

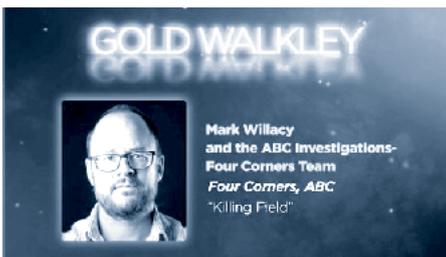
Bravo ABC!

The major prize-winner at the 2020 Walkley Awards

Mark Willacy and ABC Investigations team win Gold Walkley; ABC awarded for bushfires and coronavirus coverage

ABC News, 20 November 2020

ABC investigative journalist Mark Willacy and the ABC Investigations team **worked for more than a year to get to the truth** about alleged unlawful acts by Australia's elite soldiers in Afghanistan. Tonight the ground-breaking reporting was recognised with the Gold Walkley Award, Australian journalism's top honour. Willacy and the ABC Investigations and *Four Corners* teams also won the Walkley for Investigative Journalism for "Killing Field", which in March exposed alleged killings and cover ups by Australian special forces in Afghanistan.



"This story was extremely sensitive and a difficult one to crack," Willacy said. "We were dealing with allegations of criminal acts in a distant land by our most secretive and lethal special forces. "For us

to not only get a witness on camera, but to obtain and broadcast what we believe is the first footage of an alleged Australian military war crime, was a massive task – one that really underscores the ABC's commitment to investigative journalism.

"This work built on some very brave reporting by my colleagues Dan Oakes and Sam Clark in their series **"The Afghan Files"**. Also thanks to everyone in *Four Corners* who supported this work so brilliantly. "I'm really proud to be part of the ABC Investigations team started by Gaven Morris and led by Jo Puccini. It's still a relatively new team and it's breaking some big stories and proving it's a real powerhouse in quality journalism."



Cartoonist Jon Kudelka - 'Lest we find out'

The ABC was the major prize-winner at this year's Walkleys. Among its other honours, the coverage of last summer's bushfires, a combined effort by journalists from the News and Regional & Local teams, won the award for Coverage of A Major News Event or Issue, and the



Coronacast podcast took the prize for Radio/Audio News and Current Affairs. Hosted by health expert and broadcaster Dr Norman Swan and ABC health and science journalist Tegan Taylor, and produced by Will Ockenden, *Coronacast* launched on 3 March and has gone on to address hundreds of questions from listeners. "When we started our little podcast we had no idea what we had walked into," said Swan. "Our goal now is the same as on day one: to inform, explain and answer, and provide a sense of solidity in a time of uncertainty and huge change."

Sports reporter Russell Jackson won the award for Feature Writing (Over 4000 Words) for his **powerful story of the racial abuse experienced by trailblazing Indigenous AFL player Robert Muir**, which earlier this year also won the Grant Hattam Award for Excellence in Sports Journalism, voted on by all AFL players.

continued on page 3.

Update

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From the Editor

As 2020 draws to a close, we look back on a year that has presented enormous challenges to us, our families, our country and the world. Climate change brought catastrophic fires to Australia, USA, Europe, and Arctic regions, and cyclones, hurricanes and floods to tropical and sub-tropical regions. The COVID 19 pandemic swept the world, devastating many countries.

Through it all we have come to depend more on our ABC, not only to bring us news of events, but to provide essential and lifesaving information, especially when other technologies fail. It has provided an essential service, despite a diminishing flow of funds from the Federal Government, and the loss of 1250 jobs since 2014.

WALKLEYS – ABC SCOOPS THE POOL

The Walkley Awards, featured in Update, have been a triumph for the ABC, but should cause us to ask the question: How free is the press in Australia? The Brereton Report, just released, covers in great detail the alleged atrocities committed by our SAS forces in Afghanistan. However, there may never have been a Brereton Report but for the courageous work of ABC journalists like Mark Willacy, Andrew Greene, Dan Oakes, Sam Clark and ABC teams under David Anderson and Jo Puccini, and their conviction that we must learn the truth, at whatever cost. Sadly, there have been costs to these journalists, from harassment and abuse to death threats, raids by the AFP and threats of legal action. David McBride, the whistleblower, still faces the threat of life in prison.

Similarly, the recent Four Corners program on the toxic culture for women in the Canberra "bubble" went to air despite enormous pressure from government representatives who would clearly prefer that the truth did not come out. But let us consider the number of Royal Commissions that have been established over the past 30 years as a direct outcome of an investigation by the ABC. The truth

must be told.

THE EXODUS CONTINUES

In the September Update I listed some of the highly experienced, highly valued ABC staff who have been forced out as a result of funding cuts by the current government. Murdoch writers and presenters, in their daily diatribes against the ABC, characterise ABC staff as "inner-city, Green-voting, latte-sipping lefties." The description doesn't quite fit veteran ABC man Kerry Lonergan.

Landline is essential viewing for many on the land in rural and regional Australia, an example of an essential service which is not being provided by the ABC's commercial rivals. In 1991 the program was founded by Queensland ABC staffer Kerry Lonergan, who became its first Executive Producer, and has been the solid rock on which the program has been built over the past 30 years. Imagine Kerry's surprise on receiving a recent phone call from ABC management to tell him that his services are no longer required, thank you! Yet another casualty resulting from the governments funding cuts, even though the Prime Minister can find a spare \$10m to give to Foxtel, allegedly to increase their coverage of women's sport. Why not the ABC?

President of Queensland Friends, former ABC staffer and colleague of Kerry Lonergan, Dr. Mark Hayes provides us with more of the background to his dismissal in this Update

CLASSIC CHOIR A MUST

I should confess that my constant companion at home and in the car is ABC Classic, perhaps not surprising for a musician and music educator. But I refer to the current project, Classic Choir, which has brought together (online) over 6,000 singers of all types and experience to learn together, under conductor Ben Northey, and perform a new Christmas Carol, composed by Yorta Yorta singer and composer Deborah Cheetham. For more details, go to abc.net.au/classic

This project is the culmination of a year in which ABC Classic presenters have used

music in a quite miraculous way to calm, to soothe, to comfort and console, especially during periods of lockdown, and have had listeners dancing and singing in lounge rooms across the country. Musical friends from overseas are invariably impressed by ABC Classic – there is nothing quite like it anywhere else, especially in its ability to engage with listeners. I have appreciated the periods of focus on contemporary Australian composers, on women composers, on indigenous composers, on music for children, and for the ability of presenters to draw listeners into music which is new or perhaps different. If you are not a regular on ABC Classic, it is worth a try.

Music Therapy (the use of music to heal the sick) is now common practice in hospitals for children, and is increasingly being used by therapists working with dementia patients, sometimes with miraculous results. You can support this work on Celebration Sing Out! by going to csme.org.au/celebration

THANK YOU TO DEPARTING FRIENDS

Four of our State Presidents are stepping down from their positions after many years of wonderful and committed service to ABC Friends, both their state committees and the national committee, and we express appreciation for all that they have done to maintain the fight to preserve our national broadcaster, and to enable it to continue to provide a service to all Australians.

Our thanks to Margaret Reynolds (Tasmania), Peter Monie (Victoria), Prof. Ed Davis (NSW) and Ross McDowell (Qld). Margaret will continue as National President.

My thanks also to the Update production team: Diana Wyndham, Angela Williamson and Paul Martens.

Mal Hewitt OAM
ABC Friends



Bravo ABC!

The major prize-winner at the 2020 Walkley Awards

continued from page 1.

Managing Director David Anderson paid tribute to the finalists and winners – as well as to all the ABC’s journalists, content-makers and teams. “Along with the rest of the ABC, I’m proud of all our journalists and the work they do for all Australians,” he said. “The ABC has never shied away from tackling the tough and important stories, and our reporting and storytelling this year has been brave, meticulous and compelling. “Our bushfire and coronavirus coverage was essential, and the reporting of alleged atrocities in Afghanistan has demonstrated once again why the ABC’s commitment to public interest journalism is so crucial.”

Director, News Gaven Morris said the ABC’s investigative and public interest journalism had never been stronger. “Our teams are consistently bringing Australians the big stories and setting the agenda,” he said. “It’s also terrific to see our strength in newer formats such as podcasting and data journalism, where audiences are increasingly turning for information and

explanation. “But I want to particularly acknowledge Mark Willacy and the ABC Investigations team led by Jo Puccini, which we established several years ago to do journalism with impact across all ABC News outlets and platforms. It has had a profound impact on reporting on the conduct of Australian special forces serving in Afghanistan.”

Extracts from the ABC Media Release by Sally Jackson | ABC NEWS Communications Lead

Ed’s Note: A brave whistle-blower sparked the investigation which earned the Four Corners team a Gold Walkley: he deserves praise not persecution: as ABC investigative journalist Louise Milligan tweeted on 21 November: ‘The lawyer who raised the issues publicly, David McBride, still faces life imprisonment for his efforts. The Government stood by and allowed the ABC to be raided, and its journalists threatened with jail for exposing some of these alleged crimes’.



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ABC the embodiment of Australia

“There is a strong link between healthy democracies and strong public service media”

Ita Buttrose



Rob Harris
Sydney Morning Herald
23 November 2020



ABC chair Ita Buttrose defends broadcaster as essential to democracy

ABC chairwoman Ita Buttrose has 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. Ms Buttrose told the Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation that national broadcasters around the world face similar lines of criticism and assaults on their existence by commercial enterprises that claim public broadcasting services are no longer necessary.

She challenged the government to create a media freedom act that would compel policy makers to take media freedom into account when drafting national security legislation and give the courts a benchmark when they are adjudicating cases that touch on press freedom. Taking thinly veiled swipes at the Morrison government, commercial media rivals such as News Corp Australia and the Australian Federal Police, Ms Buttrose described the 2019 raids on the

ABC's Sydney offices as a “calculated move” that was “clearly designed to intimidate”. “There is a strong link between healthy democracies and strong public service media, so it was a bleak day for democracy and media freedom when the Australian Federal Police made the decision to raid the offices of the ABC,” Ms Buttrose said in an address recorded on November 12 but released publicly on Monday.

“I doubt though that the AFP expected such a strong reaction from the media and Australians generally - who have long valued, but perhaps, taken for granted, a free press. The raid was unprecedented - both to the ABC and to me. It was an extremely serious development and raised legitimate concerns about freedom of the press and proper public scrutiny of national security and defence matters.”

Police have since decided to not lay charges against ABC journalist Dan Oakes over stories revealing allegations of potential war crimes by Australian special forces in Afghanistan, after prosecutors found it would not be in the public interest. Ms Buttrose's speech was recorded days after the broadcaster was heavily criticised by the government for a *Four Corners* episode on the “highly sexualised” atmosphere of the “Canberra bubble”, including reports of the extramarital affair of one minister, Alan Tudge. In the days before it was aired, ABC managing director David Anderson said he had received about “half a dozen” emails from staff of government ministers whose offices had

been approached by *Four Corners* for comment about the program due to air on Monday night.

Ms Buttrose attacked criticism of the ABC's flagship program as “malicious garbage” saying it had exposed corrupt practices and shonky behaviour for almost 60 years.

“It was *Four Corners*' journalists who uncovered police corruption in Queensland that led to the Royal Commission, the Fitzgerald inquiry, into illegal activities and associated police misconduct and led to the resignation of premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen and the then police commissioner ended up in jail,” she said.

She said the broadcaster was “one of the lynch pins of our democratic society. It is not designed to make those under scrutiny feel comfortable. It exists to provide checks and balances and hold those in power to account, and as such it is the voice, and therefore the embodiment, of Australian democracy”. Broadcasters in Hong Kong, Canada, Slovenia and Poland were facing similar attacks on their independence, she said.

Ms Buttrose likened the situation of the BBC, the broadcaster's UK equivalent, to its own funding battles with the Morrison government, saying she would continue to argue for an end to a freeze in annual funding indexation, which has stripped \$84 million from the public broadcaster's budget worth just over \$1 billion a year.

Rob Harris is the National Affairs Editor for *The SMH* and *The Age*, based at Parliament House in Canberra.



'Siege mentality'

as ABC's Four Corners

bursts Canberra bubble

Amanda Meade
Guardian Australia
13 November 2020



ABC journalist Louise Milligan says government tried to 'emotionally manipulate and threaten' ABC and has likened the "siege mentality" of the Morrison government over allegations of inappropriate ministerial conduct to that of the Catholic church when confronted with allegations of child abuse. "It was fascinating in the lead-up to the story how the forces corralled to try and shut it down," the Four Corners reporter told colleague Annabel Crabb at the virtual launch of her book, *Witness*, on Thursday night. Milligan, the author of *Cardinal: The Rise and Fall of George Pell*, released her new book, about the failures of the criminal justice system in sexual assault trials, in the same week as her expose of a culture in parliament

"that can be toxic for women"... "We gave those ministers two-and-a-half weeks' notice of the story and ... they didn't answer any of our questions. They fired off a whole lot of off-the-record emails in which they tried to emotionally manipulate and threaten us. "They went over our heads. And they didn't just go to the executive producer of the program or the director of news. They went to the managing director and the board and tried to editorially interfere in the national broadcaster. This is the sort of institutional power that you come up against when you try to expose this sort of behaviour. And it is analogous to my book because it's about young people who are in these

dreadful situations who want to come forward publicly but are afraid." Guardian Australia approached the relevant ministers for comment.

The reaction to the story by some sections of the media was to call for the ABC to be defunded.

For ABC critic in chief Chris Kenny it was evidence the ABC had "surrendered any pretence of objectivity, intellectual integrity, honesty or high-minded journalism". "Four Corners essentially allowed itself to be the vehicle for another Turnbull revenge attack on his own party," Kenny wrote in the Australian. "It was tacky, transparent, and tedious. You do not have to endorse

the behaviour of these politicians to also hold that it is none of our business."

On her Sky News program, Peta Credlin labelled it an "ABC hatchet job" and Liberal senator Jim Molan insisted the ABC should lose its funding.

But it was former Conservative party senator Cory Bernardi

who had the most extreme response. The former Liberal told Andrew Bolt on Sky News the program was a "disgrace" and there needed to be an investigation into "closeted gay members of parliament". "The same cabal of people who are saying women are being targeted want to ignore some of the closeted gay members of parliament who also have relationships with male staffers," Bernardi said.

