

News+Views

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It's just not cricket

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Election outcome

Coalition promise for ABC funding

The ABC remains seriously under-funded to meet its Charter responsibilities to a high standard, a problem in which the Abbott-led Liberal-National Coalition has not at this stage expressed a positive interest.



Prime Minister Tony Abbott

Photo provided by Office of the PM

However, the Coalition has ruled out cuts to the ABC. When speaking live to *SBS World News* on election eve, Tony Abbott was asked about the future of the ABC and SBS. The answer he gave was unequivocal. He stated that there will be "no cuts to the ABC or SBS".

When any government is elected, the community should ensure its views are known on important matters. However, positive actions and commitments that politicians make should be recognised and encouraged. Politicians deserve to be praised when they act in the public interest. And, by doing so, you remind them that they are expected to adhere to their promises.

ACTION

Please contact your local Coalition Member of Parliament, ensuring that s/he is aware that you live in their electorate. And/or contact a Coalition Senator in your state.

Let them know of your concern for the ABC's inadequate level of funding. But also let them know that you were pleased to hear (or to learn of) Tony Abbott's promise on SBS before the election to maintain ABC funding.

It is the responsibility of politicians of all political persuasions to ensure that Australia's independent national public broadcaster thrives.

Let all politicians know that the ABC is valuable to you, and that you believe Australia's independent national broadcaster plays a crucial role in the life and culture of the country.

Prime Minister Abbott's interview by *SBS World News* can be heard at www.fabc.org.au

Replies of all major parties to FABC's pre-election questionnaire are at www.fabc.org.au

ABC & friends

Join Friends at the ABC



RAAF Concert Band

Courtesy of Department of Defence

Sunday 1 December, 3pm

Iwaki Auditorium, ABC Southbank

ENJOY

The RAAF Concert Band
ABC Classic FM's *Sunday Live* free concert
From 3 pm – 4 pm

FABC 2013 AGM

Approx 4.30 pm

at the conclusion of the
concert & after refreshments

Public welcome



News+Views is the newsletter of Friends of the ABC (Vic) Inc.

GPO Box 4065,
Melbourne, VIC 3001
tel +613 9682 0073
fax +613 9682 0074
fabcvic@vicnet.net.au
www.fabc.org.au
Inc No. A0034181A

Bill Peach 1935–2013

Bill Peach, the presenter of the renowned current affairs program *This Day Tonight* when it launched in 1967, has died.

When interviewed by the ABC's Peter Thompson in 2007, Peach explained that when *TDT* began, it was "up against some pretty stiff competition, like *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, which I guess makes me the man from Auntie."

The program commenced at a time when Australia was still emerging from the conservatism of the 1950s. It was "an era when journalists were still generally respectful of politicians, sometimes even eschewing questions and simply asking a minister for a statement," *The Age* journalist Mark Sawyer explained.

The ABC itself was regarded as a cautious and conservative cultural institution. The formal approval of the ABC General Manager was still required before a producer could invite politicians onto a program.

TDT had the excitement of being 'live'. And it was daring. There was no formula, it made up current affairs television as it went.

Peach said of *TDT*, "it introduced the idea of debate, controversy, especially about politics, but also about all sorts of other things ... Part of what made *TDT* exciting, but also made us friends and enemies, was because we took on big issues, we had furious debates, we had people attacking each other in the studio, and I mean physically as well as verbally."

TDT devised the empty chair strategy for ministers who refused to be interviewed: ask questions of the opposition and leave an empty chair in the studio for the absent minister. "Government politicians soon came to the party and a new journalism era dawned," wrote Gordon Farrer in *The Age*.



Bill Peach on the set of *This Day Tonight*, 1970

Peach turned out to be an inspired choice as the anchor for Australia's first nightly national current affairs program, wrote David Salter (former producer of *Media Watch* and *TDT*).

"*TDT* came under immediate assault from politicians and public figures accusing it of being a leftist cabal," Salter wrote in his tribute to Peach in *Crikey.com*.

"Within a few months, *TDT* established itself as provocative, daring, inventive, funny – and well-nigh ungovernable by the senior ABC management who'd risked the show's invention.

"Up to then, such allegations would have prompted a defensive response from the ABC. Staff would be disciplined or removed, the program ditched. But who could ever seriously believe Bill Peach was a dangerous subversive? That charming country boy with his twinkling eyes and atrocious taste in ties? The soft-spoken presenter with his easy

Australian speech patterns and gentle sense of humour? Surely not."

