

The thing about *Bluey*



Dr Cheryl Hayden Member of
ABC Friends, Queensland

As exposed recently by Amanda Meade in *The Guardian* on 14 May, the Morrison government has employed its endless sleight of hand with language to imply that it had funded the Emmy Award-winning children's animation, *Bluey*, through the Australian Children's Television Foundation. The office of Communications Minister, Paul Fletcher, had apparently not consulted with the Foundation when making this claim and, as *The Guardian* explained, refused to accept that an error or a misleading comment had been made. Instead, his spokesperson came up with the lame comment that while the Foundation did not directly fund the program, it was "a strong advocate for quality children's content including actively supporting the success of *Bluey* through lots of positive endorsement and publicity, as an excellent example of Australian's children's content, [and] the government is proud that it has been able to support the production of *Bluey* through the ABC and Screen Australia."

Call it sleight of hand; call it weasel words. The fact is this: the Morrison government is claiming credit for something it had nothing to do with because it's realised that by any standard and by any definition, *Bluey* is a winner. It might be apt to point out here that the Morrison government loves to win, but has problems recognising races and is deaf to the sound of a starter's gun. It can only follow. But we're here to talk about *Bluey* - iview.abc.net.au/show/bluey



Bluey is an endearing rendition of a world in which the human population is depicted by various breeds of dog. *Bluey* herself is a pre-schooler, the elder daughter of perhaps the world's best parents, Bandit and Chilli Heeler, and sister to Bingo. Yes, they are a family of blue and red heeler dogs, with an extended family of Heeler aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins. They live on a hilltop in Brisbane's inner-city Paddington, in a renovated Queenslander. Go on adventures with them, and you'll find yourself eating ice-cream at Southbank, shopping in the Myer Centre, or hopping on river rocks in a local creek.

Bluey and Bingo have a diverse bunch of friends, and the wit and irony that has gone into developing their names and characters is hard to miss. Mackenzie, for example, is a mildly hyperactive Border Collie from New Zealand, where it just so happens the numbers of sheep are in serious decline. There's also Jack Russell who complains that he can't concentrate for long enough to get anything done and is always getting into trouble, and a sweet little Dachshund whose back problems force him to get around on wheels. Then there's Mum and Dad. Bandit Heeler is an archaeologist, who usually works from home but gets pretty excited about a trip to Longreach.

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From the Editor

As I write this editorial, many parts of the country are in lockdown as we do battle with the Delta variant of COVID. Again we find the ABC the most trusted and reliable daily source of information on government decisions, as well as providing expert commentary on the latest developments, both from the erudite Dr. Norman Swan and a range of medical experts from Australia and overseas. The Drum and 7.30 are essential viewing on a nightly basis, as well as Q&A and daily RN programs. Our ABC is keeping us safe and informed again in a time of crisis, despite experiencing further cuts in the May budget, although the government could find \$58.6m for other media. Find out more in 'The May Budget – More cuts to the ABC' in this edition of Update.

Friends reach out to Young People

A long-standing observation in ABC Friends is that a 50 year-old Friend is considered a youngster, and most gatherings of Friends comprise those in their more senior years. Read in this Update about wonderful initiatives being taken by ABC Friends, particularly in our Victorian Branch. Read about the exciting Youth Engagement Campaign, reaching the end of its first year of operation, the research conducted into attitudes of young people to the ABC, and the programs growing from that research. Victorian findings must be considered by Friends in all states. Read also of the essay and media competitions for High School students run by Ballarat and Southern Bayside Groups. Find out more on the Victorian Friends' website at me.abcfriendsvic.org.au.

Worthy of mention, too, is the annual Media Prize awarded to students in the University of New England Media and Communication Degree course, awarded for 2020 to Sharnee Rawson, now doing Honours in 2021. Read more in the NSW Branch Report from Northern Tablelands. Our cover story features the multi-award-winning TV show Bluey by Queensland ABC Friend Dr. Cheryl Hayden – The Thing about Bluey

Some Sad ABC Farewells

Phil Williams has retired after an extraordinary 40-year career with the ABC, much of it covering the world's trouble spots. Images of Phil reporting from danger zones in the tragic bushfires of 2019/20 will not be forgotten. In the words of Gaven Morris, ABC Director News, "In the echelons of Australians, and in the ABC pantheon, Philip sits at the very top." Philip said - "For all its foibles, the ABC remains the most important media institution in the nation." Read more in our tribute to him – he will be missed.

Hamish Macdonald is leaving after only 18 months with the ABC, but said "I am enormously grateful for the opportunity I have been given to host Q&A, and to work alongside wonderful, talented and passionate people." Hamish also presented on RN Breakfast, hosted Reef Line Event, filed for Foreign Correspondent, and reported from the 2020 bushfires. President Margaret Reynolds refers to the sad circumstances of his departure in her report in Update. We wish Hamish well for the future.

Vale Mary Ward

We record the passing of veteran actress Mary Ward on Monday 19 July at the wonderful age of 106. Star of over 20 TV series (including Prisoner, Sons and Daughters, Country Practice and Neighbours) and 6 major films, she retired 11 years ago at the age of 95! As a young actress she taught elocution with Lionel Logue (voice coach to King George VI.) She was the first female voice to be heard on the ABC, becoming known as “The Forces’ Sweetheart” during World War II as she read letters on air and played music – a true pioneer in broadcasting. Our condolences to her family. The report from Blue Mountains Branch President, Sue Noske, records the passing of long-time ABC Friend Joy Thompson AM, author, conservationist, environmentalist and

frequent letter-writer, and passionate supporter of the ABC. Our condolences to her family.

Brava, Margaret Reynolds

Annabel Crabb’s brilliant TV series Ms. Represented shines the ABC spotlight on the treatment of women MPs in our Federal Parliament, which does not come out of it very well! Women from all political parties, given the opportunity to tell all, are not holding back, including our esteemed President, Margaret Reynolds. Wonderful to see and hear you, Margaret.

Once again, where would we be without our ABC to tell the story? Thank you, ABC!

Mal Hewitt OAM ABC Friends



The thing about *Bluey*

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As for mum Chilli, she’s not just a ‘hot’ dog, she’s also in airport security. The whole thing is entirely artful and delicious. I’d love to be a fly on the wall at Joe Brumm’s studio when the storylines are being hashed out.

But what about the kids? Apart from *Bluey*’s unbelievable cuteness, what do children see? What’s pressing their buttons when the lively little opener, which any kid can sing along to, reverberates around the living room? There is nothing extraordinary about the lives of Bluey and Bingo. They are, if anything, very middle class. Their challenges are those of a privileged Australian demographic.

But herein lies the joy. It’s the portrayal of a particular kind of simple everyday life that is so brilliant. What child, after hours of trying, hasn’t finally executed a perfect handstand only to find that Mum and Dad missed it? (A lovely nod here to grandparents!) What child hasn’t been cajoled into doing a chore they didn’t want to do? What three year-old hasn’t shed a tear on discovering that she hasn’t been invited to her sister’s classmate’s birthday party? Or been disappointed when Dad has to work and can’t take her to gymnastics? Or discovered that if you fight over ice-creams with your sister, instead of eating them, they will just melt? *Bluey* is full of stuff that kids identify with, but my bet is that it’s the kind, patient and endlessly rational parenting of Bandit and Chilli, providing a cloak of predictability and security, that wins the little ones over.

This lesson in parenting is perhaps only topped by Joe Brumm’s passionate belief in the importance to children of free, imaginative play. *Bluey*, Bingo and their friends are always coming up with new games with new rules and problems that need sorting out. All children can identify with this. Bandit and Chilli are always there to guide their decision-making and help them create a world in which their darlings can be happy and safe. So, for seven minutes every day, the children of Australia – and of many other countries – tune into *Bluey* and enter a world that might be like theirs. In any event, they are invited into a world where children are allowed to be children and where parents behave themselves. It’s a very simple and comforting recipe.

As the adults of Australia, we owe it our kids to make sure that our Federal Government properly supports quality children’s television that reflects our society in all its diversity and encourages all of us to be the best we can be. In the case of

Bluey, the Morrison Government can claim nothing. Please contact your local Federal MP and ask him or her what policies they will be supporting when it comes to funding more brilliant children’s television.

Note: ABC Friends, Queensland decided against involving Joe Brumm in this article, due to its political nature. We do, however, send the team at *Bluey* our very best wishes and our congratulations.

Dr Cheryl Hayden is a researcher and writer who has PhD in Creative Writing from Flinders University and is a member of ABC Friends, Queensland.

ED’S NOTE

Here are just some of *Bluey*’s awards:

ABC hit animation *Bluey* (ABC Kids, 2018-Present) is number 96 on the list of the **Top 100 Sitcoms of All Time**, compiled by the American culture and entertainment magazine ‘*Rolling Stone*’, 4 May. It is the only Australian-produced show to make the cut. This continues *Bluey*’s list of wins:

The Album, the soundtrack to *Bluey* was Number 1 on the February 2021 ARIA Albums Chart and **Joff Bush**, *Bluey*’s music composer, has twice been nominated for APRA Screen Music Awards. The Album becomes the first Australian children’s album to top the ARIA Albums Chart and the second Australian Number 1 album on ARIA Charts in 2021.

Bluey: Big Backyard topped the list of 10 bestselling books in Australia last year. SMH Books Editor Jason Steger, reported (9-10 January 2021) that “The canine hero of the ABC TV series, created by Ludo Studios in Brisbane, had seven books in the overall top 20, with combined sales exceeding 910,000 copies”.