Australia's two biggest media companies, News Corp Australia and Nine Entertainment, have responded less than enthusiastically to the Senate's decision to hold an inquiry into media diversity. Following the popularity of Kevin Rudd's petition for a royal commission

into Murdoch media, Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young was successful in establishing the inquiry and plans to call the former prime minister and Malcolm Turnbull, who also signed the petition. Nine's chairman, Peter Costello, says the inquiry won't tell us anything we don't already know and Nine doesn't like being "tied down by endless inquiries" or the significant costs involved. And the former treasurer could not hide his disdain for the involvement of Rudd and Turnbull. "If we're called upon to give any evidence of course we will," a grumpy Costello told journalists after Nine's virtual annual general meeting. "The chances of anything new coming out of it I would rate as very low. We also think the move by former prime ministers to inquire into outfits they think were unsympathetic to them says as much about them as it does about the media. The media is scrutinised every single day, there are multiple outlets who scrutinise each other. I rate the probability very low."

Murdoch's man in Australia, News Corp Australia executive chairman Michael Miller, had earlier pointed out the company had taken part in at least nine media inquiries in a decade. "As always, we will continue to constructively engage in these important conversations," Miller said.

But the real vitriol for Rudd and Turnbull came via *Sky After Dark*, courtesy of Credlin, Tony Abbott's former chief of staff. In a 10-minute editorial, Credlin defended Murdoch's dominance of the Australian media, where its newspaper circulation occupies two-thirds of the market. Credlin said News Corp supported a broad range of views – she had former Labor minister Stephen Conroy on her show – and Nine and the ABC were "more influential" because they owned television and radio stations. She said Rudd and Turnbull were failed leaders who were "targeting Murdoch media" because they had both been "rejected and removed" and it was "payback".

"Credlin said News Corp supported a broad range of views...."



ABC Friends Welcome the Senate Inquiry into Media Diversity

Margaret Reynolds
ABC Friends
National President



The decision on 11 November for the Senate to conduct an Inquiry into Media Diversity is an important step forward in gathering and assessing evidence about the capacity of all Australian Media outlets to maintain high standards of investigative journalism and independent commentary.

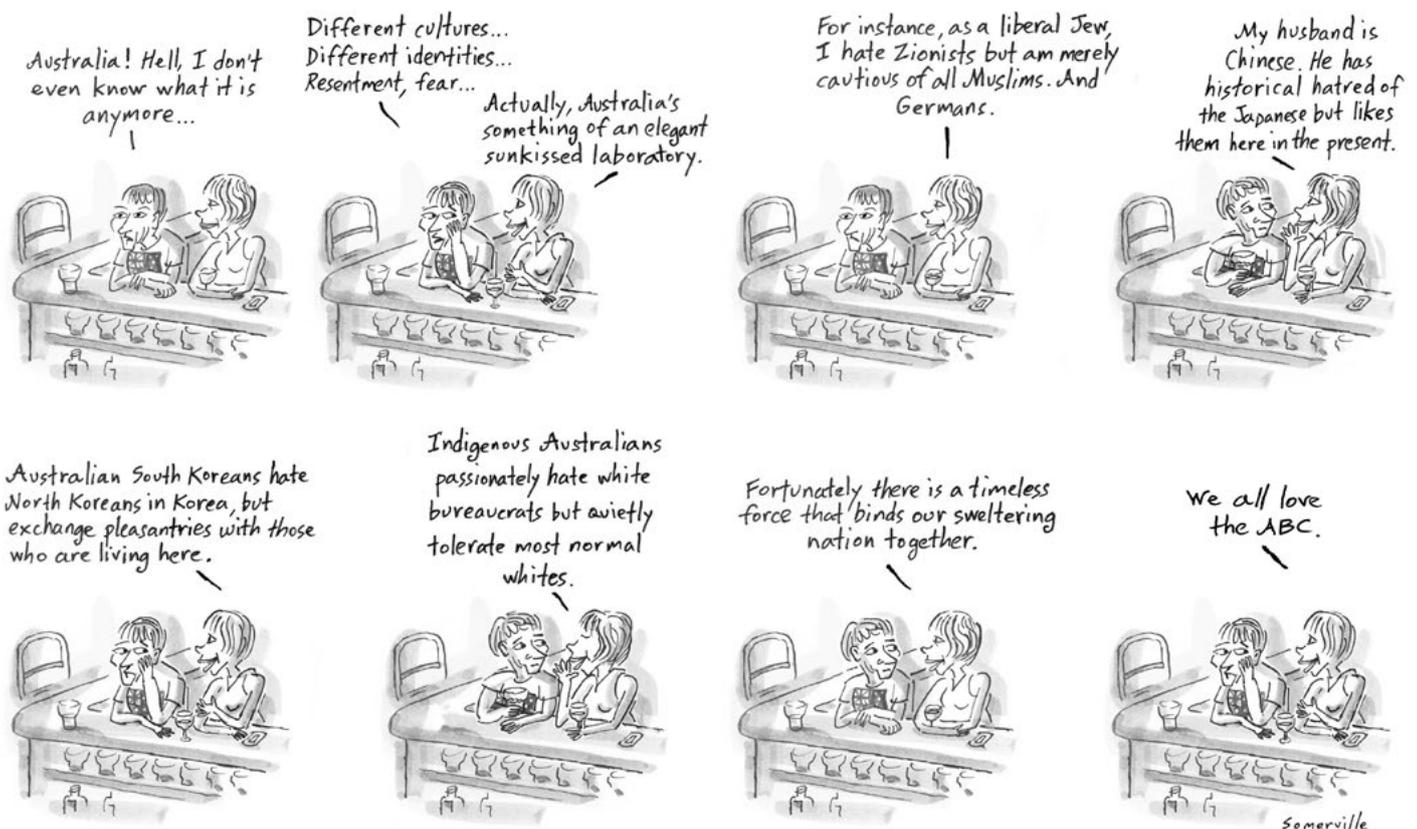
ABC Friends has long had deep concerns about the capacity of public broadcasting through ABC and SBS to maintain their roles to report without restrictions placed

on their staffing and independence. Australians have witnessed challenges to media freedom with police raids on journalists' homes and indeed the ABC itself. Government funding has been consistently reduced and essential transmission infrastructure sold off to the private sector. Australia's independent voice in the Asia Pacific region has been restricted and the national broadcaster consistently undermined both by government and media competitors particularly those owned by overseas interests.

This Senate inquiry will provide the opportunity for close scrutiny of current communications policy and how Australia can rebuild an independent range of media

voices, which can reject both local and international political interference.

We thank all those who first supported our ABCF petition calling for the Senate to investigate aspects of communications policy and congratulate Kevin Rudd on his strong advocacy for a Royal Commission into media diversity. Many thousands have now indicated their extreme dissatisfaction with current government communications policy and practice. ABC Friends look forward to actively working with all Senators to guarantee that this enquiry contributes to major reform. We greatly appreciate the initiative of Senator Sarah Hanson-Young and all those supporting Senators who recognised the importance of establishing this enquiry.



Cartoonist: Phil Somerville

A scene from the series *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds*.



ABC wins Australia's only nominations at International Emmy Awards

The ABC has scored Australia's only nominations for the 2020 International Emmy Awards, which celebrate the world's best screen content and storytellers. Two ABC shows are in the running for this year's awards, which feature 44 nominees across 11 categories and 20 countries.

Heart-warming ABC Factual series *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds** is a finalist for the Non-Scripted Entertainment International Emmy, while innovative vertical video series *Content* is a contender for the Short-Form Series Award.

Michael Carrington, ABC Director of Entertainment & Specialist, said the ABC was proud to fly the flag for Australia at this year's awards. "These International Emmy Award nominations show that innovative and uplifting Australian stories resonate with audiences, no matter where they are," he said. "Thank you to the ABC teams and our production partners for bringing these outstanding programs to life. The ABC is proud to be the home of Australian content and creativity, here and around the world." The life-changing *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds*, produced by Endemol Shine Australia, also won gold at the 2020 New York Festivals TV and Film Awards for best Social Issues Documentary and the 2019 AACTA

Award for Best Documentary or Factual Program. The unique social experiment demonstrated the physical and mental health benefits of bringing together the very young and very old at a retirement home.

Content, produced by Brisbane-based Ludo Studio, which is also behind ABC Kids' series *Bluey*, is the world's first comedy show set entirely on a smartphone and tells the story of a wannabe influencer and millennial whose life changes when a car crash turns her into a global meme. Both series are available to watch now on ABC iview.

Earlier this month, globally-lauded ABC series *Hardball* scored an International Emmy Kids Award nomination for best Kids: Live Action program. In April, *Bluey*, Australia's most popular children's television show, won the 2019 International Emmy Kids Award for best Kids: Preschool program.

Nominees for this year's International Emmy Awards come from Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Norway, Portugal, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

* It was announced on 23 November that the ABC has won this award.





Vale
Susan Ryan
AO

10 October 1942 –
27 September 2020

- the first woman to hold the portfolio relating to women's affairs,
- the first female minister from the Labor Party
- key women's rights laws were legislated on her watch, including the Sex Discrimination Act

Margaret Reynolds remembers Susan Ryan

I first met Susan Ryan in 1978 when she came to North Queensland to tell local women about her plans re women's and a national social justice agenda.

Many of us had been politicised by the 1960s Women's Movement and the reforms of the Whitlam Government 1972-1975. But that period had been cut short and in North Queensland we were isolated and keen to learn how we could contribute. Susan immediately impressed as "one of us" - she was a feisty feminist and very good company as she outlined new ideas for a future Labor Government.

Little did I know at that initial meeting that I would be joining her as a Senator for Queensland when the Hawke Government was elected in 1983. It was an exciting time because several women were elected to both the House of Representatives and Senate that year. And Susan Ryan was ready for us to start work on introducing sex discrimination and affirmative action legislation as well as a range of reforms across the community and public service. As both Education Minister and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women Susan was in a key position to lead the way in changing opportunities for Australian women but of course it was a tough job as she was the only woman in that first Hawke Ministry and some of her colleagues resented her capacity to keep the focus on women. Bob Hawke was her staunch supporter and we women established an influential Status of Women Committee, each monitoring two male

ministers to ensure they maintained a commitment to gender equality within their various departments

I particularly remember the first Women's Budget Paper released at a party in Susan's ministerial office in 1983. It was just a few pages of commitments but over the next twelve years it grew as a significant document detailing how 51% of the population benefitted from government planning. Australia's gender budgeting was to become a major international model for many countries in the 1990s, but sadly with a change of government we lost so many of those reforms. While new governments can tinker with public policy programs, Susan Ryan's key legislative reform to end gender based discrimination has had a lasting impact for Australian women.

Susan was a passionate supporter of public broadcasting and of the ABC, where she frequently featured in interviews, discussions, debates and panels, even in her later years.

Sadly Susan died doing what she loved swimming at her local Sydney beach. Her lasting legacy will continue to impact on the lives of current and future generations.

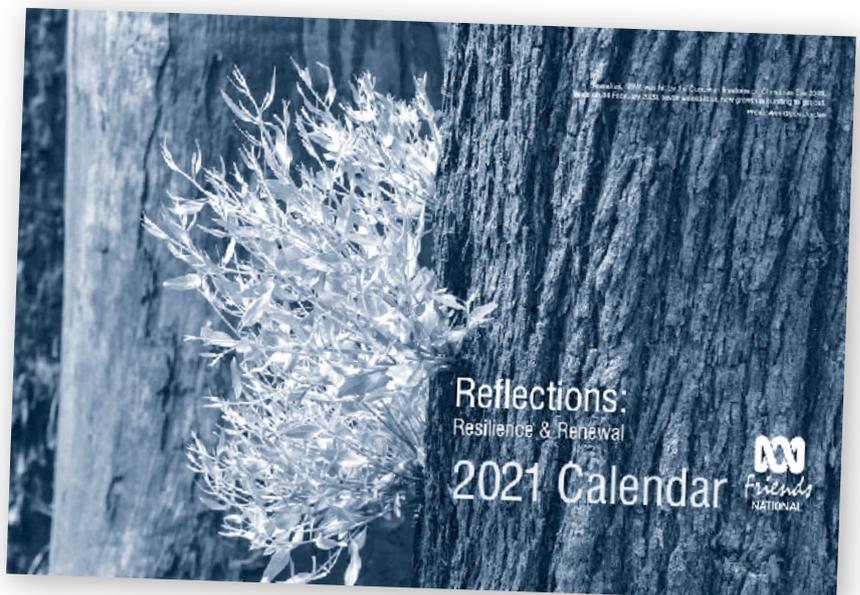
Margaret Reynolds
ABC Friends, National President

Ed's Note: Also Vale Dame Margaret Guilfoyle, a trail-blazer in Liberal politics, who died on 19 November at the age of 94. She was Australia's first female cabinet minister when she first became the Minister for Social Security and then the Finance Minister in the Fraser government, the first woman to hold an economic portfolio.

Friends' 2021 Calendar

At the end of this extraordinary year, ABC Friends and their friends have shared their personal responses to Australia's recent devastating fires, the impact of the ongoing pandemic and the inevitable changes in all our lives. These are our stories of resilience and hope for 2021.

Order now for Christmas at [abcfriends.myshopify.com/collections/gifts-etc](https://www.abcfriends.myshopify.com/collections/gifts-etc)



National President's End of Year Message

As this difficult year draws to a close, it is timely to remind ourselves of the challenges the ABC has faced and how well our national broadcaster has responded in such difficult times. We recall the outstanding role the ABC played during the summer bushfires as our emergency broadcaster.

Soon after there was a pandemic emergency and again the ABC was on the job with health advice and support for children learning at home. During those periods of lockdown, the ABC made considerable efforts to reach out to Australians isolated in their homes. Perhaps one of the most innovative was Classic FM introducing an 11am dance time when listeners were encouraged to dance or move to their favourite music!

While we appreciate these many initiatives, we also need to remember the negative attacks on the national broadcaster with ongoing funding cuts, staff losses, transmission, and programme limitations. These policy restrictions are especially concerning occurring at the same time as the government is redirecting public broadcasting dollars to overseas and private media interests. We know that there has been political pressure on the ABC from government avoiding revelation of information that may embarrass individuals' departments or organisations. Even the Australian Federal Police and the courts have been used to undermine media freedom.

However there has been a recent very positive development with the Senate initiating a Media Diversity Inquiry to review just how Australia manages media independence and public interest journalism without being manipulated by local or foreign interests. Thank you to everyone who supported the ABC Friends' petition for a Senate investigation and thanks too to Kevin Rudd whose call for a Royal Commission put scrutiny of Australian media diversity firmly on the political agenda.

ABC Friends will be submitting to this important Senate inquiry and we know many individuals and organisations will also be putting forward their views. The

early closing date of 11 December will limit the number of community submissions but there are other ways you can ensure that your concerns are heard by your elected representatives.

There are a number of issues identified by the Senate that we can also use in talking, texting and writing to our Members and Senators. You can focus on any one or more of these topics in communicating your concerns about the way that the ABC is being treated in Australia's current media climate.