Salter also makes an interesting comparison: "back then the ABC News department and the start-up nightly current affairs unit were deadly enemies. There would have been fisticuffs in the Gore Hill canteen had ABC News even suggested it might stray into *TDT* territory. Now, news and current affairs operate within one mega-division, an unfortunate amalgamation that's responsible for so much of the bland sameness about the ABC's factual output."

Peach started as a trainee at ABC radio in 1958. Before joining *TDT*, he had worked on *Four Corners*. After *TDT*, he went on to host the travel series *Peach's Australia*.

Links for more information about Bill Peach at www.fabc.org.au

Discover the ABC

Triple j's One Night Stand



Peoples Palace perform in triple j's *One Night Stand*

Each year triple j's *One Night Stand* series brings a big live concert experience to regional towns that would normally miss out on big live music events. This year it was Dubbo's turn. 18,000 locals turned up – about half the town's total population – along with hundreds of thousands more listening live on the radio. And for the first time live on TV.

In a first for the ABC, triple j not only broadcast the concert live on ABC2 but also provided a second screen experience, giving viewers unprecedented access to backstage at the event. Plus the entire concert was broadcast live around the country on triple j radio, accompanied by videos, blogs and

photo galleries on the triple j website and social media – as they happened.

The concert opened with local Dubbo band and winner of triple j's *Unearthed* competition Peoples Palace. Other acts included Seth Sentry, Flume, Ball Park Music and The Rubens.

This is an extract from Radioinfo www.radioinfo.com.au

Triple j's *One Night Stand* will be back in 2014, bringing the big live music experience to another regional Australian town. Stay tuned to triple j for the details.

The Catalyst heart-stopper

Criticisms of the medical-science program Catalyst began after the ABC screened the first episode of its two-part series, 'The Heart of the Matter – the Cholesterol Myth: Dietary Villains and Cholesterol Drug War'.

The program, which suggested that evidence linking cholesterol to heart disease is a myth, was seriously criticised by leading health specialists, including the ABC's own Dr Norman Swan.

Heart disease is a major cause of death and ill health. The anti-cholesterol medication, statins, has become the most profitable drug class ever. It is in the public interest that the ABC investigate if research is being compromised by a multibillion-dollar food and drug industry.

As these are publicly funded drugs the community is entitled to know: Are statins effective? Over-prescribed? Do these drugs damage the health of users?

However, the manner in which the ABC considers and reports on matters of science and health is critical.

Australian Medical Association president Dr Steve Hambleton said the Catalyst program on cholesterol was "sensationalist" and "gave extraordinary weight to an opinion that is a minority view". Professor Paul Zimmet from the Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute said it had given a platform to a few people who selectively use evidence that supports their view and "ignore a considerable amount of evidence and many trials linking cholesterol to heart disease."

ANU professor Emily Banks, chair of the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Medicines, feared the program might result in people not taking their drugs, leading to more cardiovascular disease events and deaths.

After the first episode, it came to public attention that three of the experts whose controversial views Catalyst aired have vested

interests in the subject. They market health products that compete with statins.

As ABC Media Watch presenter Paul Barry pointed out, the program's failure was also in the disproportionate time given to the views of people with questionable authority and qualifications on the subject.

By the second episode, the ABC had introduced an advisory informing viewers the program was not intended as medical advice and they should consult their doctor regarding their medication.

Is that sufficient?

The response of Clinical Associate Professor David Sullivan, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, to Media Watch questions was: "In my opinion, both episodes of the two-part Catalyst program were unscientific, confusing and irresponsibly misleading."

So how should the ABC report on medical and scientific matters?

Edited extracts of an article on the Catalyst program by research scientist Upulie Divisekera in *Crikey.com*:

As a scientist committed to the accurate reporting of science in the media, I'm concerned whether journalists seek false balance by presenting two polar opposite views on a subject where there is consensus determined by evidence in the form of multiple studies. Journalists also have a fondness for the 'lone genius hypothesis' revelation.

Most science occurs through collaboration, endless discussion and rethinking of hypotheses in the face of new experimental evidence.

In situations where controversial topics are being discussed, journalists must fact-check their work to the best of their ability.