As well as the Morrison government’s blatantly dishonest claims for having involvement with *Bluey*’s success, which Dr Hayden lists, Karl Quinn, a senior SMH culture writer warned on 12 October 2020 about the dire prospects facing the industry: The maker of *Bluey* is among more than 20 children’s television producers who have warned of job losses and business closures unless the federal government revisits its recently announced screen reforms. If the government does not adjust its policies urgently, the producers warn, “many thousands of jobs will be lost and highly successful and profitable production companies will be forced to close”. Under the reforms announced by arts minister Paul Fletcher [in September 2020], the free-to-air commercial broadcasters no longer have to screen Australian children’s content. Nor are streamers under any obligation to do so.



From the National President



Margaret Reynolds ABC Friends, National President

I hope that by the time many of you are reading this the recent COVID disruptions of past months will be receding, and we will be starting to resume some normality in our lives.

This year has been even more disturbing than living with the uncertainties of 2020. Sadly, we thought our experience of the virus was nearly over, as many of us organised our vaccinations and planned to return to normality. But instead, fresh outbreaks, new restrictions and inadequate stores of vaccine have dominated the national conversation.

At least we still have OUR ABC and Norman Swan keeping us well informed about the twists and turns of Australian management of COVID 19. I couldn't help but compare the serious and professional health reports of Norman Swan with the latest government advertising blitz! How can all those arms convince a diverse population about the complexity of the Australia's vaccination challenge? Where are the faces of Australians waiting patiently for their vaccination? Where is the message of reassurance for those still wanting more detail about the virus and its implications for our communities? Is it too late to tell the Federal Government that it needs health communicators like Norman Swan and real Australians to talk directly to us?

Political leaders have a responsibility to keep us informed and be transparent about what is happening, but we need to rely on those health professionals who are skilled in conveying vital medical messages to all Australians

Many ABC Friends will be saddened to hear that the ABC is losing Hamish Macdonald, a popular and talented presenter who has charmed his audience with skill, humour and empathy. News reports suggest his departure from the ABC has been influenced by ongoing social media abuse. This is most alarming if the ABC is unable to protect its staff from online and other forms of trolling. All Australian workplaces must be free of harassment, and this must include social media. Hamish will be greatly missed by many of us who wish him well for the future, but we must not allow social media bullying of other high profile ABC presenters, who are simply doing their job. Of course, they can be criticised as part of healthy open debate about many important issues, but personal and unfair commentary is not part of their job descriptions nor should it be for any of us who choose to participate in community debate.

Many thanks to all of you who contributed to our recent ABC Friends Federal Election slogan writing campaign. Here are the most popular five slogans to get us thinking about the campaign ahead:

"Value the Truth - Value Our ABC"

"Hands Off Our ABC"

"Stop Government Interference in Our ABC"

"ABC - Anti, Bias and Corruption"

**"Support for the ABC Gets My Vote
- Every Time - Always"**



Thank you, Phil Williams

After 46 years of public broadcasting, 40 of them with the ABC, Phil Williams, ABC's

Chief Foreign Correspondent, is putting down the mike. He said in his 28 April farewell, "For all its foibles, the ABC remains the most important media institution in the nation. It is a vital part of our democracy and must be protected and preserved". He knows what happens to countries without strong, independent media:

Gaven Morris, ABC Director News, said: "Philip Williams is one of Australia's most accomplished foreign correspondents, one of the best storytellers in the ABC's history and one of the most experienced and skilled field reporters of his generation. In the echelons of Australian journalists, and in the ABC pantheon, he sits at the very top. He is genuinely loved by ABC audiences. He's always considered their needs and committed himself to thoughtfully explaining complex issues and disturbing events with care, clarity and compassion.



He is loved and admired by his colleagues and peers for the quality of his character, his professionalism, his humility and the personal integrity he brings to every story and role."

Williams started work at the ABC in Canberra in 1975 as a stagehand before moving into News. He went on to roam the world and tell countless

stories, bringing the world's biggest events into the living rooms of Australians, including as the ABC's Bureau Chief in Tokyo and London. Some of the many stories he has covered include: The dismissal of Gough Whitlam in 1975. September 11 in the US and the ensuing Iraq War. The Arab Spring. The Beslan school siege. London's Grenfell Tower fire – where he filmed a whole 7.30 story on his mobile phone. Brexit. The rise of Donald Trump. Terrorist attacks all over the world – Norway, Russia, France, Spain and the UK. Natural disasters all over the world – the Pacific, Asia, North America and Europe.

One of Australia's most respected journalism leaders, he has been a mentor and a friend to dozens of journalists and operational staff.

We will miss him.





Youth Engagement team – Simon, Breanna, and Aynsley.

ABC Friends Victoria Youth Engagement Campaign

Over the past year, ABC Friends Victoria have been focusing on engaging a youth audience in the fight to save the ABC. This aligns with one of their strategic goals; to extend the reach of ABC Friends Victoria beyond existing members and local groups.

Last year, ABC Friends Victoria developed a research project aimed at exploring the views, understandings and attitudes of Victorian youth and families in relation to the ABC. Carried out by two La Trobe University Social Work students, Breanna Stockman and Simon Murphy, the project took place over 14 weeks and included multiple surveys and focus groups. The main aim of the project was to uncover the best ways in which ABC Friends Victoria could engage with, and motivate a youth audience.

The students produced a report for the organisation which concluded that while Victorian youth and families do recognise the value of the ABC, they are not aware of who funds the ABC nor are they aware of the ways in which it is threatened. The report suggested that education was the first step to engaging these audiences, and identified that social media is the preferred place for this to occur.

Breanna and Simon recommended five strategies for ABC Friends Victoria to implement to work towards better youth engagement - one of which suggested recruiting a recent graduate to lead the campaign.

As a result, in February of this year, Aynsley Mitchell – a 2020 graduate from a Bachelor of Media and Communications at Swinburne University – was employed as ABC Friends Victoria's

Youth Engagement and Communications Coordinator. Aynsley has been working to expand upon the suggestions made in the report, and has defined four tactics to be implemented over a 6-month period. These include a comprehensive social media campaign, a dedicated ABC Appreciation Day, a student awards competition and collaborations with university clubs and societies.

So far, the social media campaign has seen ABC Friends Victoria build an online community on Instagram of 200 young people interested in the fate of our public broadcaster. The page has featured informational posts aimed at educating followers on the impacts of the funding cuts to the ABC.

In late August, ABC Friends Victoria will open entries for their first 'Student Awards' competition - in which young Victorians enrolled in tertiary education can submit entries for journalism, design or media/communications. Each task requires students to research the financial state of the ABC and to explore the importance of a properly-funded public broadcaster.

The competition will be open for one month and the winner of each category will receive a \$100 prize and two one-hour mentoring sessions from industry professionals. Mentors include Jim Middleton and Dan Hirst, and the judging panel includes Maxine McKew and Jess Hardwood.

For more information about ABC Friends Victoria's youth engagement campaign contact Aynsley Mitchell at aynsley@abcfriends.org.au, and follow ABC Friends Victoria on Instagram under the username **abcfriendsvic**.



Shame Australia, Shame: Politicians Behaving Badly

Compiled by **Diana Wyndham**

China promised Hong Kong autonomy under its “one country, two systems” but instead introduced national security laws to impose its system on Hong Kong; 500 Chinese police raided the offices of Hong Kong’s pro-democracy newspaper on 19 June 2021, shut it down and arrested the paper’s five journalists who were charged for making “use of journalistic work” to incite foreign forces to impose sanctions on Hong Kong and China. Australians should be alert and alarmed about actions taken under the guise of national security imperatives.

The ABC did respond with Mark Colvin reporting on ABC’s PM on 3 December 2013: “A lawyer representing East Timor in its spying case against Australia has been raided by ASIO. Bernard Collaery says two agents seized electronic and paper files this afternoon from his law practice in Canberra, while he was attending a meeting in The Hague. He believes that a key witness in the Timor case - a former spy turned whistleblower - has been arrested in a separate raid in Canberra. East Timor is suing Australia for listening in on high level conversations, allegedly to improve the Australian position in oil and gas negotiations”. On 4 December ABC News reported Tony Abbott defended the raids. Steve Cannane on ABC’s Lateline, 3 February 2016, reported that Foreign Minister Julie Bishop rejected Witness K’s bid to have his passport returned and Cannane provided more facts on ABC’s Four Corners, August 2019, “Secrets, Spies and Trials”. He began: “In a Canberra court room one of the most controversial trials ever to be held in Australia will soon get under way. The case is highly sensitive, with key evidence central to the allegations unlikely to ever be heard by the public. A former spy and his lawyer have been charged with conspiring to reveal secret information relating to an Australian intelligence operation aimed at a friendly foreign government. The two men involved are a former intelligence operative known only as Witness K and his lawyer, the former ACT Attorney-General Bernard Collaery.

The prosecutions of Witness K and Collaery, and Christian Porter’s attempts to cover them up, proceeded with scant attention in major newspapers. Supporters, as well as the ABC and SBS, include journalists: *Guardian Australia*’s Christopher Knaus and Richard Ackland and lawyers: Dennis Wheelahan, Bernard Cowdery, Geoffrey Robertson, Bret Walker and Alan Conolly. Liberal and Labor politicians were largely silent but members of the crossbench (Andrew Wilkie, Rex Patrick and the Greens, and Nick Xenophon), asked questions in

Parliament and criticised the treatment of Witness K and his lawyer. In October 2020, the Law Council of Australia lent their support to Collaery, taking umbrage at the secrecy surrounding his case, in part enforced through the national security information act, which is designed to govern the handling of sensitive and protected information by the courts. The council warned that the laws were protecting “broadly defined national security at the expense of the rights of the accused”.