The Media Diversity Inquiry has identified these priority areas for comment

- Public Interest Journalism
- Media concentration
- Media ownership
- Barriers to accurate news services
- Global Media influences
- Local, regional, and rural media
- Independent news services
- Role of government
- Media and democracy

Governments are elected to represent the public interest, but we need strong independent media to guarantee that decision making is transparent. Currently a number of Australian communications policies and practices undermine our access to reliable news.



We need to debate these issues with our parliamentarians so that they understand our concerns and need for media reform.

Your opinion matters. It is so important that you are in contact with your elected representatives to remind them of their responsibility to defend public interest journalism and independent media.

Thank you for your support and commitment during this particularly challenging year.

My seasons greetings to you and your family.

Regards,



Margaret Reynolds
ABC Friends
National President



Coalition staffers asked ABC boss if Four Corners episode was in the public interest



Lisa Visentin
Sydney Morning Herald
9 November 2020



Federal ministerial staffers contacted the highest levels of the ABC to ask whether a Four Corners episode about an alleged toxic culture in Coalition government offices was in the public interest. ABC managing director David Anderson said he had received about “half a dozen” emails from staff of government ministers whose offices had been approached by Four Corners for comment about the program due to air on Monday night. Mr Anderson said he did not regard the emails as detailing any “direct threat”, but said they raised questions about whether or not the subject matter was in the public interest. “I haven’t had it put to me to drop the story entirely. What I’ve had is questioning about whether it was in the public interest,” Mr Anderson told a Senate estimates committee on Monday.

“Contact over a story pre-publishing that sits outside the person of interest I think is problematic. I’m not aware of any untoward pressure on the ABC specifically not to publish but any contact I think becomes difficult.” He said he was emailed directly by staffers, and was also copied in on emails from ministerial offices, and had received phone calls from one office, but had not communicated directly with ministers. Mr Anderson also revealed he had received a phone call from ABC chair Ita Buttrose to tell him that a board member had also been contacted by a federal staffer about the program. He said Ms Buttrose had seen the program and supported the decision to publish it.

The episode was billed as an exposé inside the “Canberra bubble”, with teasers for the show featuring lead reporter Louise Milligan saying the investigation “questions the conduct of some of the most senior politicians in the nation”. Executive producer Sally Neighbour has also tweeted that the episode “investigates the ‘toxic’ culture for women in federal politics”. Mr Anderson revealed the program would focus on Liberal ministers, which he said was due to the “bonk ban” implemented by former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. “It does talk broadly about a culture issue here in Parliament House and what might need to change for the future, but the reason that it will focus on Liberal ministers is with regard to that ministerial code of conduct put in by the former PM.” The ban prohibited sexual relationships between ministers and their staffers under the ministerial code of conduct.

Mr Anderson said the Four Corners team had contacted more than 200 people working inside Parliament House.

“I’m satisfied this team has investigated this properly,” Mr Anderson said. Neighbour praised the ABC’s senior ranks for not buckling to the pressure. “The political pressure applied to the ABC behind the scenes over this story has been extreme and unrelenting. All credit to the ABC’s leadership for withstanding it,” Neighbour tweeted on Monday. Milligan tweeted that “multiple representatives of the Commonwealth government” had “repeatedly tried to go over our heads to stop you from seeing [the episode]”. Earlier on Monday, Prime Minister Scott Morrison fielded questions about whether his government had pressured the ABC not to run the program amid speculation it

featured allegations against senior Coalition MPs. “I’m not in the habit of responding to allegations people make based on a program that I haven’t seen and I don’t even know what’s in it,” Mr Morrison said. However, he said the ABC should not limit its focus to one side of politics and should act in an independent and an unbiased way. “If they’re going to make inquiries, I would think they’d want to do them across the political spectrum and it’s really for the ABC under their charter to remain true to that,” Mr Morrison said. He added he was “one of the strongest supporters” of the “bonk ban”, first introduced by Mr Turnbull following revelations Nationals MP Barnaby Joyce had had an extramarital affair with his media adviser Vikki Campion. Mr Joyce was deputy prime minister at the time and resigned from the front bench shortly after the revelations were made public.

Mr Joyce, who is fiercely opposed to the bonk ban, said his resignation had established a precedent and the government now likely faced the “dilemma of consistency”. “This thing has come and bit us on the proverbial. It was inept. I never believed my situation was unique and in fact I had very strong suspicions of others. That doesn’t make it right but it does make it a fact,” Mr Joyce said. He said he did not want his colleagues to lose their jobs if they fell foul of the bonk ban, providing the relationship was between consenting adults. “I definitely don’t want the same thing for them. But I definitely want an explanation as to why my situation was different. Why did I lose my job?”

Lisa Visentin is a federal political reporter at The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, covering education and communications.



Letters and Tweets

SMH 30 September 2020

Peter Hartcher rightly points out the indispensable value in a democracy of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Worryingly, we have seen a consistent campaign by the Coalition, over a number of years, to defund and emasculate our own independent ABC. We must avoid the complete privatisation of our media, as has occurred in the USA; it results in biased and commercially driven operators and dubious or outright false content. The cost of an independent national broadcaster to a true democracy? Priceless.

Alan Marel, North Curl Curl

SMH 2 October 2020

ABC deserves more -

Communications Minister Paul Fletcher says he's disappointed ABC staff voted not to defer the 2 per cent pay rise that had previously been confirmed as part of their Enterprise Agreement ("ABC staff vote against pay rise freeze", October 1). He feels it would have been a "fine gesture of solidarity" with their colleagues in the commercial media. The Minister conveniently overlooks two pertinent facts. Most pay rates for equivalent work in the commercial sector are higher than current ABC salaries, and, the so-called "independent" media spend much of their time attacking the ABC and its staff.

David Salter, Hunters Hill

SMH 17 October 2020

Having already drastically slashed funding from the public broadcasters, the government now seems intent on depriving them of legitimate compensation from the parasitic tech

giants (Google and Facebook). If the government's legislation excludes the ABC and SBS, the federal barbarians will have inflicted another wound in the death by a thousand cuts that is their sustained campaign against our independent news publishers.

Rob Phillips, North Epping

SMH 11 November 2020 -

"Extreme and unrelenting" political pressure was applied to the ABC not to air the story regarding the toxic culture of Parliament House and the sexist and hypocritical behaviour of federal ministers Christian Porter and Alan Tudge. Congratulations for standing strong. Elisabeth Goodsall, Wahroonga

SMH 23 November 2020

Hounding whistleblower is now hypocritical - The fact that legal action remains pending against David McBride is a further outrage, and it must be withdrawn immediately. Our government should hang its head in shame in regard to his treatment and that of a fellow whistleblower and of the ABC.

Adrian Eisler, Eleebana

SMH 23 November 2020

Despite all evidence of horrendous atrocities in the Afghanistan war, so far only one person is facing criminal charges. That person is David McBride, the man who risked so much to bring those dark secrets into the light. Without him, the Breton inquiry would not have happened. He deserves our thanks and support. Dropping the charges would be a start.

Tony Judge, Woolgoolga

Tweets in response to 19 November ADF press conference:

George Megalogenis – Today's press conference was painful on so many levels. But kudos to ADF for taking responsibility. We Australians have been conditioned to expect our leaders to blame shift and mislead. General Campbell did none of that. A great example for leaders in all fields. Also, I think it is fair to say the government and AFP owe the ABC an apology for last year's raid. I know it won't happen but those involved in the decision to raid should reflect on what we learned today. The ABC was on the right side of history.

Sister Bernadette E O'Malley

– Thank you for your comment. It is so important for our democracy to maintain faith in all government sectors and to have transparency and a fearless media which is prepared to risk their safety & reputation to investigate. Bravo to our ABC, Australia.

David McBride – And I should not forget the journalists Daniel Oakes, Chris Masters and Nick Mackenzie, Mark Willacy, Mark Butcher, and all their teams. **I doubt the Breton Report would have happened without them, and it has not been an easy road for them.**

David McBride, an Army Lawyer, is being prosecuted (and faces life in jail!) by the Morrison government for exposing the war crimes about same time as ABC broke story.



The Shunting of Kerry Lonergan



Dr Mark Hayes

President, ABC Friends Queensland

A routine national conference call between *Landline*'s staff and their Masters in Sydney on Monday, 9 November 2020, to nail down the details of the last show for 2020, and kick around ideas for the show's 30th anniversary.

Sources vary, and Mr Lonergan declined to be interviewed for this story, but he received a call from senior ABC Management, probably the next morning, brusquely telling him his services would no longer be required in 2021. His long running, highly informed and informative and popular *Landline* Commodities segment was being 'taken in a different direction'. No 'heads up', no warning, and definitely no respect. A Management Prerogative Ambush.

Soon after, social media erupted as friends, former colleagues, including me, and *Landline* watchers, reacted with disbelief, sadness, support for him, and fury at the ABC for terminating an over 45-year distinguished, and awarded, career in journalism, 34 years with the Corporation, by unceremoniously showing him the door.

I was told me that when Agriculture Minister David Littleproud heard the news, he rang ABC MD, David Anderson and discovered that Anderson hadn't heard of this shunting. "Kerry Lonergan and his weekly commodity markets report are an institution for the many thousands of rural and remote Australians that watch *Landline* every Sunday," Mr Littleproud said in a statement issued on Wednesday, 11 November. "Kerry is the father of this iconic Australian program, having started *Landline* back in 1991 and remaining loyally with the program ever since," he said. "Kerry brought a keen intellect, passion, experience, integrity and an

unrivalled understanding of the issues impacting on Australia's farmers," Minister Littleproud said.

Mr Lonergan's successor as Executive Producer of *Landline*, Peter Lewis, joined many in his praise of his former boss, colleague, and friend, and disgust at his axing by the ABC. "Like so many of those who have been involved in it over the years and those who are still involved in the program, I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Kerry Lonergan for the opportunity to work on *Landline*," Mr Lewis said. "He had a clear vision of what *Landline* viewers deserved and an unshakeable faith in the people he hired to deliver those kind of stories." "The programme's enduring relevance



Aunty must surely be sucking their teeth about your exit – four months shy of *Landline*'s 30th anniversary - and they should be.

and popularity is a direct consequence of his innate feel for *Landline*'s point of difference in an increasingly fragmented marketplace for regional and rural news and information. Over a career spanning 40 years I never had the same job satisfaction nor repeat business that I enjoyed on *Landline*. The secret of its success was no secret at all. It came down to respect - both for the audience's

intelligence and the men and women who agreed to invite *Landline* crews into their lives and onto their properties to tell their stories. It's a shame after three decades service that Kerry Lonergan wasn't afforded even the slightest bit of respect and regard by Sydney management," Mr Lewis said.

Industry commentators, like John Condon on *Sheep Central* and *Beef Central*, repeated the fulsome praise and recognition for Mr Lonergan's long and outstanding career, including his induction into the Rural Journalism Hall of Fame in 2015. Mr Lonergan also was awarded an OAM in 2013 for services to broadcasting and the community. Ticky Fullerton, *Sky News* Business Editor and co-anchor of *Business Weekend*, joined *Landline* in 1995 as a reporter and then presenter, before moving to *4 Corners*. She sent Peter Lewis a most generous and fulsome message of support for Kerry Lonergan: "Kerry, you're a living legend. The ABC's decision reflects appallingly on those who made it - but then to this day Sydney has never understood the DNA of *Landline* and the fellow behind it," Ms Fullerton said. "From nothing, and on the smell of an oily rag for over thirty years, you've delivered a vital service for Australians; a top draw, informative, and positive agri show, positivity being as rare as hen's teeth these days. Content was king. You brought the bush to the city, commissioning story after story of life on the land. You got a gong for it, and rightly so. You've had many hay days at *Landline*, but for me it was when I was there with you and Pete [Lewis] was on the road bringing in great yarns with [*Landline*'s crews]. In two years in Brisvegas I learned more about journalism and Australia than at any time in my career. You're a tough critic, for which I'll forever be grateful, you've an editor's eye that can make a silk purse out of a

sow's ear on any story, you had vision that kept *Landline* current for over 30 years – extraordinary; your take on commodities is must watch for the core viewers and your network across the sector from grass roots to the ivory tower is unmatched. The calls you've had from shocked ministers and top 100 CEOs should tell you that. Naturally Sydney had issues with a successful Queensland satellite run pretty autonomously. That's how things get done on the few shekels thrown *Landline's* way. As for your occasional recalcitrance – efforts like the Gympie Muster fund-raiser for example - I'm sure you'd do it again. You have the most loyal

mates of anyone I've ever met and your hair colour will remain one of the great mysteries of television. Reading so many posts, someone high up at Aunty must surely be sucking their teeth about your exit – four months shy of *Landline's* 30th anniversary - and they should be. The ABC is better than that. And you are True Blue Kerry Lonergan and will be missed. Thank you from me and from all the *Landline* supporters," Ms Fullerton concluded.

Dr Mark Hayes, the President of ABC Friends Queensland, worked with Kerry Lonergan at QTQ Channel 9's original *Today Tonight* when both started in

television journalism in 1979, Mr Lonergan being hired by TT EP, Des Power, from a Brisbane commercial radio station. They again worked together on ABC TV's *The 7.30 Report*, Queensland Edition, between mid-1987 to the end of 1990, during Expo 88, the Fitzgerald Inquiry, and the 1989 Queensland election campaign. As a researcher, Mark Hayes assisted Kerry Lonergan with many, many stories he reported on these shows. They have kept in touch ever since, and Dr Hayes remains unstinting in his praise, respect, and enormous regard for his former colleague.



The ABC has many Friends in the Highlands

ABC Friends NSW & ACT Secretary Angela Williamson recently had her Letter to the Editor published in the *Southern Highland News*.

Here is her letter.

RE: The formation of a new ABC Friends group and its first meeting in Bowral. Spokesperson for the brand-new branch of ABC Friends in the Southern Highlands, Gill Graham, called for a reversal of the recent Federal budget cuts of \$84m. The ABC has laid off 86 'household names' journalists and 150 research, production and technical staff around the country. The ABC is being emasculated, Ms Graham said. While the first cuts to the taxpayer funded broadcaster occurred under Labor in the late 1980s, it has been conservative coalitions in recent times which have cruelled the ABC's capacities to operate its Charter.



ABC Friends Belinda Wright, Mal Hewitt, OAM, Angela Williamson, Trevor Wright and Gill Graham.

These cuts to the ABC come at a time when we all rely on the ABC's vital Emergency Broadcasting e.g. for last summer's worst-on-record bush fires! This at a time when the proliferation of 'fake news' via social media needs to be countered by the ruthless research of the ABC's quality journalists. The ABC's Charter requires it to provide a huge range of services which the budget cuts are now making impossible to meet.

