of Humph Hall at 85 Allambie Road, Allambie Heights. Loosely Woven has donated \$2,065 to ABC Friends NSW & ACT from its concerts, which have become an ABC Friends 'social outreach' hub — thank you **Wayne and Gail Richmond**, Humph Hall and Loosely Woven for your ongoing generous support for the ABC. NSoS has also promoted other northern Sydney theatrical, artistic and musical events

including the **Pymble Players**, **Ensemble Theatre**, **Manly-Warringah Choir**, the **Schools Spectacular** and **Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra** in our twice-monthly E-newsletters. We also have posters promoting our upcoming guest speaker talks. Thanks to Northern Beaches Radio presenter **Michael Lester** who has interviewed many of our guest speakers. The Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Community Transport has brought guests to our talks.

In 2024 NSoS will be giving talks on 'The ABC - its Achievements & Broadcasting Challenges' at the **U3A** (University of Third Age); **Mosman Art Gallery** (11 March, 10.30am-12.30pm); **Dougherty Centre**, Chatswood (Tues 30 April, 10.30am- 12.30pm) and **North Curl Curl** (Thurs 16 May, 10.30am-12.30pm).

The NSoS Webpage provides information about our events. Recently it is highlighting the Northern Suburbs' ABC history with its many ABC pioneers who lived and worked in Sydney's northern suburbs. Teamwork is core to NSoS' work. A hearty thanks to NSoS Committee and Volunteers — **John Inshaw** who chairs our meetings; **Beverley Inshaw** who welcomes our guests; **Corin Fairburn Bass** who thanks our guests; **Jenny Forster** for her Facebook posts; **Wendy Sirianni** who sells raffle tickets; **Peter Vail** for filming our talks; **James Hobbs** for setting up our meetings; **Elizabeth Hylton**, mezzo soprano, singing "It's Our ABC" song and **Charles Murray** for selling guest speakers' books.

NSoS is keen to support other ABC Friends NSW & ACT branches and has attended events organised by the Southern Sydney, Central Coast and Blue Mountains Branches. Mid-year it attended two Zoom meetings that included over 30 branches across NSW.

Thank you to the many others who have so generously supported us in many ways: Roseville Club and Café for its excellent service; **Susan Scott**, ABC Friends NSW & ACT Membership Officer; **Phil Evans**, NationBuilder and the ABC Friends NSW & ACT Committee led by President **Dr Tess Howes**.

Highlighting your Branch ABC History

The ABC Friends Northern Suburbs of Sydney (NSoS) Branch has been researching its own ABC local history from the northern shores of Sydney's Harbour to the Northern Beaches to Castle Hill. Highlights include:

- The first radio broadcast from the UK to Australia was received in Wahroonga in 1918. The Commonwealth Government chose land in northern Sydney at Gore Hill because of its elevation to become its main television studio from 1956-2002.
- The ABC Friends movement began in 1976 with a meeting in **Walter Bass** and **Corin Fairburn Bass'** living room in their Turramurra home.
- **Irene Hope Gibson**, the musical director of the Killara Music Club, played a pivotal role in establishing the **Sydney Symphony Orchestra** that was first administered by the ABC.



100 Years of ABC Radio Celebrated

The State Library of NSW celebrated the centenary of public broadcasting with a live ABC Radio broadcast live from its Auditorium on Thursday 23 November, 2023. Special guests included ABC Chair Ita Buttrose, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and favourite ABC presenters including Richard Glover, Angela Catterns and Simon Marnie.

ABC Radio Sydney began as 2SB (later changed to 2BL) and achieved fame – at 8pm on 23 November 1923 – as the first licenced radio station in Australia to go to air.

Australia Post has released a \$1.20 stamp to celebrate the event.

- Many ABC Four Corners “giants” lived in the area including **Allan Ashby**, **Peter Reid**, **Richard Carlton**, pioneering female journalist **Carolyn Jones** and ABC “weathermen”, **Andrew Wilkie** and **Allan Humphries**.

For details, go to the NSoS webpage: https://www.abcfriends.net.au/nsw_act_northern_suburbs_of_sydney_branch

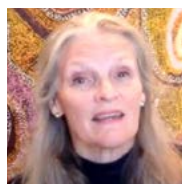
Janine Kitson

Convenor, Northern Suburbs of Sydney (NSoS) Branch

Southern Highlands

All members of our hardworking committee have many competing demands on their time, so the decision has been taken to go into recess, with the intention to “come out fighting” before the next Federal election. Individually, of course, we will always advocate for our ABC. Our contact details are available on our website: https://www.abcfriends.net.au/southern_highlands_branch and the back page of Update.

Tribute is paid to the incredibly hardworking and efficient Secretary **Julianne Cleland**, our witty and wise President **Trevor Wright**, painstakingly diligent Treasurer **Belinda Wright**, and advocates extraordinaire **Grahame Hackett** and **Meg Probyn**. The photo below shows Trevor, Meg and Belinda holding Bonny at our stall at Exeter Village Market.



Angela Williamson
Vice-president, ABC Friends
Southern Highlands



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 abcfriends.net.au or phone your local contact below.

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Victorian Groups

Like to join a local group or be on their mailing list? To find out more about one in your area: →

Not in these areas?

Contact Gai Mooney
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