Christopher Knaus reported in *Guardian Australian*, 3 December 2020, that Bernard Collaery won the UK’s Blueprint for Free Speech whistleblowing prize for exposing Australia’s spy operation in Timor-Leste but despite this, he still faces jail. Bernard Keane wrote scathingly in *Crikey*, 21 June 2021, “The wrong person was in the dock being sentenced last week in the ACT Magistrates Court in relation to Australia’s 2004 bugging of the Timor-Leste cabinet room”. He argues that Alexander Downer should face court, along with John Howard and David Irvine, the then-head of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS). Ashton Calvert, then-head of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and senior officials of that department at that time, as well as Downer’s staff, should also have faced investigation. They were all implicated in “ordering and overseeing a potentially illegal act by ASIS, to benefit fossil fuel giant and political donor Woodside. Both Downer and Calvert went on to take positions with Woodside”. Keane continued: “The ACT Magistrate’s Court, recognised that Witness K’s motivation was justice not personal gain, handed him a suspended sentence, but said he had “deliberately” “unilaterally” departed from his obligations. “In fact, Witness K had acted in accordance with advice from the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security, and he acted appropriately in revealing that a crime had been committed”. The crime against Timor-Leste is a lasting stain on Australia’s history. So is the conviction of Witness K, a brave, patriotic servant,

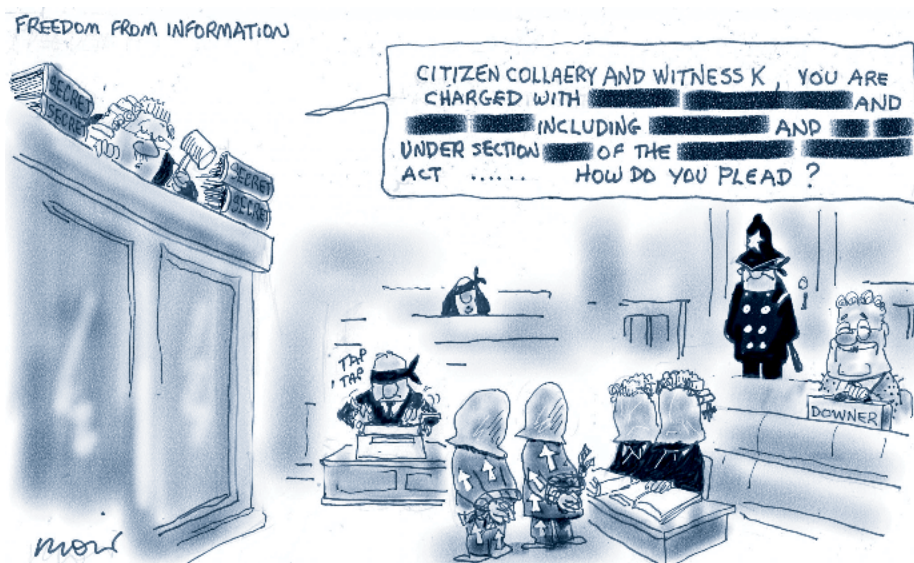


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while Australia's most pre-eminent institutions continue to act with impunity.

Sister Susan Connelly, the nun who called for the prosecutions to be discontinued when she appeared on *Four Corners* in 2019, said in John Menadue's *Pearls and Irritations* on 21 June: "This whole farce is more about protecting the real criminals in the case, those politicians and public servants who devised and planned, enabled and financed the shameful act of spying on the Timorese people". Witness K's three months' suspended jail term with a longer good behaviour bond is "for conspiring to reveal classified information about a spying operation during maritime treaty negotiations between Australia and East Timor. Witness K was not accused of lying about Australia; he was prosecuted for deciding to tell the truth, *confidentially*, to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague".

The scandalous treatment of Witness K and his lawyer may have prompted another call for a National Integrity Commission, made by 59 eminent lawyers in an open letter to the Prime Minister on 22 June. In his aptly titled book "Oil Under Troubled Water: Australia's Timor Sea Intrigue", Bernard Collaery asked "why, in the federal sphere in Australia, did the Westminster system of government fail the Timorise? In the second half of the 20th century, and so far in the 21st, both sides of Australian national politics have, with some notable individual exceptions, abandoned a rules-based order to support the exploitation of the sovereign petroleum of a poor neighbour." Timor-Leste deserves an apology and retribution and those responsible should be held to account. The outcome is of vital importance: national security versus the public's right to know, and democracy versus Chinese-style tyranny.

The *Four Corners* program quoted an anonymous politician: "I feel we're living in very dangerous times here in Australia...one day we'll wake up and wonder how on earth we got here." This grim reality is explored by Stuart Rees, OAM Professor Emeritus, University of Sydney and human rights activist in 'Fascism is alive in Australia', John Menadue's 'Pearls and Irritations', 30 June. This is a summary of some of his key points:

In the six years after 9/11, the Howard government introduced counter terrorism laws, 60 of which, according Constitutional lawyer George Williams, include provision for warrantless searches, the banning of organisations and secret detention and interrogation of non-suspected citizens by ASIO. Barrister Greg Barns has recorded the ACT Ombudsman's judgement that between 2015 and 2019, the Australian Federal Police accessed location information about individuals 1700 times but only did complied with the law nine times.

A year ago, 40 Federal police conducted a 19-hour raid on Shaoquett Moselmane's home although the MP was not a suspect. In Senate Estimates, the chief of the AFP dodged questions as to who informed the media about an event described as ASIO's most significant investigation for years. An innocent politician and his family were held accountable for nothing yet a police chief avoided answering questions. Months later the politician was reinstated as a member of the Labor Party.

Since 2014, military lawyer David McBride had been warning about the conduct of the war in Afghanistan yet his evidence was ignored until (then) Attorney General Porter decided to lay charges against the whistleblower. When told that McBride had displayed courage in the public interest and should be thanked not prosecuted, Porter blamed court proceedings on the Commonwealth Director of Prosecutions. Similarly, when Richard Boyle blew the whistle about the debt recovery tactics of the Australian Taxation Office he was told, 'don't you dare speak about the shortcomings of government institutions.' It is a case of shoot the whistleblower. Hit with 66 charges, since reduced to 24, Boyle faces up to 160 years in prison.

In Washington, US prosecutors concocted charges against Julian Assange who could face 175 years in jail. In apparent sympathy with its US ally and in collusion with the UK, Australian governments say nothing about the cruelty towards Julian Assange. His treatment matches a current 'we'll do what we like', 'we'll do what we can get away with' political-legal culture.

The ABC has reported on all these instances of anti-democratic actions by politicians, ASIO and the police.

Freedom of the Press

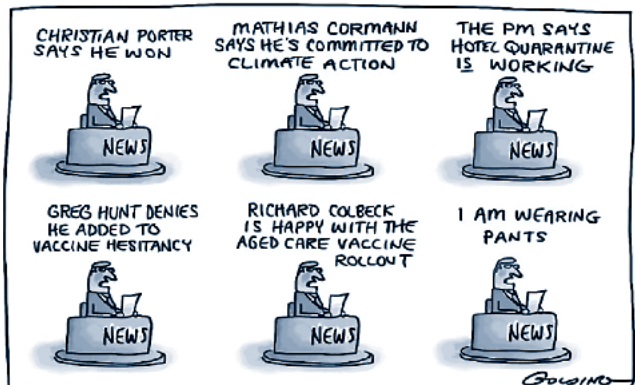


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Appropriately, two redacted blanks surround the title of the Freedom of the Press Inquiry's report which the Senate Environment and Committee References Committee tabled in Parliament on 17 May 2021. Amanda Meade responded in the *Guardian Australia*: "Press freedom report recommends stronger laws to protect public interest journalism." The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) in its 19 May media release, welcomed the report for responding to many of the concerns raised by media organisations and said

the recommendations "would help to curb the growing culture of government secrecy, stop the persecution of whistleblowers and prevent journalists being prosecuted for simply doing their jobs". MEAA Media President Marcus Strom said "the report recommendations went a long way to clawing back the overreach of dozens Australia's 'national security' laws that have been introduced since the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the US". ABC Political reporter Matthew Doran wrote "Press freedom inquiry demands government proves actual harm from journalists publishing classified information - a culture of secrecy has permeated through government". Peter Greste, Director of the Alliance for Journalists' Freedom (AJF), wrote "We strongly welcome most of these recommendations. The committee's acknowledgement of the importance of inverting the onus of proof with respect to public interest disclosures is a must for ensuring the public's right to know is supported in our democracy".

The inquiry was established in 2019 after the Australian Federal Police (AFP) raided the Canberra home of a News Corp journalist and the Sydney headquarters of the ABC over its reporting of alleged war crimes, in a series of stories in 2017 about the covert



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operations of Australia's Special Forces in Afghanistan (the Afghan Files). The AFP raids elicited strong national and international reaction. ABC Friends National was "overwhelmed by members and supporters expressing their anger and disbelief" (ABC Friends National, Submission 23, p. 1).¹

The terms of the inquiry were restricted to considering security provisions, which meant that press freedom could only be considered under '(f) any related matters'. Here are some of the highlights and conclusions of this 151 page Inquiry, which was chaired by Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young:

Unlike its Five Eyes intelligence partners, Australia does not have explicit and overarching protection for the right to freedom of information (FOI). The committee found this unacceptable and considers that federal legislation should be introduced to protect the right to FOI and guide Parliament in its consideration of intersecting criminal and national security laws. There are also an unnecessarily large number of Commonwealth laws which have the potential to infringe on the right to freedom of expression, affecting the media and every Australian.