The new Southern Highlands Branch launched on Wednesday to a COVID-19-limited crowd of around 30 in Bowral. Vice-President of NSW & ACT Friends, Mal Hewitt, OAM, came especially from the Blue Mountains for the soft launch of the branch. Post-

COVID plans are afoot for further events and activities to raise the community's awareness of the threats to Our ABC. Several concerned Highlands residents joined ABC Friends at the meeting.

Branch organisers, Gill Graham and Belinda Wright, felt that the Southern Highlands Friends needed to be active now. Contact ABC Friends Southern Highlands Branch via nsw@abcfriends.org.au or **0407 509 985**.

Angela Williamson – ABC Friends NSW & ACT Secretary

Belinda Wright – Southern Highlands Branch Secretary

Gill Graham – Southern Highlands Branch Convenor



What is the IPA and what is its influence on Conservative Government?

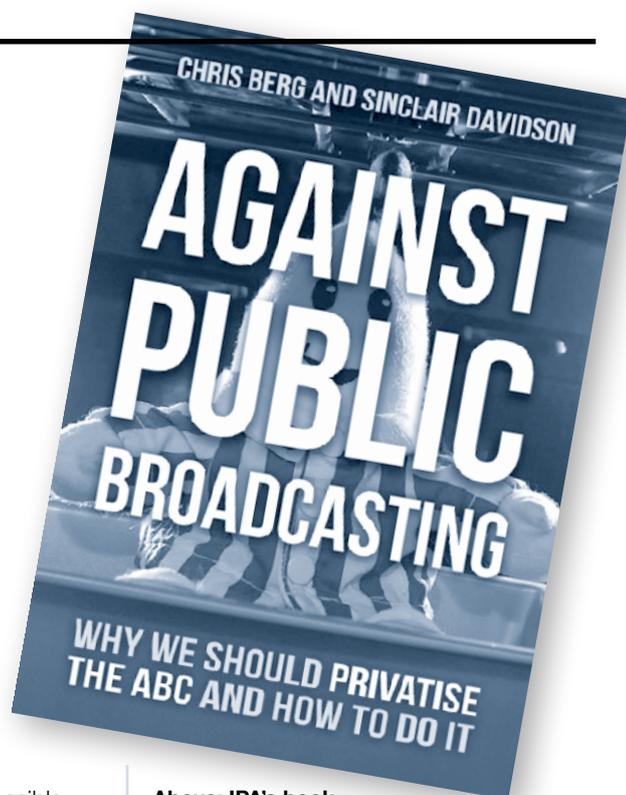
- It is a small (less than 4,000 members) but very well-funded (\$2-4 million p.a.) think-tank and fundraiser for the Liberal Party.
- It champions free market capitalism, small government and the elimination of regulation and supervision of commercial life; e.g. no restraints on mining and no minimum wage.
- Big supporters include the mining and tobacco industries, and individuals such as Gina Rinehart, Rupert Murdoch, Tony Abbott and George Pell.
- IPA members Chris Berg and Sinclair Davidson advocated selling the ABC in their 2018 book 'Against Public Broadcasting: Why and how we should privatise the ABC'.
- Current senior Liberal Party parliamentarians who are members of the IPA or its affiliates include: Prime Minister Scott Morrison; Treasurer Josh Frydenberg; Minister for Communications Paul Fletcher; another eight Ministers, Speaker of the House Tony Smith, and several backbenchers
- It is enmeshed in a global web of libertarian right-wing networks, mainly centred in the USA and Europe, funded by wealthy businesses and businessmen like the Koch brothers

The Institute of Public Affairs (IPA), founded in 1943, describes itself as “an independent, non-profit public policy think tank, dedicated to preserving and strengthening the foundations of economic and political freedom.” Two of their statements - ‘small as possible government’ and ‘free market, no regulation business’ – indicates what the IPA stands for and how it wants to influence government policy. In its 2012 publication ‘Be Like Gough’ the IPA listed its objectives of **‘Break up the ABC and put out to tender each individual function’** and **‘Privatise SBS’**. More recently in its 2019 publication ‘20 Policies to Fix Australia’, gives its objective 8 as:

“Privatise the ABC

In a free society the government should not own and operate its own media company. The media market in Australia is highly competitive. Online platforms have transformed and disrupted traditional approaches to media. Consumers have never had more choice about where to source their news and opinions on current affairs. Moreover, the ABC is unremittingly biased. Its staff are five times more likely to vote for the Greens compared to the general population. The ABC is beyond reform. New leaders will not fix the problem, regardless of their experience or intention. The ABC must be privatised.”

Of course, the ABC is a priority. The ABC is ‘beyond reform’ and no future leader can ‘fix the problem’. The lack of logic in the IPA’s rhetoric doesn’t seem to bother it. That no organisational bias has ever been proved (as over 200 *Australian Communications and Media Authority* investigations 2014-2019 show), that the Australian public relies on the ABC for accuracy and reliability of information in times of trouble (as the Roy Morgan 2020 research commissioned by ABC



Above: IPA's book of anti-ABC bile.

Friends confirms) and that the ABC is far more trusted than any other media source (Reuters research 2020, Roy Morgan Media Trust Report 2020) or organisation (Essential Report research in 2015, 2018).

None of this stops the IPA making its deeply flawed assertions. On 27 February 2020 the IPA released its ‘poll’, claiming that ‘Only 32% of Australians believe the ABC represents the views of ordinary Australians’. This one-question, skewed ‘poll’ was publicly torn apart on *Media Watch* and totally exposed by the ABC *Friends* commissioned Morgan research papers showing enormous support for the public broadcaster across the country, and positioning the ABC as the No. 1 media channel most accessed by Australians on TV, radio and on the web.

The IPA has refused to reveal who’s funding its activities (including climate change denial), citing concerns over the privacy of its donors. The refusal follows revelations mining magnate Gina Rinehart’s Hancock Prospecting donated \$4.5 million to the organisation over a two-year period. IPA researchers and associates have a high media presence and appear daily as guests on both public and commercial radio and television, including the ABC, in Australia. IPA staff also write regular columns for Australian newspapers and online media.

The current chair of the IPA is Janet Albrechtsen, a News Corp columnist and relentless critic of the ABC, appointed to the ABC Board by John Howard 2005-2010.

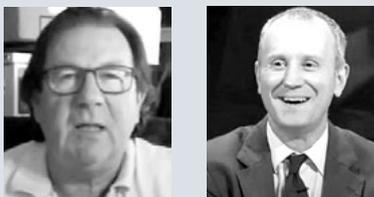
Albrechtsen recently wrote an article for *The Australian* in July this year, “What the Minister should have said to ABC bleaters”, a piece that was highly critical of the ABC and full of emotive language. Her by-line on the article did not mention that she is the chair of the IPA board, which one might have thought was very relevant.

The IPA has strong links with the Liberal Party and currently has nearly a dozen of its members imbedded as ministers in the Morrison government, as well as Morrison himself. When Tony Abbott was elected Prime Minister, he implemented a significant number of the 75 objectives in the 2012 IPA wish list ‘Be Like Gough’ in his first year.

This level of influence over the Liberal Party, and indeed on all conservative governments over the past thirty years or more, should be seen as significant and provide the background about how we view the current government’s attitude towards the ABC and its future. The IPA is also an associate organisation of libertarian think-tank style networks across the UK and USA.

Marcus May

Secretary, ABC Friends, Victoria



Via a Q&A video link on 23 April 2018, Marcus May (left) put these two questions to John Roskam, Executive Director of the IPA (right), who confirmed the first and laughingly dismissed the second:

1. **Could you publicly confirm, right now on the ABC, that your policy is to get rid of the ABC and sell it off? and**
2. **Given you’re appearing on the ABC, how do you think your credibility stands right now?**

Ed’s comment: See also Mark Buckley’s article on the IPA and the Politics Q & A in *Update*, June 2020, pp, 8-9.

IPA affiliates include: [The Institute for Progress](#), [Australian Taxation Alliance](#) and the global group, [Atlas Network](#).



Spotlight on

Peter Tatham

ABC Friends
Tasmania President



Angela Williamson
Update Production Manager

Peter grew up in Wollongong, NSW, but found Tasmania in early adulthood, and loved it. His work, helping with a youth employment program took him to Fiji during Rabuka’s leadership for a few years, till Tasmania’s quality of life beckoned again. On his return Peter managed the University of Tasmania Careers and Employment Service and for the past decade or so he has worked as a consultant career coach.

Most of his career has revolved around helping people slot into the right niche in their employment, or, as is much more common these days, to change career direction. He’s currently assisting PhD students at the University of Tasmania to develop their career opportunities, facilitating transition from one stage in a working life to the next.

Peter loves what he does: listening to clients, discussing various options, assisting them to see different pathways. He has also worked for the Tasmanian Government for a period helping to select people with particular skills from overseas.

Peter sees a challenging next decade for Australia and believes that our ABC is an important tool for all because it is able to inform our understanding of where we are now and where we are

headed. The ABC is a seeker and broadcaster of sound science-based knowledge as well as a rich provider of Australian stories.

Peter and Sheryl could retire one day and enjoy their steeply sloping mini-acreage watching the yachts sail the mouth of the Derwent, but the ABC’s dire plight keeps him committed to the task of trying to get the message through to the Federal MPs that it isn’t about them; it’s about Australia’s democracy being diminished with every dollar that the Government takes from the ABC’s budget.

Peter’s goals for ABC Friends Tasmania are:

- to address two main questions - how we provide feedback to the ABC in Tasmania, and how we promote the messages of what independent media is
- promote the concept that the ABC is vital infrastructure, an essential service

To that end he sees the ABC Friends’ role as advocating for the ABC to be part of Australia’s infrastructure, and for a less-Sydney-centric view from the ABC which Peter thinks is a direct correlation to its even more restricted budget.

Should keep him and the Tasmanian Friends team well occupied.



Winning Wilcox draws on a year that was

Rachel Clun, SMH, 20 November 2020

In a year where horrible news has been replaced by more horrible news, the job of a political cartoonist is more important than ever. That's according to the Museum of Australian Democracy, which has named the *Herald's* Cathy Wilcox the political cartoonist of the year.

For Wilcox, this year has required a balance between poking fun at the absurd and putting a spotlight on the ugly. "We're often here to make light or point out some sort of folly but there are always serious things going on that shouldn't be allowed to just get away with being seen as ridiculous," she said.

Nobel Prize-winning immunologist Professor Peter Doherty, one of the external judges for this year's award, said there were parallels between his work and that of cartoonists, in that they "do their



POLITICAL CARTOONIST OF THE YEAR

Through simple loose lines and splashes of colour Cathy Wilcox cuts egos down to size and draws out the best in us. This year she has pricked people's hearts with her take on events big and small. Reflecting on our nation, she has found a poignant angle to the summer's wildlife disaster and COVID-centric humour with 'anyone who wants to leave the house'.

It is the sharp eye that she casts across both sides of the fence that has made her such a deserving recipient of the Political Cartoonist of the Year award. This is the same Cathy Wilcox, a Sydney-based cartoonist for the *Morning Herald* and the *Melbourne Age*, has been named Political Cartoonist of the Year.

best to tell the truth". "I've always had the sense that part of the job of the cartoonist in an open democracy is to provoke us, and maybe to make us a bit angry, so we suddenly have doubts about some entrenched position, some dogmatic idea of how things are, or should be," he said. Wilcox's award will be announced on 20 November at the Museum of Australian Democracy in Old Parliament House. The

Behind the Lines exhibition of political cartoons from the year also begins today, and two of Wilcox's cartoons have been selected in the curator's top 10.

This is the third win for the *Herald* cartoonist Cathy Wilcox and this is one of her brilliant cartoons.

BRAVO! To Cathy, a great Friend of the ABC



A clear picture of how ABC fared in the current Federal Budget

Ranald McDonald AO
Journalist and newspaper executive; broadcaster and educator



To show what the future holds for the ABC, I have rounded the funding commitments and 'estimates' to 2023/24 so it is absolutely clear what the Government is doing. Otherwise we get involved in the minutiae of the odd dollars and cents.

It is (as I wrote some years ago¹) a continuing and very clinical and deliberate 'Death by a Thousand Cuts'.

We have already seen the appalling impact of the Abbott cuts and DFAT taking its funding away from the Australia Network - and thus the loss of so many talented and experienced staff members. The three year 'freeze' imposed by the current Government was from 2019/20 through to 2021/22.

These are the yearly amounts the ABC has to spend on programs, general costs and staff as set down in the just-released 2020 Federal Budget:

(2019/20 - actual \$879 million.)

2020/21 - budget \$879 million.

2021/22 - forward estimate \$881 million

2022/23 - forward estimate \$867 million.

2023/24 - forward estimate \$873 million

Costs of course go up each year, and in the area of production recently some 4% p.a. - the wage increase negotiated was 2%. Even if you accept as a done deal the freeze which has cost up to 250 jobs and then allow 2 1/2% a year for 22/23 and 23/24 over the \$881 million 21/22 figure as a minimum for overall cost increases (and to claw back just a little on emergency service expenses) - then the further two year freeze (or cut!) imposed in the latest Coalition Budget will cost \$67 million on top of the \$87 lost funding over the earlier freeze. Of course, those inside the ABC are very coy about criticising

the Government publicly as they hope for more special funding (such as the enhanced news funding program) and - at worst - hope that the Government actually delivers on its projected 'estimates'.

So - it is up to ABC Friends and the ABC Alumni Association to make a noise. And, for the recalcitrant Ita Buttrose and her board to actually live up to their statutory responsibilities in fulfilling the ABC's Charter by, as is required of them:

- (a) ensuring that the functions of the Corporation are performed efficiently and (my bold) **with the maximum benefit to the people of Australia,** and
- (b) to **maintain the independence and integrity of the organisation.**

It is clearly stated that the Chair and Directors only need (being statutorily independent under the 1983 ABC Act) to "give consideration to", i.e. not slavishly accepting Minister's statements of policy.

I think it has reached the stage of us all saying to Buttrose and Board that they all need to put up or get out after this further cut in funding!

1. 'Where will we be without our ABC?' Update, July 2018, pages 1 and 3.



Senate to launch media diversity inquiry after Kevin Rudd petition



Zoe Samios
Sydney Morning Herald
11 November 2020



The Senate will examine local media ownership and its impact on democracy after more than 500,000 people signed a petition by former prime minister Kevin Rudd that raised concerns about the influence of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. Senator Sarah Hanson-Young moved on Wednesday to establish an inquiry into media diversity, an investigation that is expected to scrutinise local media companies and how Google and Facebook have changed the way people access news. It will also examine how newswire services such as the loss-making Australian Associated Press support local journalism as well as the challenges that small community and regional news outlets face. The motion, instigated because of the number of people who signed Mr Rudd's petition, was not opposed and passed without a vote.