The Heart Foundation's National CEO Dr Lyn Roberts. The Foundation was shocked by the Catalyst program's "disregard for the extensive evidence" upon which the Foundation's recommendations are made.

Australian National University communication academic Dr Will Grant suggests three options.

One is to do the full due diligence, examine the relevant scientific studies, and also how they've been taken up by the medical establishment. That's basically a PhD right there. The second is to just trust established authorities (the Australian Medical Association, the Academy, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), ignore the controversy and trust the peer review process.

The third is to find and face a controversy, then allow both 'sides' a chance to put forward their case clearly. Options two and three are far easier; options one and three are likely to make the biggest impact. So you can see why journalists might be tempted with option three.

Science is a slow process, filled with constant re-evaluation and doubt, and highly qualified statements. It's harder to report that millions of dollars of research resulted in the discovery of a drug target and not a drug, or that climate change doesn't mean that it will be summer all year round. Scientists and journalists need to work more actively together to ensure that they are accurately reporting information.



ABC Catalyst team

Media Watch comments on Catalyst:
www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s3888657.htm

Information on cholesterol, heart disease and stroke: Dr Norman Swan, ABC Radio National's *Health Report* www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/healthreport/the-cholesterol-and-statin-debate/5067536

ABC loses exclusive cricket rights

Cricket fans who appreciate informed coverage, uninterrupted by advertising and hype, will be concerned at what the future may bring.

In a historic move by Cricket Australia, the ABC has lost its exclusive rights to Test cricket in Australia. Starting with this summer's Ashes series, commercial radio will cover the game alongside the public broadcaster.

Cricket Australia's aim is to broaden cricket's traditional audience. Its expressed expectation that the new arrangement with commercial radio will enable sponsors to "leverage" their association with cricket is presumably code for enhanced advertising opportunities.

In another development, the ABC has been frozen out of domestic cricket. A commercial radio network has been sold the rights to the Twenty20 Big Bash League.

Having earlier this year refused to allow the ABC to broadcast calls on phone apps, Cricket Australia has also stopped the ABC live streaming international cricket online as it had previously done. Instead, Cricket Australia is partnering with a commercial television network to have televised games streamed live on smartphone, tablets and the Cricket Australia website.



Many ABC listeners abandon local ABC radio during the cricket season. However, for others, ABC cricket broadcasts are an institution.

The broadcaster began covering cricket in 1924, when ABC radio provided the first commentary and score updates during the First Test between Australia and England at the SCG. Before ABC radio broadcasts, Australian cricket enthusiasts had to rely on newspaper reports.

The ABC's initial excursion into covering cricket from abroad came in the 1934 Ashes series in England, via the famous 'synthetic' broadcasts. Telegrams from London were handed to commentators in Australia, and a wooden pencil was tapped on the desk to simulate the sounds of play.



Rupert Murdoch (aka Michael Barrett) on hand to meet attendees of a forum on the fourth estate. The Melbourne Conversation's forum, held in partnership with the Melbourne Theatre Company, was informed by some of the themes of David Williamson's play, *Rupert* (Arts Centre Melbourne, September 2013)

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EDITOR: Glenys Stradijot // DESIGN: Liz Cox
PRINTING: Arena Printing & Publishing

Issued three times a year. Letters from members are welcome. Send to: *The Editor, News & Views, GPO Box 4065, Melbourne, VIC 3001* or email: fabcvic@vicnet.net.au Letters may be edited for length. Unattributed items are by the editor. Items attributed to other authors do not necessarily represent the views of FABC.

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WEBSITE MANAGER: Paul Harris

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Useful contacts

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

ABC—phone: (03) 9626 1500, GPO Box 9994, Sydney 2001
James Spigelman AC—Chairman, ABC Board;
Mark Scott—ABC Managing Director

Feedback on ABC programs and services:
www.abc.net.au/contact

Identify your electorate: <http://apps.aec.gov.au/eseach>



Boxing Day Test last year at the 'G' Courtesy of the Melbourne Cricket Club

ABC friend



Vale Janet Powell

Former FABC president Janet Powell has died. Janet was a long-time member of FABC and a former leader of the Democrats. After resigning from the Democrats to become an independent, Janet became FABC's president in 1992 after former Victorian premier Sir Rupert Hamer retired from the position.

Friends of the ABC is one of many organisations working for public good that is grateful for the support that Janet gave until her last illness.