The Inquiry's final two recommendations are:

Recommendation 16. That the Australian Government initiate an independent review of law enforcement and national security laws to reduce duplication and inconsistencies, and to align them with Australia's international human rights obligations, including the right to FOI. This should consider of the definition of 'national security' in national security laws and how to amend this to conform more closely with international law and jurisprudence.

Recommendation 17: That the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions urgently reconsider, on strong public interest grounds, whether the prosecution of Mr David McBride [in relation to the Afghan Files] should be continued.

The committee heard from numerous law and media experts on the various ways in which Commonwealth law fails to support press freedom, despite the fact that Australia has ratified the international treaty that specifically protects this human right. This failure to support press freedom has attracted considerable adverse comment both nationally and internationally, which is not an enviable position for Australia, as one of the strongest democracies and leaders in the Asia-Pacific region. Clearly, there is recognition of the need for urgent reform. The committee urges the Australian Government and the Parliament to give serious consideration to the issue of press freedom in Australia and commends its findings and conclusions to the Senate. The two government senators on the inquiry, Liberal David Fawcett and Country Liberal Sam McMahon, issued a dissenting report, saying the intelligence and security committee's findings should take precedence given its "unique remit" to consider matters of national security.

1. In addition to Submission 23 by ABC Friends National, the Inquiry considered submissions made by Diana Wyndham (6); ABC Friends Armidale (8); ABC Alumni (15); Angela Williamson (16) and ABC Friends (19). MEAA, the AJF and other members of the Australia's Right to Know coalition also gave evidence.

Our National team under the microscope



Photo credit: Richard Wainwright AAP.

Bobbie Mackley ABC Friends' National Secretary

By **Angela Williamson**, Update Production Manager

Our hardworking Secretary, Bobbie grew up in London where, in 1970, she met a young Aussie from Perth in Lewisham High Street. Fifty years later they are still together and are grandparents. Bobbie says she learned a lot about life, but not enough about Byron's 'Childe Harold', and was diverted from academia at a time when young people found their voice and made their presence very much felt, quite possibly for the first time in history.

Bobbie and Ian spent much of the '70s travelling, first to Morocco and Greece and then by thumb or local transport through Europe and Asia to India, arriving six months later in Perth. Returning to London in 1976, after an eighteen month overland trip, Bobbie found work at the BBC's Television Centre. In late 1979 they set off again, flying direct to India, and six months later on to Perth, arriving in March 1980.

Bobbie went straight to the ABC and was taken on as a 'Temporary-Permanent' (yes, really!), renewable every six weeks. She joined the ABC Staff Association when her position was made permanent. In 1990 she joined the union delegates' committee, now part of the Public Sector Union (later CPSU) and, in 1997, was elected CPSU ABC Section Councillor, for WA, a position she held until retirement in 2010. Bobbie has been awarded Life Membership of CPSU. Bobbie points out that she has been barracking for the ABC for forty years.

Bobbie has had a long association with Friends of the ABC and has acted as their (unofficial) ABC 'liaison person'. She remembers attending a national meeting of Friends held in Perth in 2003 with the CPSU ABC Section Secretary Graeme Thomson. She eventually became a member of Friends herself, and a year after retirement joined the WA committee. She was elected WA President in 2011. She is keen to find a suitable person to take over this role.

Bobbie says the state-based Friends groups have tried to set up a national organisation several times. The catalyst for the eventual successful establishment of ABC Friends National Inc. was the May 2015 edition of (then NSW&ACT only) Update which

announced on its front cover a 'National Campaign' about which Friends in WA knew nothing; neither did Friends in SA, Tassie or Queensland! Bobbie penned a long email, endorsed by all four states, about this remarkable oversight. In short, work then began co-operatively on the establishment of our current national peak body. The formal structure and achievements of ABC Friends National is reflected in the pages of Update, and in membership that has grown markedly across the nation.

Bobbie is the inaugural National Secretary. She is conscientious to a fault, ensuring that no-one is in any doubt how a decision has been reached. Yet another voluntary role handled with sincerity and huge time commitment. Take a bow, Bobbie Mackley.



"The Friends" Poet Laureate

By **Angela Williamson**, Update Production Manager

John Clair lives with his wife on the Northern Beaches of Sydney. He worked as a School Psychologist with the Dept. of Education up until his retirement in 2004. He has two grown children and four grandchildren. He graduated with Arts honours in Psychology from NSW University in 1972. He is passionate about the ABC and wouldn't miss the 7pm news followed by Leigh Sales.

The poem virtually "wrote itself" very quickly one morning. It was born out of the frustration and disappointment at hearing our Prime Minister trying to "spin" the latest round of cuts to the ABC budget and witnessing the danger of misinformation in the United States.

John would be happy if in some small way the poem encouraged people who care about an independent accountable press to mobilise for the coming election. He says: 'Speak to friends, neighbours and family members and make them aware that this government is dismantling piece by piece the most trusted source of information we have. Contact ABC Friends and see what you can do now and in the lead up to the coming election – especially if you are in a marginal electorate.

The time to act is NOW; tomorrow will be too late.'

Here's the printed version of his poem and you can find the video recording of it on our National Website at www.abcfriends.org.au/videos



Our ABC

by **John Clair**, a Friend of the ABC

Our ABC is there for us,
it filters through our lives.
And as our enemies gather round,
we need to ensure that it survives.

It helped us get through Covid,
the bush fires and floods did test.
But with flying colours Aunty led,
the facts there to attest.

It's ethical, trustworthy, and accountable,
unlike some other press.
False news, lies and spin,
you can be sure it will address.

It's the lifeblood of our democracy,
and protects our way of life.
Our journalists must feel free to report,
without threats and fear and strife.

But why attack a trusted friend,
you well may ask indeed?
If not to try and silence her,
so a different message you can feed.

While Fletcher and Morrison make their cuts,
then tell us black is white.
Their smugness and their lies,
just steel us for the fight.

For there's many marginal seats out there,
with targets on their back.
And the Friends of the ABC,
are keen to take them back.

And facts are facts that's what they are,
without them we are lost.
They must be guarded carefully,
the U.S. showed the cost.

So, Friends of the ABC,
it's time to stand your ground.
And see off this political attack,
to show our voices we have found.

For politicians they come and go,
and some you just see out.
But the ABC is here to stay,
of that there is no doubt.

John Clair © February 2021

THE VISIONARY...

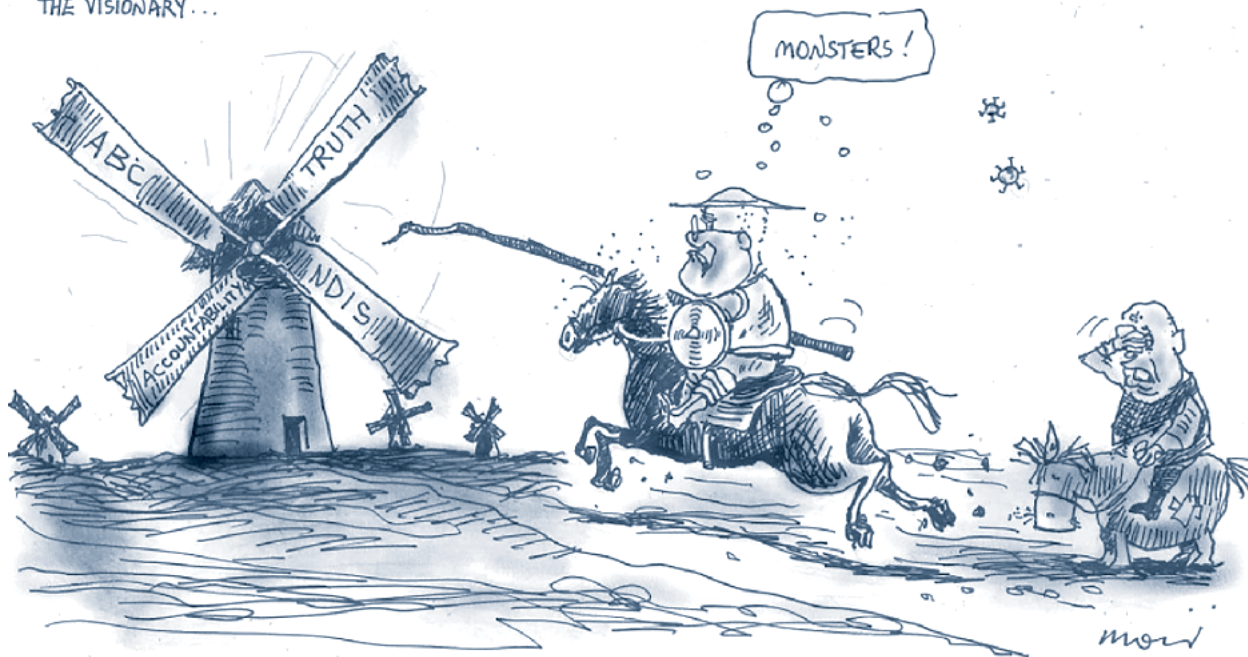


Illustration by
Alan Moir
reproduced with
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The May Budget – More cuts to the ABC

Compiled by **Diana Wyndham**

When the Morrison government's Budget was handed down on 12 May, most commentators praised the good news: the big increases to areas including aged care, mental health, childcare, women's safety, vaccine rollout, apprenticeships, infrastructure and the digital economy, while ignoring the devastatingly bad news for the ABC.

As Amanda Meade pointed out in *The Guardian*, the ABC was excluded from the extra \$58.6m the government handed the media sector. Not only was the ABC ignored, its funding could drop \$10 million over the next year.