Ms Hanson-Young said it was essential to look at the state of media diversity in Australia before another federal election. "It's clear from the half a million signatures on the record-breaking petition for a Royal Commission into media diversity that Australians are very concerned about the concentration of media ownership and the power and political influence of Murdoch," Ms Hanson-Young said. "As a Parliament it was right that we acted on those concerns. The loss of media outlets and the increasing pressure faced by small and independent publishers is bad for our democracy and should be given the attention it deserves. The dominance of Facebook and Google has been ever increasing and this inquiry will also provide

an opportunity for a proper consideration of how that is impacting media diversity." The Senate inquiry will not carry the same weight as the royal commission requested by Mr Rudd but will give senators the chance to investigate some of his claims. An inquiry can order witnesses to attend and require the production of documents, but the final report is not necessarily independent and can be influenced by the political make up of the committee. Royal commissions involve the appointment of independent commissioners and lawyers to test the evidence and witnesses, before making recommendations to governments.

Mr Rudd launched his petition on 10 October and asked for a royal commission largely because of his concerns about the influence newspapers such as News Corp's The Australian, The Herald Sun and The Daily Telegraph on democracy. Mr Rudd was also concerned about job losses in journalism caused by major cuts in regional and metropolitan newsrooms, the impact of digital platforms such as Google and Facebook on media diversity, and Nine Entertainment Co's takeover of The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald. Nine's takeover took place after media laws were relaxed in 2017. The Herald and Age are governed by a charter of editorial independence that has been in place for more than 30 years. It was endorsed by the board of Nine after the 2018 merger with Fairfax Media.

Mr Rudd courted News Corp editors when he was in politics but has recently become one of the company's fiercest critics in recent years. Former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull, who was among the 501,876 signatures, is also a major critic of the organisation that he blames for his downfall. Mr Turnbull attacked The Australian's editor-at-large Paul Kelly on ABC's Q&A on Monday night over News

Corp's coverage of the national bushfire crisis and climate change. News Corp has since described Mr Turnbull's comments as "blatantly untrue".

Mr Rudd's petition was tabled in parliament on Monday by Labor frontbencher Andrew Leigh although his party has refused to take a position on Mr Rudd's request. The senate inquiry will follow a difficult year for a media industry put under immense financial pressure due to a sharp advertising downturn caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Several media companies such as News Corp Australia, Seven West Media and Nine were forced to slash costs to adjust to weak market conditions. News Corp decided to permanently shut the print editions of hundreds of regional newspapers earlier this year, while regional newspaper company Australian Community Media temporarily suspended some titles and shut its printing centres. AAP, a newswire service previously owned by Nine and News Corp, was on the verge of closure before it was saved by a group of philanthropists and investors.

The Environment and Communications References Committee will report on its findings by 31 March 2021. The government has requested a number of inquiries on the local media industry and the impact of large tech giants in recent years. A committee on the future of public interest journalism was established in 2017 and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission launched its digital platforms inquiry in 2018, a report that provided a detailed assessment of the market power of tech giants Google and Facebook and its impact on the local media industry.

Zoe Samios is a media and telecommunications reporter at The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age. 

State News

South Australia / Northern Territory

On 16 November, as I write this, 17 new COVID-19 cases have just been reported in South Australia and, during the day, ABC Adelaide radio has been keeping us informed and up-to-date about testing, contact tracing, restrictions and border closures. Your ABC continues to prove itself as a remarkable and essential service. Long may it be ever present!

The ABC's Gardeners' Market did not run in October and our stall activity has continued to be impacted which has affected merchandise sales. Fortunately, the ABC F National website has its Friends' Shop where merchandise can be purchased for gifts leading up to Christmas, including our wonderful 2021 ABC F National Calendar: "Reflections: Resilience and Renewal".

Roselie Copley, Wendy Parsons and Andrew Johnston have continued to work on our subcommittee, "Alternative Engagement Strategies" to devise different ways to engage with our membership and attract new members, including the younger demographic. A lot of interesting ideas are being developed and we are looking forward to putting some of these in place early in 2021.

While the Federal Government's budget on the 6 October did not directly cut the ABC's funding, forward estimates indicate that the freeze in indexation will continue for another two years, to the end of 2024. The freeze in indexation in the current triennium, 2019 to the end of 2022, has already meant a funding cut of \$84 million. \$67 million is the estimate until the end of 2024. The threat of privatisation does not go away nor do threats to the ABC's independence and funding. For us, these issues will continue to be the drivers leading up to the next Federal election.

We hope you are finding useful and informative our monthly short email Checking the Pulse. Its purpose is to reach out and stay in touch with our Members and Supporters more regularly, to let them know about: interesting reads to keep them informed about the ABC, online events coming up and ABC

TV productions they may enjoy. Please feel free to give us feedback about it. November will be our last edition this year and we will resume in February 2021.

Quentin Dempster and Rick Sarre online Conversation

Late last year, a sub-committee chaired by Wendy Parsons planned a public event for 5 May, in partnership with The



Quentin Dempster

Hawke Centre, with Quentin Dempster and Emeritus Professor Rick Sarre in conversation on the topic "Criminalising Journalism, Silencing Whistle-Blowers - Your Right to Know". The event was

postponed event and held on-line via YouTube on Thursday 19 November. It was interesting to see how it was produced. The actual recording of the event took place by Zoom on 28 October with Rick Sarre and Sue Pinnock operating from the Green Room at the University of SA and Quentin Dempster from Sydney. The around 1.5 hour recording was edited and set up on YouTube for the 19 November event - <https://youtu.be/yU9sTee-L44>

Rick Sarre was masterful in his asking of questions and of course Quentin is so knowledgeable that he was able to provide context and great insights about the current state of media freedom and what must be done to protect journalists and whistle blowers going forward. Quentin magnificently underlined the importance of the ABC to our democracy and why it must be protected.

I would like to thank our Committee for the work they have done on behalf of our



Emeritus Professor Rick Sarre

members during 2019-20. Thanks go to Sandra Coopman (Secretary), Mihir Makwana (Treasurer), Rosemary Abbott (Membership Officer) and Committee Members: Wendy Parsons, Andrew Johnston, Roselie Copley and Tina Phillips.

Our AGM was held by Zoom on Sunday 18 October. There is some thinking that Zoom is a good mode for our AGM as members who cannot get to Adelaide can take part. One member from Alice Springs took the opportunity to attend. Members living at distance from Adelaide will be made more aware and encouraged to take up this opportunity in 2021. At the AGM the new committee was endorsed: Sue Pinnock (President), Sandra Coopman (Secretary), Mihir Makwana (Treasurer) and Committee members: Andrew Johnston, Roselie Copley and Tina Phillips. Rosemary Abbott and Wendy Parsons retired from the committee and were appropriately thanked for their contribution. Sue Pinnock and Sandra Coopman will be sharing the Membership Officer role until another person can take up this role.

During 2021, in the lead up to the Federal election, we will be implementing different strategies to inform our members about action they can take in support of the ABC and we will continue to inform the public about the difficulties the ABC is under. We will work in conjunction with ABC Friends National to make use of our resources efficiently and to dovetail with campaigns the National Committee initiates. As a committee, we are stretched to do this so we are keen to get more support from our membership. If you think you would like to help us on committee, please contact me on 0407 035 701. We are a good team, just need more of us!

On behalf of the committee, I wish you all the best for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Stay safe and let's hope SA moves quickly to once again suppress/eliminate COVID-19 so that, over the Christmas/New Year period, we can cross our borders without quarantining and catch up with family and friends who are interstate. Fingers crossed!

Sue Pinnock

President ABC Friends SA/NT and National Committee Member

Tasmania

Greg Barns Addresses Tasmania's AGM

Some 60 Friends and supporters gathered in Launceston on Sunday 18 October for a socially-distanced AGM, lunch and an inspiring address by our guest speaker, Greg Barns.



Margaret presents Anne with her gift

There is one significant change in the make-up of the newly-elected Committee for the coming year. Margaret Reynolds has decided to stand down as President and the baton has been handed to Peter Tatham. Peter has been part of the Committee for the past five years and is a major contributor in developing its strategic approach to the challenges ahead. We have also found it hard to fill Anne O'Byrne's shoes as the Northern Convenor and that position will remain vacant in the short term. The final item for the meeting itself was the awarding of our very first Life Membership to Anne O'Byrne. In presenting the award, outgoing

President, Margaret Reynolds, spoke of Anne's many years of service to establish a presence for Friends in Tasmania. In unanimously agreeing on the award, Committee members noted that Anne has been the life-blood of the Northern group since getting it off the ground and has been vital to the State body throughout. In working with her over the years, all have found her endlessly supportive, a driving force, inspiring others with her enthusiasm - throughout, a solid rock of consistency in her passion for the ABC.

We then heard from our guest speaker, Greg Barns SC, a barrister, writer and academic. His topic 'Critical Thought in Australia – RIP' is printed below and it is also available on the Tasmanian page of ABC Friends National website - https://www.abcfriends.org.au/abc_friends_tasmania_agm_2020. After his address, Greg fielded questions in a lively Q & A session. Wide-ranging topics included the role of the ABC Board, generational differences in how we view the ABC, the prevalence of propaganda and puerile debate around the role of the ABC, the importance of work in marginal seats and the need to get back to a true contest of



Greg Barns delivers his address

ideas in public debate in Australia Friends and supporters then continued discussions over a yummy lunch.

Kate Durkin

Secretary, ABC Friends Tas

Greg Barns, 'Critical Thought in Australia – RIP'

A journalist I know and respect once told me, when we were lamenting one of the federal government's illiberal initiatives, that it is not written in stone anywhere that Australia is a democracy. Australia could well slide into becoming an ersatz democracy. That is, the obvious institutional features of democratic life exist such as elections, partial freedom of speech, legislatures and independent courts, could still exist while at the same time the nation's soul and its collective mind became captured by conformist culture. He was right then and he is right today. The abject failure of the body politic and much of the media in this nation to ensure that intelligent, evidence-based and nuanced policy discussions are thriving in the community is not accidental. There is a deliberate attempt by the reactionary conservatives in Australia to impose what has been termed, in the US context, a cultural democracy.

Writing on the public affairs website Salon.com David Masciotra⁽¹⁾ earlier this year described what has been happening in the United States for a number of years, via the medium of the Republican Party, Donald Trump and news outlets like Fox News: "To compensate for its failure to create a genuine political democracy, America has marched drunkenly into the gutter of what could be termed cultural democracy — a pathological condition in which all opinions are equal, and to argue otherwise invites accusations of snobbery, pretentiousness and down-the-nose contempt for the "forgotten man." In cultural democracy, the enemy of freedom is not the Wall Street executive hiding his wealth in an offshore tax haven and corrupting the political process through the deployment of large donations and lobbying firms. It is not the SWAT team conducting "no knock" raids that result in the deaths of innocent people. It's not the real estate tycoon turned television star who rides his golden escalator — and relentless racist rhetoric — to political power. The true villain in a cultural democracy is the intellectual. The intellectual insists on standards of evidence, reason and logic when attempting to reach a conclusion regarding



Greg Barns engages his socially-distanced audience

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a matter of social import. She undermines the dogma that all nonsense is created equal, which renders her (or indeed him) unfit for participation in the increasingly masochistic rituals of liberty.”

Substitute Australia for America and you have a picture of what has been, and is, happening in Australia. A similar point was made by Ken Hayne⁽²⁾, former Banking Royal Commissioner and High Court judge who observed in a speech earlier this year: “Nativist populism founded in slogans and denial has succeeded elsewhere, why would it not succeed here? Those who will not now grapple with the truth will not do that until they feel compelled to do so by those upon whom they depend for success. Those who now resort to slogans and untruths will continue to rely upon those tactics until they feel that those upon whom they depend for success require them to abandon those tactics and engage with issues through reasoned and respectful debate. But how can we begin to do that in the age of social media and a perpetual news cycle?”

It is of course in the interests of the authoritarian right to “dumb down” a culture. Attacks on institutions such as the ABC and universities is part of the armoury of those who spew out their nasty bile on Sky News after 6pm, or in the pages of *The Australian*. In fact they do so obsessively. Look, for example, at Chris Kenny on Sky and in *The Australian*. Here he is on April 6 this year: “The ABC’s Insiders panel chat program is “relentlessly anti-conservative” and “makes a mockery” of the national broadcaster’s claim to objectivity and diversity says Sky News host Chris Kenny. He said regular viewers of the program would “know only too well the panel is usually filled by green left journalists” and “small ‘L’ liberals.” In fact it is fair to say there is rarely a week goes by without *The Australian* and Sky News after 6pm – it is a different beast before that time and refreshingly balanced – that the ABC is not subjected to an excoriation. The themes of the ‘critique’ are familiar. The ABC is full of left wing and green voting journalists. The ABC is anti-Trump. The ABC’s Norman Swan is no more qualified to talk about COVID than an anti-vaxxer. The ABC is biased and refuses to give voice to “ordinary” or “mainstream” Australians.

These are not new themes. They were peddled by the man who started Australia’s slide into authoritarianism – John Howard, Prime Minister from 1996-2007. Mr Howard used the language of anti-intellectualism, dividing Australia into ‘elites’ and ‘mainstream Australians.’ His toxic legacy lives on today in the Liberal Party in the form of the current Prime Minister, Scott Morrison. The right’s consistent and constant attacks on the ABC manifest themselves not just in routine swingeing budget cuts but in a frustration that the national broadcaster is not what every authoritarian politician wishes for – a tame national propagandist broadcaster. Remember that other former Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott once lamenting he wished the ABC could be on the side of Australia! In my book *Rise of the Right: The War on Australia’s Liberal Values*⁽³⁾ I observed that what the right really wants is an ABC which toes their line. They want nothing less than a Fox News or a Sky News after 6pm or an audio and visual version of *The Australian* newspaper. That is, a broadcaster which praises the Coalition and that only supports opposition parties if they adopt conservative policy positions.