SBS got \$30m, newswire Australian Associated Press received \$15m, community broadcasting got \$8m and the media regulator secured \$4.2m. 'Everyone got something, except the ABC,' says Michael Ward, a former senior ABC executive, who calculated that the ABC would have lost \$1bn between 2014 and 2024 under a Coalition government. He said the restoration of the indexation would add \$4m to the budget next year but that would be offset by the loss of the enhanced newsgathering fund of \$14m

The indexation pause was imposed on the ABC in 2018 by the Turnbull government and amounted to an \$84m cut overall. The ABC has already made significant staffing cuts. Last year, the ABC's managing director, David Anderson, said the summer bushfires had added an extra \$3m in emergency broadcasting costs at a time the corporation had to absorb an ongoing annual budget cut of \$105.9m including the indexation pause.

As noted by ABC Alumni, the Coalition continues to claim, falsely, that it has not cut the ABC's budget, despite the evidence of funding losses over the last eight years totalling \$783 million, which have already forced the shedding of more than a quarter of its staff and the cutting of entire programs as well as dramatic

reductions in the budgets of others. On current indications, this amount is predicted to rise to a billion dollars by 2024.

A spokesperson for the communications minister, Paul Fletcher, said on 12 May that no decision had been made about ABC funding over the next triennium, including indexation, and the news funding program was not reflected in the forward estimates because it had an end date. "But that doesn't mean any decision has been made on whether to continue or discontinue the program," he said.

The budget states the ABC's operational funding will drop from \$880.56m in 2021/22 to \$870.34m in 2022/23, a net loss of just over \$10m. The Australian dismissed these cuts as 'modest', 'dip' and 'trim': "Funding for public broadcasting is set for a modest 0.8 per cent dip from 2020/21 to 2021/22", and further there is a "forecast 6 per cent trim (on funding) from 2021/22 to 2024/25."

Andrew Tillett reported in the *Australian Financial Review* on 5 May that Ita Buttrose wasn't expecting any funding cuts as political retribution for the ABC's reporting of stories such as the historical rape allegations involving senior minister Christian Porter, but she said any move to commercialise the public broadcaster could fuel right-wing extremism. She criticised the government's leaving several board positions vacant for months and said as chair it made "no sense" that she had no input into choosing those directors.

Unfortunately, the ABC has been severely punished, and funding for universities and TAFE have been similarly slashed. Clearly the government wants 'quiet Australians' not educated ones, and a tame ABC, not one which speaks out.

ABC Friends National President Margaret Reynolds' response to the Budget is on our website.



State News



Tasmania

Celebration of Andrew Bent, the father of independent media in Australia

On 1 May this year, ABC Chair Ita Buttrose AC, OBE, joined with ABC Friends Tasmania to highlight the importance of Media Freedom and celebrate the life of Andrew Bent (1790-1851). The event was held in Hobart, not far from where Bent printed his first newspaper.

Andrew Bent was transported to Hobart Town in 1812, became Government Printer in 1815 and began the *Hobart Town Gazette* the following year. On 4 June 1824, Bent sacked the official editor and censor of the *Gazette* and became the first publisher to conduct a truly independent Australian newspaper.

We also celebrated World Press Freedom Day (3 May) which recognises that freedom of the press and freedom of expression are fundamental human rights and essential for a thriving democracy.

Holding those in power to account is never easy and not without risk. Lieutenant Governor George Arthur jailed Bent twice for criminal libel and again for breaching a press licensing law, known as Bent's Act because it was so targeted. Bent's Act was later held by the British authorities to be repugnant to the laws of

England. The day started with Bent's story, as told by Bert Spinks, storyteller, writer, poet and bushwalking guide.

As Chair of the ABC and with a lifetime of achievement and leadership in the Australian media, Ita Buttrose provided a keynote address on the importance of media freedom and its challenges.

Both Andrew Bent and Ita Buttrose are members of the Australian Media Hall of Fame. Both have contributed substantially to the Australian media and shaped its development. One of Andrew Bent's relatives, Sally Bloomfield, is writing a book on Andrew Bent and joined us for the day. Sally grew up in Tasmania and is descended from Andrew and Mary Bent through their second daughter, Catherine (b1820).

After lunch, we were entertained by a great line-up of local musicians. Michael Fortescue played the double bass. Emily Sheppard and Georgia Shine performed together - Emily explores the extremities of violin and viola playing, and Georgia is a classically trained cellist gone rogue. Ben Salter is a singer and songwriter, currently an artist in residence at MONA. To close the day, our performers came together and Michael led us in a round of community singing – a rollicking rendition of Bananas in Pyjamas.

Our audience of 100 included many fresh faces and lots of younger people. Tasmania had a surge in membership subscriptions in response to the event.



Top left: Peter Tatham, TAS President, introduces Ita Buttrose. Top right: Bert Spinks with Ita Buttrose and Catherine Zengerer (ABC Hobart) Above left: Michael Fortescue performing. Above right: Audience questions for Ita Buttrose. Photos supplied by Peter Mathew.

State News

Parts of the event were filmed. Ita Buttrose's inspiring speech can be made available for Friends' events. If you are interested in using this video as a drawcard for local gatherings, phone Kate on 0447 645 345 (business hours). Bert's story of Andrew Bent can be viewed at youtu.be/OKMypUXneNI and we hope to have a short video with highlights from Ms Buttrose's speech available soon.

Kate Durkin

Secretary, ABC Friends Tasmania

Queensland

ABC Friends Queensland has been busy making plans for a number of events later this year, pandemic permitting, of course. A social media workshop will be held with young members on the Sunshine Coast on July 25 to plan Instagram, Twitter and Facebook campaigns with key messages for youth on the ABC. The author of ABC Friends Victoria's Youth Engagement Strategy will be zooming in to share her thoughts.

On Friday evening, August 27, Quentin Dempster will be appearing as guest speaker in Maleny, in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, to discuss the current state of ABC funding. Joining him will be his former colleague, ex-ABC journalist, Dr Mark Hayes, discussing and showing examples of the innovative methods used by The 7.30 Report Queensland edition to report on daily evidence at the Fitzgerald Inquiry between mid-1987 and mid-1989. Chief of Staff from ABC News on the Sunshine Coast, Ms Bianca Clare, will be explaining how ABC's Emergency operated during the local 2019 bushfire crisis, and is responding to the pandemic. Well known rural identity, Peter Lewis, a former Executive Producer of ABC *Landline*, will MC.

Later in 2021, along with our usual market stalls, we are planning some lovely end-of-year member BBQ's in Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast, and Toowoomba. If you would like support to host a member Barbie in your area, please contact the President on president_qld@abcfriends.net.au

Dr Mark Hayes

Communications Advisor, ABC Friends Qld

South Australia/ Northern Territory

At the end of May (28th to 30th), Andrew Johnston (proxy Sandra Coopman) and Sue Pinnock attended ABC Friends National Conference in Canberra held at Hotel Kurrajong, in easy distance from Parliament House. Having not met together physically since 2019 it was an excellent opportunity to meet new members and establish new working relationships and build on the old. The three days we spent together were very worthwhile. We heard from guest speakers, shared ideas, resources and further refined processes to underpin our strategy leading up to the Federal election. On return to Adelaide a Strategic Framework 2021-2023 was written for ABC F SA/NT to focus thinking in line with the people resources we have on our state committee.

Earlier in the year Sue Pinnock, on behalf of National, wrote a paper about ABC TV and Radio Broadcasting Transmission, which highlighted issues and possible solutions associated with access by people living in remote and regional and rural Australia. Please contact with Sue Pinnock at spinnock@chariot.net.au if you would like a copy.

Having arrived two days earlier in Canberra, Margaret Reynolds (National President), Cassandra Parkinson (Vice President, National) and Sue Pinnock (National Committee Member) spent the time in Parliament presenting the content of the transmission paper to ABC Parliamentary Friends and Members of Parliament with relevant roles.

In early July, ABC F National had a presence at the 27th National General Assembly of Local Government held in Canberra. This was to promote the thinking in the transmission paper to rural and regional councils where there might be issues accessing ABC TV and Radio Broadcasting and where funds might be being used to provide retransmission services to communities.

In May, ABC F SA/NT collaborated with the Hawke Centre to produce an online event for June 10: "The Hon Kevin Rudd AC In-Conversation with Quentin Dempster AM: Disinformation: A toxic mix of media, politics, and vested interests." Disinformation as opposed to misinformation was defined. The discussion centred on the problem posed by disinformation in the context of a 24-hour news cycle in a "clickbait" media world. The threat of disinformation to democracy was highlighted. A big thank you to Wendy Parsons who has spearheaded collaborations with the Hawke Centre and was instrumental in setting up this event. Thank you also to Rick Sarre, Emeritus Professor of Law and Criminal Justice at the UniSA and an Adjunct with UniSA: Justice and Society, who made a vote of thanks on behalf of ABC F SA/NT at the conclusion while Sue Pinnock was in Canberra. To date 2851 people have viewed this event, to watch go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=g07L7jMIC_k

As we move into the build up to the Federal election our committee is keen to hear from you if you are able to give time to help us prepare. Please contact Sue Pinnock at spinnock@chariot.net.au.

Sue Spinnock

President, ABC Friends SA/NT
National Committee Member

NSW and ACT

Campaign planning kicks into gear

With an election in the wings we have started planning in earnest. Our campaign committee, chaired by Peter Lindenmayer, is in the process of selecting an agency to help run the campaign and produce a small number of advertisements and other materials. While the state campaign will focus on selected marginal electorates, we will encourage all branches to participate in promoting our message and seeking commitments from candidates.