Recently Allan Patience put it better than anyone else when he observed: “The Morrison government’s persistent dumbing down of the public broadcaster is evidence of the deep-seated anti-intellectualism and cultural philistinism at its walnut-like heart. What was once thought of as our ABC, with an enviable history of respected news reporting, cultural sophistication and information sharing, is turning into their ABC – a pale version of the glibbest offerings in the overly-commercialised media. With a limited autodidact as board chair, and a pusillanimous senior management team, things are unlikely to get better while this government remains in power.”⁽⁴⁾

Part of the anti-intellectualism drive of the right is to not only relentlessly attack the ABC so that it cowers and cringes and desperately tries for “balance” when frankly none is called for – for example the crimes against humanity that constitutes policy towards asylum seekers for two decades is what it is and the ABC should never seek to allow voices which seek to defend it – but in its undermining of serious art by packaging it up as would a commercial broadcaster. ABC Classic FM was once a veritable powerhouse. It was the place where you learned about classical music and jazz. It was a repository of some of

the finest minds in talking about music. But what is it now? It’s just another cost centre which peddles demeaning products such as the ‘Classic 100’ and which plays a movement here and there of lengthy works rather than the whole piece. Jazz has been relegated to a digital station. The ABC is flawed and has given up the ghost too often to crass commercialism and the bleating of the right, but it is still one of the most important vehicles and repositories of critical thought in Australia. In particular Radio National. Programs such as *Background Briefing*, *Between the Lines* and *Big Ideas* are fora where ideas and arguments can be had and important and contentious issues aired reasonably and in an atmosphere of knowledge building. It is critical that the relentless attack on the ABC by the right be halted. What would replace those programs I have mentioned if the ABC were so gutted it simply became a money spinner for government returning a dividend each year? But enough of the ABC because as Friends you know the depressing landscape better than I do.

What of the universities? The Morrison government’s contempt for universities is manifest in its regressive and nasty package of funding which seeks to turn universities into tech colleges. The homes of critical thinking such as Arts, Humanities, Law and Social Inquiry have been relegated because that is where this populist anti-intellectual government wants them.

Anthony Albanese, the federal Opposition Leader, was right when he observed: “Australians are entitled to wonder whether the shift away from the humanities and towards more practical degrees is linked to the Coalition’s anti-intellectual streak and its culture wars over what universities teach, particularly in areas such as history.”⁽⁵⁾ You don’t have to wonder though because it is blindingly obvious this is exactly part of the authoritarian playbook.

As Professor Jeff Malpas, a distinguished philosopher from the University of Tasmania, has observed the Morrison government’s attack on humanities “represents a desire to shut down Australians’ capacity to think critically about themselves and those who govern them, to reflect on who we are and what we want to be, to make properly informed decisions about the challenges that face us.”⁽⁶⁾ It is not an exaggeration to observe that Mr Tehan’s attack on critical thought, shamefully supported by the Centre Alliance but courageously and passionately

opposed by Senator Jacqui Lambie, is no different to what Russian President Vladimir Putin has done to the European University in St Petersburg. Force its downward spiral because it churns out critical thinkers.

As former British academic and writer Marina Warner artfully put it, in a 2015 interview: "Investing in the humanities should be seen as infrastructure." She argued: "It's not a balance-sheet equation where if you put in this much you'll get that much out, but if you're teaching people to be articulate, if you're teaching people about the traditions of the country and the traditions of their culture...that's how people connect. If we diminish that, we will all be the poorer and I really do think you can put that in value terms."⁽⁷⁾

Sadly Tasmania has played a key role in aiding and abetting the Morrison government's attack on critical thought. The Vice Chancellor of the State's university Rufus Black supported the Morrison government's package. His intervention was crucial because it enabled Education Minister Dan Tehan and his advocates to say, look here is a VC who backs us. Black has no background in academia. He was a consultant at that epitome of bland and vacuous management speak, McKinseys, and he ran a university college at Melbourne University where he earned himself a headline in 2015 for censoriously and patronisingly trying to stop adult students from watching porn!⁽⁸⁾ Black's recent long winded and platitudinous email to all University of Tasmania staff essentially said that despite the misgivings Black had about Mr Tehan's offering, he would rather have the money on offer. Self-interested, short term thinking is at the expense of this State's critical thinking capacity now and into the future.

The title of this talk is 'Critical Thought in Australia-RIP.' Make no mistake it is real. The authoritarianism of the right is aggressive, unmuted and shows no sign of abating. The current government in Canberra is its ally and sadly too often the ALP charts a course close to the right's coastline. It is incumbent on all of us to push back against what is happening and to rescue our democracy.

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Greg Barns SC is a barrister, writer and academic. He is based in Hobart and practises from Chambers there, and in Melbourne and Brisbane. He teaches within the Juris Doctor program at RMIT University. Greg is a weekly columnist with the *Hobart Mercury*, the author of four books on Australian politics and a national spokesman for the Australian Lawyers Alliance. He is an adviser to the Assange campaign. Greg was a political adviser to a number of federal and state leaders and ministers and ran the 1999 Republic Referendum Campaign.

Victoria

Report and AGM

Your ABC soldiers on. Since I reported a year ago, another nearly 250 people – many were experienced and innovative ABC veterans – have left or been pushed out the ABC doors. The constant hostility from News Ltd and the IPA continues. LNP hostility raged during Senate Estimates where David Anderson withstood unbelievable aggression on the day of the now famous *Four Corners* program about the toxic culture in Parliament House.

A year ago, we introduced Heather Ewart, of ABC's Back Roads, at our AGM Dinner

– she having just returned from filming at Omeo, not far from the then raging bushfires. We were already aware of the ABC's remarkable emergency service work in keeping people informed and safer.

We entered 2020 worried about the continuing fire threat, reminded by the smoke haze, and worrying about the continuing lack of climate action by the federal government. Your Committee held a Planning Day in Feb 2020, determined to continue the fight for our national broadcaster, and to be ready for an election whenever it might be called. We decided to set-up several self-starting subcommittees, each with a specific role and leading to more decentralised decision-making.

Then COVID-19 struck, disrupting our plans more than just a little, but we quickly pivoted to massive use of Zoom so that campaigns could continue within the COVID-19 restrictions on physical gathering and movement. Despite all the 2020 difficulties, our rejuvenated Ballarat and Bendigo local groups thrived, showing great initiative. The Geelong 'Supergroup' developed a very professional monthly newsletter to get news and events out to its large membership – a role model for us all. And plans for new groups in the north and east were only temporarily delayed – watch out for news on those developments.

That other pandemic, the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA), released a "survey" purporting to show that Australians consider the ABC irrelevant and rapidly losing listener and viewer support. ABC Friends Vic decided to respond by commissioning a Roy Morgan survey in April. You, our Members and supporters, responded very generously to our request for financial help and by May, under the professional guidance of a dear ABC Friend Robyn Collins, we were able to publish the reputedly researched outcome, showing that the IPA was maliciously or incompetently wrong. The Morgan survey revealed that **76% of Australians oppose any further cuts to the ABC's budget and 49% believe it should get more Federal Government funding. Less than 10% believe the ABC's funding should be cut.** The Roy Morgan findings serve as a warning to the Government that **voters have had enough of budget cuts to the national broadcaster.** Successive Governments have reduced ABC funding by a total of \$783 million since 2014.

Meanwhile, on another front LNP people were answering our barrage of

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letters to MPs by asserting that ABC Funding had increased since 2014. PM Morrison, Treasurer Frydenberg and Communications Minister Fletcher, were all spreading the same “Porkies” about “The ABC getting more money than ever”. Fact checkers at RMIT and experts at University of NSW enabled us to refute these untruths. And to underline the facts, nearly 250 further jobs at the ABC were lost, bringing the total ABC staff reductions under this government’s watch to about 1300!

During the winter months, through an initiative by Committee member, Anne-Maree Newbold, we ran a Slogan competition. The winner was Barry Clarke for his slogan – “The ABC for Truth – not Profit”. Second was Marcus Ross with “Australia’s Heartbeat – the ABC”. And third was Jill Bamforth with “Your Lives, Your Issues, Your ABC”. Congrats to all entrants.

Our next challenge was to run a Pre-Budget campaign – you will recall the Budget was delayed until 6 October this year. The rumours were strong mid-year that the government was planning further ABC damage in the budget, perhaps via another 2% ‘Efficiency Dividend’, so over August/September our Groups and Communications sub-committee ran a rurally-focused ‘No More Cuts’ campaign, backed up by letter-writing to MPs and Senators and an advertising barrage in print and on-line. Local groups wound up their activity telephoning MPs in numbers on set days to really get the message across – ‘No More Cuts’! As it turned out in the end there were no further cuts and we believe the Government is aware of

the potential electoral cost of ignoring the ABC’s supporter base. Well done everyone!

While all this was going on, we were fortunate to have Michael Henry join the Committee, recruited to help with a new planning process to operate within the new world of COVID-19. Michael’s extensive experience in strategic planning and running organisations at the highest levels is of enormous value as we look ahead. Already in a short timeframe Michael has guided the completion of our Strategic Framework, within which the subcommittees will fill in the specific plans for the coming years’ activities. The Framework has been distributed to all our local group convenors to assist them in formulating their local plans.

So, what’s next - Preparing for an election next Sept/Oct - please let us know if you can help. You may like to join a local group or be involved in setting up a new group. With the help of a group of Social Media experts, your Committee is preparing a sophisticated campaign aiming to reach younger people who support the ABC. And two students from La Trobe University are working with us on a direct survey of young families and young people’s experience in accessing news. Additionally, we are reaching out to other like-minded groups such as GetUp!, Educators and Unions, with whom we are developing good working relationships.

Southern Bayside Group has again produced some wonderful Calendars that will serve as excellent Christmas gifts – get your orders in if you haven’t already done so.

Thanks to you, our Members and Supporters, 2020 has been a year in which we have been able to fight very

strongly for the ABC – in spite of a few impediments which the year has imposed on us. Thank you all so much.

Peter Monie
President, ABC Friends Victoria

Victorian Pre-Budget Campaign 2020

With the delayed (due to COVID-19) May budget scheduled for early October, rumours were rife that the ABC was going to be hit with some more damage to its funding, possibly by another horrible 2% ‘Efficiency Dividend’ or through a direct reduction.

It was clear that the federal government had no intention of restoring the \$84 million frozen from ABC budget indexation; Communications Minister Fletcher had stated that more than once. But our great fear was that further cuts in this budget could make the damage to the ABC irreversible – it was a critical and dangerous time for Aunty.

Thinking that all the budget decisions for the October announcements would probably be set in stone by mid-September, the Victorian ABC Friends Committee decided to launch a big grass roots campaign, supported by targeted advertising, to push the message ‘No More Cuts’ at communities and federal politicians over a continuous three week period, beginning the last week in August.

Local groups were wound into action in numbers to phone and write to their local federal MP’s and Senators, send in Letters to the Editor and spread the message across community groups. Strong messages were posted on the Victorian Facebook page throughout and news of the campaign was messaged to other supportive organisation like GetUp, unions such as MEAA and to the ABC Alumni.



The fires. The virus. The crisis. Imagine them without the ABC.

- ABC funding halved from 8 cents a day in 1987 to 4 cents today – just when emergency broadcasting has increased.
- Over 1250 jobs gone.
- Privatisation of the ABC openly advocated.

Contact the Minister for Communications
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Can't live without the ABC? Soon you might have to.

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Left: Advertising in The Weekly Times. Above: GetUp van.

Advertising in News Corp's The Weekly Times, often referred to as the Bush Bible in Victoria, was scheduled every week across the campaign, with a final half page at the end of the campaign. These advertisements were directed at our rural and country citizens, who are important supporters of the ABC generally, but are often unaware of the damage being inflicted upon the ABC through federal government actions and budget cuts.

GetUp also ran an excellent 'No More Cuts' campaign running up to the October budget release, also targeting rural communities, and even commissioned a large van with the message in Canberra.

The October budget once released had much less damage to the ABC than we feared, so I think we can take some credit, and say 'well done' to all our wonderful local group supporters. That result shows that the combined and co-ordinated efforts of all the organisations fighting for the ABC's funding and independence can be effective. A good effort by everyone.

Marcus May

ABC Friends Victoria

Victorian Groups

In light of how seriously a large number of Australians view the attacks and defunding of the ABC, we have many coming on board to express their angst. This has become very evident with our local groups in Victoria. Despite the restrictions placed on them by COVID-19 they have maintained their activity levels and their enthusiasm for the task ahead. Non-metropolitan local groups in particular have been very active. Regardless of where we live there are huge concerns regarding the ongoing damage to the quality of programming. However, for those who live in regional and rural areas, the issues are more complex. There is disquiet at the future capacity of the ABC to provide critical information that saves lives and property as occurred during disasters such as the bushfires in the 2019-20 season. Part of the problem is the financial capacity of the ABC to implement the increasing number of call-outs with reduced funding and reduced staffing levels. There is also the problem of the integrity of the transmission infrastructure that is very troubling to these groups.

ABC Friends Vic have two regional branches that have been reinvigorated in recent times. Bendigo ABC Friends has a great team that is working together to



help inform their local population whilst, at the same time, ensuring Bendigo has a voice to demonstrate to politicians and others just how important the ABC is in their lives. They run a Facebook page; and they regularly ring and write to politicians to hold them accountable. They have recently held a vigil with COVID masks and social distancing which proved popular with motorists tooting and encouraging them on. More are to be held as COVID restrictions ease. They have also held zoom meetings with speakers one of whom was the local Mayor.

Ballarat ABC Friends are now starting to have stalls and will soon be having more to increase their exposure to the public. Through letter-writing and phone

calls, Ballarat ensures politicians are made aware of the group's ongoing concerns. They are also having regular articles published in the Ballarat Courier. The Ballarat group have organised quite a number of zoom sessions to keep people in touch and informed. These have included talks by ABC Alumni - Matt Peacock being one; and a Year 11 boy who used his interest in journalism to start a local paper when so many regional and rural newspapers stopped publishing.

Geelong continues its good work. It has held vigils and has letter-writing campaigns and phone-call blasts to express concerns to politicians, for example when the additional freeze was announced in the budget. As an established group, Geelong has provided much support to Bendigo and Ballarat.

ABC Friends Vic is currently working with ABC followers in Mallacoota and nearby areas of East Gippsland who are keen to increase the area's involvement in advocating for the ABC. After all, it is abundantly clear, after last summer, that this area needs ABC services. It is quite possible that there will be other groups that will emerge in the next few months.

Sue Moseby

ABC Friends, Victoria

Western Australia

Hello to all our WA Friends and supporters, and welcome to other readers. We are drawing to the end of an unprecedented and difficult year. This state has been



Subiaco Farmers' Market - Cathy and supporters

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fortunate that our most stringent period of lockdown did not last too long, and that there has been no community transmission. But, as we've seen recently in South Australia, outbreaks of the virus can turn up without warning and it's important to continue to be alert. This naturally makes planning, short and long term, more challenging – but plan we must if we are to do anything.

As flagged in the last edition of Update, we ran a stall at Subiaco Farmers' Market on the morning of Saturday 3 October, sold some merchandise, gave out stickers and badges, gained a few new members and, most importantly, held lots of conversations about the ABC! We are planning stalls at other markets around Perth next year. If there's anyone living in a rural or regional area who would be prepared to organise and run a stall for ABC Friends at a local market or other suitable event, please get in touch. We can supply materials and advice! Email us at wa@abcfriends.org.au.