The NSW campaign will be part of a broader national campaign. A national planning meeting in May identified some of the themes that will feature in the campaign. Foremost among these is the need to restore the funding that's been cut from the ABC over the past eight years. We will also ask candidates and political parties

to make clear commitments against privatising the ABC. And we need to secure proper funding to guarantee reliable coverage and emergency services in all parts of Australia.

This election could be the most important one in which ABC Friends has participated. A lot has been lost over the past eight years: programs and services have been scrapped, especially in regional Australia, and many wonderful ABC staff have left. The ABC has come under sustained attack, its offices have been raided, and its journalists have been threatened with legal action for simply doing their jobs. We must fight to protect the ABC against more cuts and threats to its independence.

Spreading the word

I recently spoke at an event organised by the Blue Mountains branch. This very active branch is located in the seat of Macquarie, the most marginal electorate of NSW, which is held by Labor's Susan Templeman with a margin of 1.2%.

My speech focused on ABC independence, privatisation and funding. I noted that throughout its history the ABC has been accused of bias by politicians of all political persuasions. Perhaps complaints of bias and attempts to influence editorial coverage are part of the life of a public broadcaster. But, I suggested, more recently the attacks on the ABC have become shriller. That, along with calls to privatise the ABC, have made me uneasy. There was a time when it was unthinkable that a mainstream political party would seek to privatise the ABC, but the Liberal Party did exactly that in 2018.

In late May, Margaret Reynolds (National President), Sue Pinnock (South Australian President) and I spent two days meeting Federal Members and Senators to give them information central to developing Australian public broadcasting policy from 2022-2027. During our visit, we met with the Parliamentary Friends of the ABC group including Andrew Wilkie, Rebekha Sharkie, Helen Haines, Mike Freeland, Susan Templeman, Kirsty McBain, Terri Butler, Katie Thwaites, Alicia Payne, Mark Dreyfus, Andrew Leigh, and Brian Mitchell.

Committee changes

The indefatigable Angela Williamson has stepped down as secretary of the NSW committee. Angela, who is also a member of the (quite new) Southern Highlands branch has been replaced by Peter Lindenmayer, a long time committee member who hails from the ACT.

A massive thank you to Angela. She has been a superb secretary for ABC Friends over many years, taking on responsibilities that go well beyond her official role. Fortunately, Angela will continue to contribute to ABC Friends in various ways, including as the production manager for this magazine.

Paul Reid has joined the NSW committee replacing Janine Kitson, who has stepped down to contest the Federal election as an independent against Paul Fletcher in the seat of Bradfield (Nothing like a challenge). A warm welcome to Paul and thanks to Janine for her contribution to ABC Friends.

The best laid plans

Our plans for a state conference in July were disrupted by COVID as was our planning for the annual dinner. That's after

both events were cancelled last year. We plan to hold them later this year, probably in October. Watch this space!

Cassandra Parkinson

President, ABC Friends NSW & ACT

Western Australia

Welcome to our WA members and supporters and other readers. We have been relatively lucky in WA in respect to COVID, and life is not that much different from normal except, of course, that there is no certainty for any plans as day-to-day life can change in a matter of hours, as has happened in the eastern states as I write this.

This year the WA committee tried to reach a younger audience by holding a stall at Edith Cowan University's (ECU) Mt. Lawley campus Open Day on Sunday, April 18. It was also an opportunity to try out our new marquee. I can report that shorter people are definitely at a disadvantage when it comes to putting up a marquee! The weather was fine, if a little hot out of the shade in the afternoon. Committee members Terri, Michael, Cathy, Margo and I were joined by volunteers Susanna, Chilla, Marita, Angela, Peter and Eric for shifts during the day. We had lots of conversations with people young and older, handed out information flyers and stickers and quite a few membership forms. Everyone did a great job and I think quite enjoyed themselves too. Thanks everyone! Betty Maas and Gary Duffield, from community radio station 89.7fm Northside Radio (which is based at ECU's Joondalup campus), broadcast live from the Open Day and gave me an opportunity to plug the ABC and its lack of funding, and speak about ABC Friends, live-to-air. Thanks to them both, and Gary for the providing the photo.

We have had a couple of changes on the WA committee. We farewelled Rosie Coates, with thanks for her contribution, and welcomed Eric Findlay whom we met as a volunteer at the ECU Open Day. We still have a vacancy on the committee for a person with some spare time and a wish to help preserve the ABC.

ABC Friends National, Friends in WA and around the country are gearing up for the Federal Election and deciding how best



Betty Mass (L) with Bobbie Mackley (R) at ECU Open Day 18 April 2021. Photo Credit: Gary Duffield

State News

to keep the ABC funding shortfall in the public eye. Ideas, skills and practical help are always welcome, and I should point out that there is no requirement to join the committee. Someone with experience in newspaper advertising and/or graphics would be useful. Please email fabcwa1@hotmail.com for more information.

Bobbie Mackley

President, ABC Friends WA

Cathy, also a member of the National IT steering committee, writes about WA's presence on Facebook and Twitter:

Our Facebook page is www.facebook.com/abcfriendswa/. I try to post regularly so people keep interested. In the last week I posted 10 times, resulting in 596 total page likes and 58 engagements. I post ABC-related articles, and others of interest on the media and press freedom generally. Sometimes the article might refer to events offshore (for example Hong Kong), but most are Australian stories. I subscribe to quite a few online news services, and always check the excellent internal emails containing news and media links provided by a Queensland volunteer, Jacqueline Deacon. I have also recently taken over as the news archivist for the national website, the reading being the same.

It's interesting which posts get the most views, and how quickly. People read about well-known media people, so a piece on Annabel Crabb's new series *Ms Represented* did well, and so did news of Nikki Savva moving to the Age and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. But the standout recently was a piece on ABC sports presenter Tony Armstrong, which rapidly reached 170 people, with 47 engagements, much more than our usual. Perhaps it was the eye-catching photo that accompanied this article on domain.com?

Committee member Michael Dowling looks after WA's Twitter feed @ABCFriendsWA has 923 followers and Michael retweets articles on the ABC and also the media generally.

Cathy Bardon

Secretary, ABC Friends WA

Victoria

The post-COVID revival is in full (but stuttering) swing for ABC Friends Victoria. Between the hibernations of lockdowns, we have opened a new office, taken on a Youth Engagement team (see separate piece), embarked on a range of new communications, and launched our pre-election campaign in the Treasurer's electorate. We are reinvigorated and ready to fight for the ABC.

The new office, at Ross House at 247 Flinders Lane, in the heart of Melbourne CBD, is an exciting change. The office is managed by Simon Strong, and it can host volunteers, contractors, and meetings of all sizes. You are very welcome to phone the office (1300 108 126) and/or to visit.

Another obvious change is our regular newsletter, now produced every two-three weeks and emailed to the 8,200 members and supporters on our mailing list. We are constantly trying to improve the newsletter, and your comments are very welcome. Each newsletter item links to a post on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/pg/ABCFriendsVic/posts and on our website (me.abcfriendsvic.org.au) and we encourage you to

suggest ways in which the newsletter can help you in your support of the ABC.

The newsletter and the new style of communications are part of the three-year Strategic Framework which ABCF Victoria adopted at the end of 2020, with clear goals and strategies to influence the next federal election in favour of the ABC. We want to help people who support the ABC to get elected. And we want to ensure that people who do not support the ABC are not elected. Our two overriding campaign messages are:

It's your ABC: Fight for it!

The ABC: Trusted, Valued, Underfunded.

These messages will feature on our bumper stickers, banners, printed materials and conflutes leading up to the election. We hope you like them – and we very much hope they will be effective!

In May we co-hosted a public rally in the Hawthorn Town Hall (HTH) to launch Victoria's campaign to Fight for the Future of the ABC. Over 400 people filled the hall, and the event was live streamed and recorded (available on abcfriendsvic.org.au). It was held on Budget eve in the Kooyong electorate of Treasurer Josh Frydenberg MP and hosted by an alliance of GetUp!, ABC Alumni, the Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance, and ABC Friends – a coalition of nonpartisan concerned organisations. Speakers included Tosca Lloyd from GetUp!, Prof Ed Davis from ABC Friends, Karen Percy from MEAA, and Jim Middleton from ABC Alumni. MC for the evening was Prof Andrea Hull, former Chair of the ABC Advisory Council.

As they left the hall the participants were given an open letter to the Treasurer, rebutting his false claims that ABC funding has not been cut. Copies of the letter and numerous other campaign



Above: Ross House and ABCFV office.

Below: Panel at HTH rally.





documents – fact sheets, fliers, brochures – are available from our Victorian office, and online at me.abcfriendsvic.org.au.

We are now gearing up to campaign for the next federal election, which will occur before May 2022. Our campaign will target eight marginal Victorian seats, and in other seats where we have active local Groups. The Victorian Groups (see separate piece) have indicated their needs for the campaign, and the Victorian Executive is developing the campaign strategy. If you are interested in helping with the campaign you would be very welcome.

Michael Henry

President ABC Friends Victoria.



Top left: Trades Hall Banner; Top centre: Eastern Freeway Banners. Top right: Lidia Aitken & Prue Bentley with Ballarat Essay completion winners - Molly Coyle, Molly Fredericks, Audrey English, Ben Nash. Above: HTH Volunteers.

Victorian Groups News

The stop/start permission to run public events has curtailed the visibility of our ABCF Groups in Victoria. But they are beaver away, preparing for the next campaign, and taking opportunities to raise awareness when they arise. Some Groups have become regular Zoomers, and some are adopting the hybrid model – face-to-face when you can, otherwise ZOOM.

COVID has forced the development of better computer skills for some of us, and mitigated the ‘tyranny of distance’ for our regional groups, allowing continued engagement for those for whom a long drive would have prevented attendance at meetings.