ABC Friends WA held its Annual General Meeting on Sunday 25 October, virtually by



AGM - 2020/21 Committee L-R Michael (inset), Jenny, Rosie, Bobbie, Margo, Liz, Terri, Cathy.

Zoom and in-person on Level 6 of the CSA Centre, Hay Street, East Perth. We had a good attendance at the in-person event, but despite many RSVPs, very few people joined online. This was disappointing because a major benefit of running the event by Zoom was to enable members distant from the venue, or otherwise unable to attend in person, to take part. Regardless of this, we will organise events with an online component in future.

This being the first time we have attempted a membership meeting online as well as in person, we were prepared to learn by experience. As the person standing at the lectern chairing the meeting and looking

towards the audience at the venue, I found it all too easy to overlook the fact that some people were attending online, and to remember to include them. At the AGM, I thanked all of the previous committee, including Janet Matthews who is stepping back, for their contributions and support. Everyone worked well individually and as a team. We welcome Rosie Coates and Margo Webb to the committee and look forward to working together over the next term. Three office-holders and five committee members were elected for the 2020/21 term, as follows:

Bobbie Mackley	President
Vacant	Vice President
Cathy Bardon	Secretary
Liz Millward	Treasurer

Committee members:
Terri Brown, Rosie Coates, Michael Dowling, Jenny Meyrick and Margo Webb

Following the meeting, the Conversation between our special guests, Kerry O'Brien, online from his home somewhere in the eastern states, and Mignon Shardlow, from Notre Dame University, who joined us at the CSA Centre, was based on questions submitted by WA members of ABC Friends, and was both compelling and intimate. Kerry is more 'unfettered' following his retirement from the ABC and not slow to speak his mind. You can catch up with the Conversation between Kerry and Mignon here [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bXZ98HOB-s&feature=youtu.be], and there's a report on the AGM on the WA webpage abcfriends.org.au/wa. On behalf of the committee, I wish you all a safe and happy festival season.

Bobbie Mackley
 President, ABC Friends, WA



AGM - Bobbie, Cathy & audience. Below: AGM - Kerry O'Brien and Mignon Shardlow





Ross McDowell, Mac Stewart, Vicki Uhlmann, Murray Watt

Queensland

ABC Friends Queensland AGM



Senator Murray Watt

A late November Saturday afternoon at the inner city Paddington Tavern, The Paddo, saw the 2020 ABC Friends Queensland Annual General Meeting, the same venue where, the

previous evening, colleagues and friends celebrated the Gold Walkley Award for 2020 going to the ABC's Brisbane-based Mark Willacy for his *Four Corners* exposé on *Four Corners* exposé on alleged Afghanistan war crimes, 'Killing Fields'. Plus the collective Walkley for the ABC Emergency bushfire coverage, and the *Coronacast* by Dr Norman Swan and Tegan Taylor. The room was filled to capacity, for the formalities of an AGM and to meet the new ABC Friends Queensland Patron, Senator Murray Watt, ALP Queensland, and hear the Guest Speaker, Paul Barclay, presenter of Radio National's *Big Ideas*.



Paul Barclay

On the formalities, Dr Vicki Uhlmann replaced Ross McDowell as President,

Macgregor 'Mac' Stewart replaced Dr Uhlmann as Secretary, and Kent Eising was returned as Treasurer.

Also present was an organiser for the MEAA, and Trish Lake, representing ABC Alumn (declaring an interest, I'm also an ABC Alumnus).

Paul Barclay sketched out his career from hosting ABC Radio Mornings in Alice Springs, to Background Briefing, where he won a Walkley Award in 2005 for his background briefing on 'Bundaberg's Dr Death', then to hosting *Australia Talks Back*, a national talkback radio program and then Radio National's *Big Ideas*. While working on *ATB*, he and colleagues learned that there was a wealth of potential content for longer-form radio that was not being gathered, produced and broadcast, such as book launches and talks and lectures from visiting scholars and identities. On almost all kinds of topics and issues. *Big Ideas* provides a slot for this kind of content.

At the same time, the podcast revolution was occurring, and the ABC was at the

forefront of taking advantage of being able to disseminate its content online for convenience listening to a global audience. As well as appointment listeners on the wireless, Radio National's podcasts are downloaded in the millions, with *Big Ideas* being among the most popular, even more so with the pandemic disrupting normal routines. In addition, Paul Barclay said that in the era of 'Fake News' and widespread disinformation, audiences were looking for content they knew was credible and produced to rigorous editorial standards, like on the ABC. Barclay also paid extensive tribute to how the ABC has responded to the pandemic by continuing to produce high quality programmes, with broadcasters, including himself, being kitted out with needed gear to record and produce shows from their homes.

Senator Watt stressed his lifelong engagement with the ABC as a loyal listener and viewer, and now, as a Senator serving on Committees scrutinising the public broadcasters, he was very concerned about the budget cuts to the ABC, and apparent attempts at editorial interference, witness a Hearing on 9 November, 2020, the same evening as the *Four Corners* investigation of Parliament's toxic culture was broadcast.

Attendees at the 2020 ABC Friends Queensland AGM would have left encouraged, informed, and prepared to continue campaigning for public broadcasting into 2021.

Dr Mark Hayes
ABC Friends, Qld



MEAA organiser and Trish Lake

NSW and ACT

New and familiar faces

Following the AGM in October, we have a new president and a new committee. At an online election (a new experience in the age of COVID) we selected a full complement of 16 members to the NSW committee. Seven of our committee now come from outside Sydney.

Jennie Hicks joined us from the Northern Rivers branch, **Carmel McCallum** from the newly-formed Shoalhaven branch and Sue Ingram from the ACT. Geoff Brann, Ed Davis, Sybille Frank, Tess Howes, Janine Kitson, Peter Lindenmayer, Jason Lowe, Gia Metherell and Diana Wyndham were re-elected to the committee and the office bearers are Cassandra Parkinson (President), Mal Hewitt (Vice-President), Angela Williamson (Secretary) and Margaret Whealy (Treasurer).

I succeeded **Ed Davis** as President – and it's a tough act to follow. Ed has done a brilliant job as a spokesperson and advocate for the ABC and, thanks to his leadership, ABC friends is stronger and more effective than ever. The AGM acknowledged Ed's contribution with a life membership and a gift. Fortunately, Ed will remain on the NSW committee and has taken on the presidency of the Eastern suburbs branch.

The AGM also farewelled another long-time committee member, **Ireen Allanson**. For more than 20 years, Ireen has been active in ABCF, first as a member of the events sub-committee and then on the NSW committee. Ireen was always there at fetes, rallies and meetings, doing all those things that made our events a success. We were delighted to award Ireen with life membership and a crystal plaque.

Excellence in Broadcasting Award

Each year, ABCF NSW/ACT presents an excellence in broadcasting award to an individual at the ABC. Past winners have included such luminaries as Geraldine

Doogue, Robyn Williams and Kerry O'Brien. In 2020, the committee agreed unanimously to present the award to the ABC as a whole, in recognition of its exceptional work in this most difficult of years.

From the devastating Black Summer bushfires, to the coronavirus pandemic, which plunged us into a massive health and economic crisis, to the rollercoaster of the US presidential election, 2020 has been a year like no other. Through it all, the ABC was there for us — helping safeguard lives and property, keeping us informed, entertaining us, educating and amusing our children, and uplifting our spirits.

As president, I was pleased to present the award to ABC Managing Director, **David Anderson** via webinar. Two special ABC presenters joined us. Interviewed by Gia Metherell, Fran Kelly, RN Breakfast presenter, and **Dr Norman Swan**, Health Report and Coronacast presenter, told us about their experience working at the ABC in challenging broadcasting conditions. **Thank you ABC: trusted and treasured for 88 years.**

New Branches

We have two new branches and two more on the horizon.

The new Southern Highlands branch launched in September to a COVID-limited crowd of around 30 in Bowral. Vice-President of NSW & ACT Friends, Mal Hewitt, OAM, came from the Blue Mountains to launch the branch. On 28 November we launched the Shoalhaven and South Coast branch with Dr John Hewson as the guest speaker. Branch convenor, Carmel McCallum and I also spoke. Many thanks to secretary, Angela Williamson, for her work in helping establish the new branches.

COVID forced us to delay the launch of a branch in the western suburbs of Sydney but as restrictions ease we will revive our plans. Another branch is planned in Sydney's southern suburbs. Keep tuned for more news or contact nsw@abcfriends.org.au if you'd like to be involved.

A world of Zoom

More than 500 people registered for our September webinar, *Stand Up for the ABC!* Around 90 people attended the 2020 AGM by zoom, and 300 registered for the annual awards event. National president, Margaret Reynolds, and I also attended the first birthday zoom celebration of the Northern Suburbs of Sydney.

The NSW committee met by zoom throughout the year and we held our first virtual branch meeting in August – the first, but not the last. While there's nothing quite like an in-person event, the great thing about zoom is that it opens access to many more participants. And so, we'll continue to hold virtual events throughout 2021.

Senate enquiry into media diversity

In November, the Senate announced an enquiry into the state of media diversity, independence and reliability in Australia to report by 31 March 2021. The enquiry follows a petition from ABCF for an enquiry into ABC funding and another petition from Kevin Rudd, which attracted more than 500,000 signatures. Clearly, Australians care about the state of our media!

ABCF NSW & ACT will help draft a submission to be presented by ABCF National. We are also participating in several other national activities including a review of IT systems and preparations for the annual planning meeting and lobbying day to be held early in 2021.

Mal Hewitt and I are the NSW/ACT members on the national committee for 2021 and I have been elected National Vice-President.

To all our valued Friends and supporters, your NSW committee sends warm wishes for a peaceful Christmas and New Year. It's been a tough year, but we'll emerge stronger than ever in 2021, ready to campaign vigorously in support of a strong, properly-funded and independent ABC. Thank you for your support.

Cassandra Parkinson
President, ABC Friends NSW & ACT



NSW Branch News

ACT & Region Branch

This year has been one of surprises for the ACT and Region Branch – as for the whole world! In February our Planning Day with high profile guest speakers had to be cancelled when Canberra was smothered in dense smoke that closed events and prevented non-essential travel. But watching and listening to ABC reporting on the fires in our area reminded us of the vital role that the ABC plays in emergencies.

In March we went along to Parliament to support and listen to the debate on a motion from (SA Centre Alliance MP) Rebecca Sharkie in support of the ABC. Rebecca and seconder Helen Haines (Independent, Indi, Vic) spoke well, and we met with them afterwards to congratulate them on the motion and thank them for their advocacy.

Of course the virus then intervened in ways that we all know, cancelling various planned activities, including stalls at local markets and a visit to ABC studios. But we fumbled our way to mastery of the new online technologies - which now actually work reasonably well, and we've continued to have some interesting discussions.

Fortunately, the ACT's COVID numbers and restrictions have been relatively light, so we were able to hold a (socially distanced) Thank You ABC demo outside the local studios, recognising the work done on both the bushfire and the pandemic. It was gratifying to have lots of local motorists tooting their support.

With the retirement of Eden-Monaro MP (and long-time ABC supporter) Mike Kelly, our group swung into election mode again, evaluating candidates' views on the ABC, developing score cards and campaigning actively with letterboxing, attending voting booths, newspaper articles and ads and social media. The campaign also gave us the impetus to establish our own Facebook page. In our analysis of views, ALP candidate Kristy McBain came out as a much stronger supporter than her Liberal opponent. It was a result, but we think our campaign helped get her over the line – and she's since spoken out strongly on ABC issues.

Concerned about reports of the Government commissioning a secret

report into public broadcasting, we wrote to Minister Fletcher seeking more information, particularly the reason that the report would not be publicly released. Finally, after two follow up prompts, we received a reply - that failed to answer our key questions. The report was due to be handed to the Minister on 2 October, and at this stage neither we nor the general public have any idea what it says. (Did someone mention transparency and accountability?)

As well as these activities, a number of our members are active letter writers, and have a good record for getting their lively and topical contributions printed in relevant newspapers. Oddly enough, only The Australian seems reluctant to print them, apparently preferring letters that keep to the News Ltd line. But then we all know that diversity in media isn't their thing.

Congratulations to local member Sue Ingram, who was elected to join the NSW & ACT Committee, joining Gia Metherell and me, both re-elected. We look forward to working with you during a busy year. And with (we hope) the worst of COVID behind us, our branch was pleased to hold its first stall of the year in November, enjoying lots of support from passers-by at Ainslie shopping centre. So we're looking forward to a more outgoing program of activities in 2021.

Peter Lindenmayer,

Convenor, ABC Friends ACT Regional Branch

Northern Rivers

The deferred Federal Budget gave us an opportunity to again remind the major political parties that we are still around and that we're not going to let the ABC be gutted without listing the consequences.

Northern Rivers cover two Federal seats, Page with the Nationals and Richmond with Labor. And for good measure, the Greens hold the state seat of Ballina. Two of the three pollies belong to Friends. Looking for a trifector, in late September we collaborated with GetUp! who ran full page advertisements calling on the Nationals' Kevin Hogan to defend the ABC. More than two thousand Page electorate residents signed GetUp's petition. No response was forthcoming to the petition nor to the request for a joint meeting with him.

With community markets starting again in October, we ran a stall at the small Ballina Market that services Page and Richmond Electorates. In our covering letters to both Federal MP's enclosing copies of the signed petitions, we indicated that we understood the need to address the current health and budget crisis (Norman Swan and the ABC, again, thank you) but stressed the need to get ABC funding back on the agenda.

The ALP responded favourably and in fairness to Mr Hogan. We did get a response, of sorts. While he didn't address



Branch stalwarts Gia and Jane celebrating a return to market stalls, Ainslie Shops

NSW Branch News



The stall at the small Ballina Market

the two important issues raised in the petition i.e merit based appointments and the restoration of funding levels, he did state that the Nats have a clear policy never to “privatise or sell the ABC”. We thanked him for that commitment and wish him well any efforts made to persuade his Coalition partner to do likewise.

Looking for a more positive year in 2021, planning is progressing nicely for us to sponsor a public event in late February with Kerry O’Brien, in conversation with former ABC Foreign Correspondent Zoe Daniel. Zoe will discuss her experiences in Washington DC during the Trump era. More details on an exact date and venue to come in the new year.

Peter Dickson

ABC Friends, Northern Rivers

Blue Mountains

Our branch started the year with a bang, with our highly visible stall at the Glenbrook Australia Day Festival. It was a timely opportunity to highlight the vital role of our ABC in emergency coverage, with our new banner, “our ABC: Your Local Bushfire Lifeline”, proudly displayed on top of our tent. Our new pull-up banner “Integrity and Truth in Reporting”, generated much interest, with its long list of major ABC investigations. We were visited by our Blue Mountains Mayor Mark Greenhill, our Federal MP Susan Templeman, who was accompanied by Anthony Albanese. This provided a great opportunity for Barry and Bev Redshaw to speak to the pollies about the launch of the Western Suburbs of Sydney Friends branch, scheduled for March this year. This event, like many, had to be postponed, but it will be full-steam-ahead in March 2021!

Fortunately, we were able to hold two branch Zoom committee meetings this year, thus staying in touch with each other, and planning for future activities.

Despite being unable to meet up at our monthly meetings throughout the year, our branch has supported other branches in their campaigns. We were invited to participate in the NSoS Friends rally in February, outside the Communications minister Paul Fletcher’s office. Many enthusiastic Friends successfully drew attention to the plight of Our ABC. NSoS branch inspires us all.

Two of our members, Susan Lamont and Wendy Goldsmith, participated in The Eden-Monaro By-Election, handing out Friends How-to-vote cards at Narooma polling station, and engaging with the locals on all things ABC. They had a great time and their report in our BM newsletter paid tribute to the fantastic and awe-inspiring Friends Campaign.

Barry and Bev Redshaw were able to participate in the “soft launch” of the new Southern Highlands branch, extending the hand of Friendship to another emerging branch of Friends.

We look forward to collaborating with fellow Friends branches next year. Blue Mountains members will be particularly involved in supporting the launch of the much-anticipated Western Suburbs of Sydney branch. Co-convenors Barry and Bev Redshaw, previous BM residents, have been major players in our branch, serving on the committee in many roles, and participating tirelessly at local markets and events. Barry and Bev also took on the role of producing and editing a monthly newsletter for over three years, thus keeping our members informed and connected. These ABCF warriors feature in quite a few photos on the NSW / ACT Friends site!

We were thoroughly inspired by the “Stand up for the ABC” webinar in September, and also by our local MP Susan Templeman’s Virtual Rally with Michelle Rowland, Shadow Minister for Communications, in July. This rally confirmed the Labor Party’s commitment to reversing the latest cuts to the ABC. Michelle spoke about the need to appeal more to pro-ABC organisations such as the CWA, the Farmers’ Federation and big industry. She spoke about the need for more resilience for the telcos, to keep Australians safe, the first job of government. And, she admitted that the toughest interview she’s ever had, was

with the ABC. Michelle stated that she is keen to receive ideas from ABC Friends.

During the ABC Friends Federal Election Campaign next year, our ABC Friends stalls at major local community events will be vital opportunities to share the facts and fears about the persistent defunding of OUR ABC and to grow our Friends membership. Also, we will be able to raise funds for our branch, with the sale of ABCF merchandise.

We hope to be addressing various local community groups and organisations next year, about the role of the Friends in defending the ABC, with the inherent opportunity of recruiting new members. Initially, we will be drawing on our own members’ associations with other groups to gain invitations to visit! The new “ABC Funding Facts” presentation will be an invaluable tool in our endeavours.

Sue Noske

ABC Friends, Blue Mountains

Northern Suburbs of Sydney (NSoS)

NSoS sent a delegation of ten to Parliament House, Canberra on Budget Day 6-7 October because we love the ABC so much that we travelled to Canberra on Budget Day to ensure our message was heard. It also highlighted how Paul Fletcher MP for Bradfield and Minister for Communications has refused to meet his constituents, even though we have been asking for a meeting since October 2019 when we staged our first demonstration.

For two mornings we stood on the Parliamentary Lawns with our umbrellas, signs and banners, in the Canberra rain and cold and waiting for Mr Fletcher to walk the 370 steps down from the Parliament doors to meet us. His absence only reinforced our banner message “Paul Fletcher, Minister for Non-Communications.” However we were greatly encouraged by the support we received from many MPs and Senators, across the political divide, who met with us or sent a message of support - including from Michelle Rowland Shadow Minister for Communications, Senator Jacqui Lambie, MP Susan Templeman (Macquarie) and NSoS’s MP Zali Steggall (Warringah) who kindly brought us each a cup of coffee. Andrew Wilkie and Dr Mike Freeland, the Co-Convenors

of the Parliamentary Friends of ABC telephoned us sending their messages of admiration for our delegation demanding that the ABC cuts be reversed in the Budget. Other messages of support came from Rebekah Sharkie, and Senators Mehreen Faruqi, Perin Davey and Sarah Hanson-Young

We were delighted when Ben Utting, Media Incentives from the Department of Communications invited us to meet him in his Acton office and then promised to meet with National President Margaret Reynolds at a future date. Just as we were about to get into our cars to travel home, a message came through from Senator Kristina Keneally office - she was available to meet with us and we rushed back to Parliament House for a photograph with her.

Other highlights included the pride we

felt singing 'Where would we be without the ABC' in front of Parliament House. Hundreds of Canberra commuters showed their support for the ABC as they honked their car horns outside the ABC Studio on Northbourne Avenue. Perhaps our most poignant moment was when we stood in a candlelight vigil outside the ABC Studio and felt the pain and grief over the loss of 250 of the nation's most talented, experienced and professional ABC staff.

What next? - We have now written to many MPs and Senators including our own NSoS Liberal MPs - John Alexander (Bennelong), Jason Falinski (Mackellar), Julian Lesser (Berowra), Trent Zimmerman (North Sydney - also a Parliamentary Friend of ABC) asking for their assistance for a pre-Budget delegation to Canberra in 2021. We look forward to their support in reversing the ABC cuts.

NSoS Zoom First Birthday Party - Friday 9 October

Our special guest Margaret Reynolds President of ABC Friends National

encouraged us to remember the three 'P's' of campaigning - patience, persistence and passion. Thank you to Cassandra Parkinson who hosted our zoom party and congratulations on her election as the new ABC Friends NSW & ACT President. Corin Fairburn Bass - whose husband Walter Bass founded the ABC Friends in 1976 gave a moving speech that inspired us to continue our fight for the ABC. The zoom 'birthday party' ended with members singing 'Happy Birthday' and blowing out the candles on their cakes.

NSoS's first ABC Friends Stall at Hornsby Shopping Centre - Saturday 14 November

Thank you to Chris Haviland and Anne Matheson and all the volunteers who helped at our first ABC Friends stall. If you know of a local stall and are prepared to run one - please contact us. NSoS can supply you with materials and posters.

ABC should be the preferred viewing channel in public hospital waiting rooms - NSoS has written to Brad Hazzard NSW Minister of Health asking if he could ensure that ABC be the preferred channel in public hospital viewing areas.

Calling for a NSW Parliamentary Friends of ABC to be formed - NSoS has also written to Brad Hazzard NSW Minister of Health asking if he could consider initiating a bipartisan NSW Parliamentary Friendship Group for the ABC. Very relevant when the NSW Parliament House has other Parliamentary Friends Groups including the NSW Parliamentary Friends of Australian Music. Where would NSW be without the ABC during the Summer Bushfires and pandemic?



Vigil outside ABC Studio in Canberra



Kate Reid, Lindsay Somerville and Janine Kitson before the 3 September meeting with Paul Fletcher Canberra



NSoS Hornsby Stall



Upcoming Actions & Events

Friday 18 December 6pm: Dinner, Bella Blue Café, Lindfield - numbers strictly limited - so please contact me if you are interested in joining us

Letter Writing & Coffee morning at Bella Blue Café: date to be confirmed

Saturday 13 February 2021: ABCF Stall at Hornsby Shopping Plaza

Janine Kitson

Convenor, ABC Friends, Northern Suburbs of Sydney Branch (NSoS)

Armidale

The Armidale branch had its AGM recently, which we managed to run in hybrid-mode. We had a capacity (COVID-wise) audience of about 16 in the venue we were using plus others via Zoom. This seemed to work quite well, and highlighted the point that using the internet in addition to those attending in person allows for more geographically dispersed people to attend such functions. A helpful point for a regional branch. We might continue to use this hybrid approach post-pandemic for AGMs and talks.

Our AGM was followed with a talk by Professor Alan Scott, sociologist at the University of New England. Alan used a number of case studies, including the BBC and recent developments in European countries, to highlight attacks on public broadcasting and other public bodies. Needless to say, defending public institutions and the dissemination of valid information (with substantial and independent support, unlike false information) is an ongoing business. For those who are interested in the phenomenon of misinformation (false news) which has always been with us, but is unfortunately becoming increasingly prevalent, the idea of a 'fake news vaccine' – a game to immunise the public against false information - has been proposed by Dutch academics in collaboration with others at Oxford University: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bad_News_\(video_game\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bad_News_(video_game)).

We continue to be concerned about Radio National's poor signal strength in Armidale, and reports from other regional areas of problems with ABC broadcast strength, but at the same time we are sympathetic

to the ABC's current financial problems due to the current funding freeze. In thinking about ways to address this we are currently considering contact with influential community groups like National Farmers Federation, Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service. They have mainly positive public profiles, and have a stake in a well-funded ABC. Promoting the new ABC Emergency website to these groups will be on our list of action items. Politicians might be less inclined to dismiss the ABC if it was to receive endorsements from these groups.

That is all for now, at the end of an externally dramatic year, whilst a wee bit quiet here in Armidale.

Dr Bruce Stephenson

President, ABC Friends Armidale

Western Suburbs of Sydney WSoS (forming)

Greater Western Sydney is in the metropolitan area with one of the fastest growing populations of around 2 million. The Greater Western Sydney region runs from Windsor in the north Campbelltown in the south Parramatta in the east and Penrith in the west.

The disappointing COVID-19 Pandemic postponement just a few days before the 2020 scheduled launch is in the distant past. We stand ready to restart our 2021 WSoS campaign when safe to do so and with ABC Friends NSW/ACT agreement as early as March 2021 or soon thereafter.

Beverly and Barry Redshaw

Co-convenors WSoS (forming)

Southern Highlands

We are a very new Branch, having been launched at a meeting in Bowral on 23 September 2020 attended by about 30 people including Mal Hewitt and Angela Williamson, respectively Vice President and Secretary of the NSW & ACT Branch. Their support was very much appreciated.

During the meeting those attending were invited by the chair, Trevor Wright, to participate by answering the question 'What do we hope to achieve and what strategies could we use'. This prompted a flow of ideas including managing information booths at community events, holding market stalls, contacting politicians, whether State or Federal, by mail, email or telephone, as well as targeting different age groups including

young people and those in their 40s or 50s to see whether the ABC is valued by these groups and, if so, what they might be able to do about it. There was some discussion around the use of social media and suggestions were made about attending bushfire preparation meetings and going to speak to Garden Clubs about the role of the ABC in these areas. The Branch was subsequently successfully launched and a small committee was formed which has since had two meetings.

In early October some members joined a delegation to Canberra organised by Janine Kitson of the NSoS Branch. Janine has reported on this in the NSoS Report. Unfortunately, neither Paul Fletcher, Minister for Communications, nor Angus Taylor, our Federal Member for Hume, bothered to call us or come out to meet us, even though they had been informed beforehand that we would be there, and were invited to do so. We have since sent an email and a letter from our committee to Angus Taylor, expressing our concerns about ABC funding and requesting that he speak to Paul Fletcher on our behalf, asking Mr Fletcher to take more seriously his responsibility to talk to his constituents, and his accountability to the taxpayers more generally who widely care about the ABC. We await a response.

We are now planning to hold a street table in Bowral on 5 December and we are looking to have a larger meeting of the Southern Highlands Branch early next year and have canvassed some possible speakers. We are also planning to hold a stall at the Exeter Market early in 2021. If any Southern Highlands ABC Friends are interested in helping us to develop further activities, we would love to hear from you.

Gill Graham

Convenor ABC Friends, Southern Highlands

Hunter

It has been a quiet year for the Hunter branch as have not had any face-to-face meetings. When we contacted members about delaying the AGM and keeping the present committee, there were no objections, so the current committee will be continuing until the next AGM. We plan to have a committee meeting in November or December this year and we will discuss future activities then.

Anne Kirsten

Secretary, ABC Friends Hunter



ABC Education and Australian Media Literacy Alliance unite to combat “fake news” for Media Literacy Week

ABC Education has partnered with the newly formed Australian Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA) to combat the spread of spin, misinformation and “fake news” around the world. **AMLA** brings together some of the nation’s leading cultural and educational institutions to advocate for high-quality education programs and resources and to raise awareness of the need for robust media literacy education for all Australians. The 2020 Media Literacy Week, from 26-31 October, featured special events to help teachers and students, including:

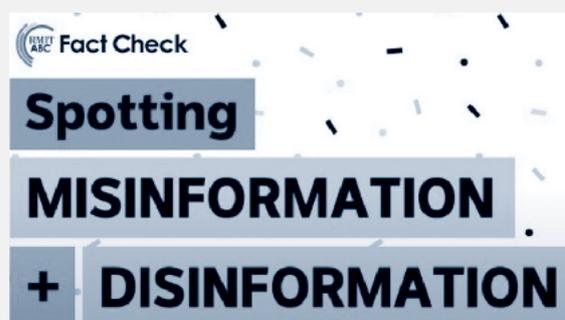
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) **online professional learning** session on media literacy.
- **National Sound and Film Archive** discussions on media literacy and advertising in Australia.
- **The Foundation for Young Australians** panel discussing their report “**Missing: Young People in Australian News Media**”, which examines how young people have been represented by the media during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ABC’s Behind the News (BTN) special media-literacy themed “**Ask a Reporter**” episode on Friday 30 October.

ABC Education’s Media Literacy website - <http://education.abc.net.au> or @ABCEducationAU - features new resources to teach students about using data and statistics, as well as “fake news” interactives and online lessons with RMIT/ABC Fact Check about subjects such as “information disorder” and spotting fake images. Annabel Astbury, ABC Head of Education,

said: “The ABC is delighted to partner with AMLA in educating people about the essential need of media literacy for all Australians. Through Media Literacy Week and the ABC Education Website, we will connect students and teachers with high quality and trustworthy content that equips them with the skills to think critically about the media they consume and create every day.”

About the Australian and Media Literacy Alliance (AMLA) - AMLA partners collaborate to develop a united approach to media literacy for all Australians.

Its efforts focus on supporting lifelong learning, especially for those who may be vulnerable to disinformation or digital exclusion. Founding members are ABC Education, Australian Library and Information Association, Museum of Australian Democracy, National Film and Sound Archives, National and State Libraries Australia, Queensland University of Technology and Western Sydney University. For more information: <https://medialiteracy.org.au/> or info@medialiteracy.org.au.



Join the ABC Friends

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

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

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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 Marcus May
0416 009 339
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as we are setting up new groups.

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