We have nine active ABCF Groups in Victoria, with more in “development”. We are working towards making sure that we have a strong Group in each of the eight marginal electorates for the next federal election. Meanwhile, the activities are primarily awareness-raising and educational. The recent rally at the Hawthorn Town Hall, in the middle of Treasurer Josh Frydenberg’s electorate, was a great joint effort from all our local groups, with excellent speakers from ABC Friends, MEAA and GetUp!, supported by large banners on every street corner and our marvellous volunteers engaging passers-by and handing out material about the ABC. In the intervals between Victorian lockdowns, our groups are out and about with banners on buildings and over major roadways, giving strong messages to the passing traffic (sometimes even providing an opportunity to educate the police sent to investigate).

Two local groups – Ballarat and Southern Bayside have taken the innovative step of running school essay and media competitions with local high school students, offering prizes for the best entries. These groups have seen the value of involving and educating the younger population on the critical importance of the ABC and spreading our message to them. The Ballarat Courier picked it up, and published two stories about the competition. Some Groups run their own Facebook page, or their own newsletter. Some have regular speakers at their meetings, and some meet regularly

with their local MPs. Leaders of all the Groups meet regularly. The Groups are in constant campaign mode, even when their impact is constrained by COVID restrictions.

The nine active Groups in Victoria, with the contact person in each case provided on the back page of this Update.

Links between the Victorian Groups and the state Committee of Management (and the ABCFV office) are maintained via meetings with Group representatives, linking members to Groups, and representation of Groups in the meetings of COM. A composite Groups activity Calendar is under development, along with a Groups training manual, to capture and pass on the experience and skills of seasoned campaigners.

ABCF Groups will be the drivers of our pre-election awareness-raising activities, and they will be the life blood of our federal election campaign.

Gai Mooney

ABC Friends, Victorian Groups Subcommittee Convenor

Northern Melbourne

Despite lockdowns we have been able to meet a few times this year with a combination of Zoom and face-to-face meetings. Our main recent activity was to visit two out of the three Labor MP that are in our area. (We were due to visit the third one yesterday, but it had to be postponed because of the lockdown.) We received a very warm and friendly reception, though neither MP suggested that there was a likely, increased-funding promise from the Labor Party on the horizon. Both were interested in supporting a five-year funding proposal.

Margaret Hanrahan

Convenor, ABC Friends, North Melbourne



NSW Branch News

Blue Mountains

Our branch has been able to hold well-attended monthly meetings since February this year, despite restrictions. Our July meeting however, has been cancelled due to the Lockdown, (ironically, our July meeting last year was also cancelled, due to COVID-19). Our May meeting featured Cassandra Parkinson, our NSW /ACT President, as Guest Speaker. Her insights into 'an extraordinary year for the media' highlighted the importance of an 'independent broadcaster free from political, commercial or other interests'. Cassandra pointed us to current events such as the Parliament House 'culture' stories, highlighting the issues of public interest journalism and press freedom. Cassandra's inspiring address has made us even more determined to fight for our ABC!

Our ABCF stall at Glenbrook Rotary Market on 1 May attracted much attention, including families keen to take a photo with our child-sized poster of Bluey. We had a variety of ABCF merchandise available, plus a petition demanding the restoration of funding to the ABC. We now have our own branch QR code, to direct interested parties to our BM website fabcnswbm.org.au/ We also advertise our BM Facebook page www.facebook.com/fabcnswbm.

We are still hopeful that the August market will go ahead. This market attracts people from both the mountains, and the Penrith area, and therefore is an important awareness-raising / recruiting event for our sister branch, the Western Suburbs of Sydney. Glenbrook is neatly perched on the eastern edge of Macquarie, our federal electorate, and borders the electorate of Lindsay in which Penrith and surrounding suburbs are located. Both electorates are marginal seats. BM and WSoS branches are committed to actively supporting each other, especially in the lead-up and during the Friends Federal Election campaign.

One of our staunch Friends, Joy Thompson, passed away recently. She was a devoted and active member of our branch, particularly in the critical field of letter-writing. Joy was awarded the AM in 2002 for her achievements as an author, conservationist and environmentalist. Here is her final powerful and passionate letter as an ABC Friend in support of the national broadcaster, which was published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* last year:

"Dear Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, I cannot believe that your government has not reversed the cuts to the ABC's budget after the wonderful job that they did covering the droughts, fires and floods. Climate change experts tell us we can expect more fires and disasters. What will we do without the ABC? As well as being essential in times of crises, they can give us first rate entertainment when fully funded. Any person watching the brilliant "Operation Buffalo" would have to agree. It is based partly on truth and partly on fact. It is a wonderful show (see [iview -https://iview.abc.net.au/show/operation-buffalo](https://iview.abc.net.au/show/operation-buffalo)). No commercial TV would have funded it. When you strangle the ABC you must take responsibility for the loss of an institution which has served this nation, all ages, for many years. For people who want to see the

ABC sold, they don't know what they have until they lose it. Dear Prime Minister, please don't let your Government be remembered as the one that destroyed an incredibly valuable institution. You still have time to reverse your actions."

Joy Thomson. Hazelbrook (Blue Mountains)

Sue Noske

President, ABC Friends Blue Mountains

Hunter

At our recent committee meeting we discussed the ABC Friends draft Strategic Plan Framework. The group felt that there were some very good suggestions in the Plan Framework. For our group the consensus was, going on previous experience, that:

- having a petition to sign, especially as an election approaches is an advantage. In the past we have found people are quite happy to sign petitions.
- attending markets where we could promote what the ABC offers. We have found this useful at a particularly large market in Newcastle and there are others we could attend also.
- merchandise, especially bumper stickers and badges, which we have a lot in stock. Coffee cups for sale were also suggested.
- A concise handout re the ABC's mission and the services it offers. We believe that most people are not aware of just how many programs, podcasts and useful information is available through the ABC and on its website.
- an up-to-date information sheet about cutbacks and financial issues for the ABC.

We have planned to have our AGM on 25 September at Souths Leagues Club, Merewether at 1.30. Hopefully it will go ahead as it was cancelled last year. We look forward to meeting a lot of our members there as well as our president Cassandra Parkinson.

Ann Kirsten

Secretary, ABC Friends Hunter

Northern Tablelands

After 25 years the 'Armidale' branch of ABC Friends has changed its name to 'Northern Tablelands'. This is not meant to reflect a mid-life crisis, but is to ensure a more inclusive role for our branch across the Northern Tablelands of NSW. We are primarily here for ABC Friends members from Walcha in the south to Tenterfield in the north. This is a distinctive part of Australia, a temperate climate two hours inland from the relative warmth of the Pacific Ocean, yet with altitudes ranging from 850 to 1500 metres (whilst also including Inverell at a lowly 582 metres above sea level). We wish to focus on public broadcasting needs and strengths across these tablelands.

Our branch had planned to hold a public forum on disinformation in the media (Fake News) in early July, which was to involve five



ABC Friends at Armidale Markets.

speakers in a format that encouraged audience participation. Due to current COVID-19 restrictions we decided to postpone this event to a time when a larger audience could congregate without fear of infection ... hopefully in the not too distant future.

In our one public event in the last four months we attended the Armidale Market at the end of June. While market attendee numbers (both stalls and public) were down, there were still sufficient opportunities in which to discuss the importance of independent public broadcasting with those who passed by, as witnessed in the accompanying picture.

On a more reserved note, we pursued a 'home-based' activity through the construction of a web-site for our local branch. This was achieved through the assistance of the ABC Friends IT folk, starting with a NSW/ACT website template which was modified using appropriate software. It was a lot easier than we thought, similar to using word-processor software. To view the result go to the NSW & ACT Regional Branches website, scroll down to Northern Tablelands Branch, and click on www.abcfriends.org.au/nsw_act_northern_tablelands_branch. Any feedback on layout and content greatly appreciated.

Finally, we would like to announce the winner of our ABC Friends Media Prize for 2020. Each year we have funded a prize for the strongest student graduating from the University of New England's Bachelor of Media and Communication degree. For 2020 it was Sharnee Rawson, who has now gone on to study media in an Honours year for 2021. Congratulations to Sharnee and we trust that she will have a productive and enjoyable future in media.

Bruce Stevenson

President, ABC Friends, Northern Tablelands

Northern Rivers

Rather than basking in the prospective glow of our big event on 31 July involving with Zoe Daniel and Kerry O'Brien and a full house of 200 punters, we have been consumed by the need to undo six months of ongoing work by our own Neville Jennings. With so many health risks, travel uncertainty and prospects worsening day by day, we had to kill it early this time. By the time you read this, apologies will have been conveyed and tickets refunded. (If we have missed you please give me a call on 0431 958 991) Neville is not contemplating a new career in events management, although perhaps he should be on speed dial for the organisers of the Tokyo Olympics.

Meanwhile we continue to encourage our local National Party Member for Page to break with his Coalition mates and come out

in support of the work done by the ABC for his rural constituents. Wasted taxpayer-funded subsidies to media barons, together with the ascendancy of his new leader, has prompted us to seek re-affirmation of his undertaking that "The Nationals have a very clear policy regarding the ownership of the ABC. It is and will remain a public broadcaster. It will never be privatised or sold"

We hope that when the COVID dust settles, we can get back to local market attendances.

Peter Dickson

President ABC Friends Northern Rivers

Letter to Kevin Hogan, Federal MP for Page

15 July 2021

Dear Kevin,

Yes, this is another letter on behalf of your constituents in the Page electorate who are concerned about the Federal Government's continued underfunding of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

This time, we must express our dismay that the funding provided by taxpayers to subsidise commercial TV outlets in the provision of local content, has been wasted, WIN and 9 now having deserted the regions after pocketing 4.5 and 4m dollars respectively. Just because rural TV and newspaper services might not turn a buck for media barons, does not mean that we should be deprived of information vital to our community.

Since Federation, governments of both stripes have funded services in health, education, agriculture, science and research, where the motive is service and community benefit, not profit.

For 70 years the ABC has served your constituents during fires, floods and specific crises like COVID 19. It has also provided education, cultural services and objective reporting vital to informing the community. Perhaps even more importantly it has informed urban Australians of the issues crucial to rural people.

We would still like to believe that the National Party will oppose the privatisation agenda of your Coalition partner. We are re-assured by your November 2020 email where you said "The Nationals have a very clear policy regarding the ownership of the ABC. It is and will remain a public broadcaster. It will never be privatised or sold".

Recent events with your change of leadership do cause us concern, especially the unpredictability of Mr Joyce and his Queensland based supporters, who are not friendly to the ABC. We would appreciate confirmation of the Nationals' stated policy and your assurance that the Nationals will never support splitting the National broadcaster along some artificial city/country divide, as has been mooted by some Coalition members.

It has now been more than four years since we met with you. We would really appreciate an opportunity to talk to you about these matters of concern to your constituents.

Peter Dickson

President ABC Friends Northern Rivers

NSW Branch News

Southern Highlands

Some members of the Southern Highlands Branch had our first table at the Exeter Market back in April, which went well. Almost 100 people signed a petition in support of the ABC and Gill Graham, our Convenor, organized a raffle which was very successful. Since that time however, it has been somewhat difficult to organize events because of 'guess what - COVID.'

We were intending to have another table in June at a Human Rights Forum to be held at a venue in Bowral but that had to be cancelled/postponed because of the NSW COVID lockdown rules being introduced.

We had developed an A4 Fact sheet providing information about the ABC's Funding and the effects of its reduction over the years, which we had planned to hand out at the event. We did send this out via email to all our SH Branch members for their information and it will no doubt be used at future stalls and events.

Our most recent meeting was in mid-June where we discussed, amongst other things, possible ABC Friends activities, such as producing information flyers and doing letter drops, preceding the next Federal Election.

It was also drawn to our attention that our ABC will turn 90 in mid 2022, something we plan to really celebrate!

Belinda Wright

Secretary, ABC Friends Southern Highlands

ACT & SE NSW Region

Anzac Day saw ACT & SE NSW Region members heading off early to Braidwood for a day at the local markets — armed with

a plentiful supply of home-baked Anzacs. Thanks to stall stalwart Jane Smyth and late-night biccly baker Rick Smyth, Anzacs have become a regular feature at our stalls as a giveaway to those making purchases of ABCF wares. Bungendore member Jenny Dibley organised the stall, and Jane and I, along with other Canberra members Peggy Horn and Sue Ingram, made up the rest of the team. We chatted with locals — as well as with long-weekend visitors from Sydney and elsewhere — and heard their concerns, especially about reception in country areas. Sales were good and the Anzacs were a great hit. All in all, an excellent outing for our branch. Building on an idea trialed last year of Saturday morning stalls at suburban centres, in May and June we set up shop in the Canberra suburbs of Lyneham and Curtin. We always enjoy the conversations and hearing what people love (or, occasionally, not) about the ABC and it's a good way to get the message out.

Visits to ABC Canberra resumed in May, with convenor Peter Lindenmayer organising two parties of 10 members each (COVID maximum) to tour the studios, hear from staff and chat with them over morning tea. These popular visits are enjoyed as much by ABC staff as members, and give members a good insight into behind-the-scenes aspects of news gathering and programming for radio and TV.

This seems to be a bumper year for books by ABC journalists and presenters. We've taken advantage of their publicity tours to hand out ABCF material to attendees at speaking events, organised in association with ABC Friends ACT & SE-NSW Region. In May an audience of 250 at the Australian National University heard the ABC's (now non-resident) China correspondent, Bill Birtles, in conversation about his book, *The Truth About China*. Bill's colleagues and fellow authors Norman Swan, Julia Baird and Lisa Millar are all lined up to speak at the ANU in coming months, despite lockdowns playing havoc with booking schedules. We plan to be there if and when they can make it.

We were also on hand with ABCF material at the ANU in July when the ABC's international affairs analyst, Stan Grant, delivered the 21st Manning Clark Lecture. Stan also has a new book out — *With the Falling of the Dusk*.

The Canberra group is also arranging a forum for later this year on health and the media, which follows on from an informative media forum in March. Speakers at the latter included Jack Waterford, former *Canberra Times* editor-in-chief, former ABC head of editorial policies Alan Sunderland and University of Canberra associate professor Caroline Fisher. Peter, who organised the forum, reported:

"Lots of interesting discussion about media trends generally, as well as the role of the ABC in upholding quality standards and promoting trust. While much media content increasingly focuses on exploiting fears and outrage,



Peggy Horn, Jenny Dibley, Jane Smyth and Gia Metherell at Braidwood markets. Photo by Sue Ingram.

Alan Sunderland pointed out the steady growth of an approach known as solutions journalism. This is not, as some critics have suggested, 'crusading' journalism, but instead is rigorous reporting that not only identifies social and political problems, but also explores credible, evidence-based options for dealing with them constructively. Much online ABC reporting has this feature, but it's also found in some print journalism. Another example was ABC TV's influential *War on Waste*."

If you'd like to stay up to date with interesting and stimulating ABC- and media-related articles and event notifications, keep an eye on our Facebook page — look for ABC Friends ACT & SE NSW Region.

Gia Metherell

Member, ABC Friends ACT & SE NSW Region

Central Coast

At the beginning of the year our branch was grateful to have the opportunity to meet in person. Unfortunately, with the recent lockdown we are once again having to resort to communicating via ZOOM. Our biggest disappointment was that the restrictions were imposed just prior to our first event for over a year, a function featuring Walkley Award winning Executive Producer, Sue Spencer. Sue was the Executive Producer of *Four Corners* from October 2007 to March 2015. The ground breaking stories under her stewardship of the program included investigations into Aboriginal deaths in custody, the live cattle trade, exposés into banking and finance, leading to a Royal Commission and a report on greyhound racing which led to criminal charges being laid. Sue's most recent contribution was the investigation into the 1979 fire at Luna Park. We are planning to reschedule our event featuring her outstanding contribution to journalism on 3 September at the same venue, the Everglades Country Club in Woy Woy. Fortunately, both our guest and the club have been very understanding and we are all hopeful that the event can proceed without a second interruption. Up to the postponement of the event on 25 June, bookings were full. My sincere thanks are also extended to all those who made a booking or an inquiry about the function for their patience and consideration.

On behalf of our branch, I would also like to extend sincere thanks to two wonderful donors, both of whom are branch members, Elaine Hume and Pamela Lemoine. Pamela has also placed private advertisements in our local independent newspapers promoting the ABC over a long period and at considerable personal expense. We are all very grateful to both of them and will endeavour to put the donations to good use in supporting the national broadcaster. Along with the rest of the nation all of us are hoping that the current situation will ease and we can engage with all ABC Friends and supporters with greater confidence and certainty in the near future. One consolation I have found during lockdowns has been the opportunity to listen to ABC Classic. During a recent program, musician and broadcaster Ed Ayres broadcast Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* played by the Grimethorpe Colliery band. The music was performed in a memorable scene from the movie *Brassed Off*. An uplifting performance from both the band and the cast. Perhaps try tuning in to ABC Classic to lift your spirits during the restrictions.

Ross McGowen

Convenor, ABC Friends Central Coast

Northern Suburbs of Sydney

I made personal and joint NSoS submissions to the Media Reform Green Paper. We had a very successful Town Hall meeting via Zoom with Michelle Rowland, Shadow Minister for Communications on April 20 but first rain and then COVID prevented us having stalls at local markets.

Lindsay Somerville

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

Western Suburbs of Sydney (WSoS)

Stop! Start! Stop!

Resulting from COVID Lockdown restrictions has disrupted plans since inauguration, deferred from March 2020 to March 2021.

We did squeeze in our committee and branch meeting and two community market stalls before Lockdown. But now branch meetings etc. are cancelled. We have also produced two Newsletters and have adopted the theme "While we live, we grow".

The ABC board decision to relocate 300 journalists to Parramatta by 2024, Chairwoman Ita Buttrose said would improve diversity in the ABC's newsroom and make its coverage more relevant. Being of the Western Suburbs we agree.

Having met with ABC department managers at events in Liverpool, we wrote to Managing Director welcoming Our ABC to Western Sydney. He replied and acknowledged our interest and support and to keep him informed of our events.

Meanwhile like everyone else we, we wait patiently for COVID to "leave town" and resume WSoS Branch activities.

Barry and Bev Redshaw

Co-Convenors, ABC Friends, Western Suburbs of Sydney Branch (WSoS)

Shoalhaven and South Coast

After forming in November 2020, we held our first ordinary meeting on 5th June. Twenty -five people attended , showing how they value ABC, and plans to show 'Zappa', the documentary (as a fundraiser and to talk about protecting Our ABC), on 17th July, were approved. Bruce Elder introduced the film and 80 people bought tickets, though some people decided not to come owing to COVID fears.

All enjoyed learning about this inspiring creative composer who valued democracy and human rights. A very successful event all 'round.

Our next meeting is scheduled for 7th August.

Carmel McCallum

Convenor, ABC Friends Shoalhaven and South Coast



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?

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as we are setting up new groups.

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