



LEVY: ABC UNDERFUNDED BY HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS

The woman regarded as the most influential manager in the ABC has told NSW Friends of the 'grim reality' of programming at current funding levels.

In her address to the Friends AGM in September, the Head of ABC Television, Sandra Levy painted a stark picture. A 30% decline in funding in real terms over the last 20 years. A 50% drop in staff numbers. Production



Sandra Levy, Head of ABC-TV

costs rising at levels not commensurate with CPI increases.

By contrast the commercial networks, Nine and Seven, which don't produce the range of programs as the ABC in areas such as arts, science, religion, or indigenous affairs, each spend \$700M a year more than the ABC on running their television networks.

Continued on Page 2

Cartoon courtesy Phil Sommerville

WINDFALL FOR ABC EXECUTIVES

The ABC's Annual Report 2003-04 reveals that senior executives in the cash-strapped national broadcaster have given themselves whopping pay rises.

Continued on Page 9

LEVY: ABC UNDERFUNDED BY HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS

Continued from Page 1

"We'd love to do more if we had the money," Levy said, also adding "we'd love to do more if we could make more hours in the day."

She admitted that the range and diversity of ABC content is being 'adjusted' and production methodology reduced to match the funding realities.

On a brighter note, Levy said more than 50 ABC programs had achieved audiences of more than a million people this year.

Sandra made two particularly resonant observations.

"The ABC functions at 100s of millions of dollars a year less than its rivals and competitors in its marketplace."

"The money you get from government each year doesn't even maintain often our current levels of activity. It's a very very very stressful place to work. You're constantly having to evaluate and lose things."

Here's a summary of some other areas she covered:

TV Audiences.

Up 24% in the last 3 years with increases across all age groups, including a 25% jump in the 16-39

age group. The biggest increase has been in Melbourne (34% +)

Local content.

6:30 to 8 o'clock strands are all Australian from Monday to Friday.

New shows such as *the Einstein Factor* have been well received.

Funding rejections.

Submissions to the Federal Government for an all-Australian digital TV channel for children and additional funding for Australian drama were both rejected this year.

Licence fees.

This is not something that I can make happen or not make happen.

Dumbing down.

I don't believe that there's a single program that we wouldn't put on the ABC that isn't appropriate for the ABC... all of our programs are valid appropriate programs that fall within our appropriate responsibilities within Charter. I don't think we should confuse success with dumbing-down.

Drama costs.

Australian drama, miniseries and telemovies are about \$1M to \$3M an hour. Low-cost high-volume video tape studio is about \$500,000 an hour. That's a lot of weeks of *The Bill*.

The new Communications Minister Senator Helen Coonan. A delight to work with (!)

Grass Roots.

We are still in dialogue with Geoffrey Atherton another series.

Tony Squires.

The ABC can't afford to or manage to keep everybody of talent working on our network. We are very fond of Tony and hope the next project he does works out well.

Repeats in prime time.

We're running Cracker now because we think they're cult pieces. We only repeat those things which we think are classics. But we don't do it very often.

Parramatta branch member Mal Hewitt also asked Sandra if she could clone the ABC's Middle East Correspondent Jane Hutcheon. Sandra tactfully suggested he refer his request to the News and Current Affairs Division.

Mal will be pleased to hear that Jane has just been appointed as the ABC's Europe Correspondent based in London. She takes over from Philip Williams in early 2005, and joins another ABC luminary, Fran Kelly.

Inside:

Levy: ABC Underfunded.....	1-2
The Acting President's Report	3
Private lives vs public broadcaster	4
Introducing the FABC Bulletin	5
Our ABC: A Dying Culture?	6
Funding Fiasco	8-9
BTN is back	12
FABC NSW Events	12
Branch News	14

(l to r) Liliane Leroy, Gary Cook, and Peter Burke look on as Sandra Levy addresses the NSW Friends AGM.

THE ACTING PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The Federal Election is over and despite the best efforts of many Friends branches in NSW, the ABC never really seemed to register on the voters' radar.

The Coalition, which promised the least support of any major party to the ABC in its campaign, was re-elected with an increased majority and will take control of the Senate from July next year.

For the record, the Coalition has promised to extend ABC NewsRadio to all transmission areas around Australia with populations over 10,000 and improve the reception of local radio in some regional areas, including Dubbo and Wagga Wagga..

To those branches who organised Meet the Candidate forums in their regions, well done on a sterling effort.

Election posters, flyers and bumper stickers were made available to all branches. It's worth noting that Friends groups actively campaigned in two marginal seats that changed hands, Parramatta and Richmond.

For the next three years and beyond, the Friends will continue to raise our voice in a frank, fearless and non-partisan way, to ensure the

issues of ABC funding and quality public broadcasting get the prominence they deserve.

New Committee

The responsibility for keeping the ABC in the spotlight over the next year falls to our new Executive Committee.

As you can tell from the photo there are some new faces, and some old ones. I'm looking forward to working with all of you.

There are some crunch times ahead, and one of our biggest responsibilities will be the Friends' role in highlighting the chronic lack of funding at the ABC, and the continuing threats to its independence.

Andrew Olle Lecture

I attended this year's Andrew Olle Media Lecture on behalf of the Friends and came away somewhat disillusioned.

The former Optus and TVNZ CEO Chris Anderson gave the lecture in his current incarnation as a PBL Board member. In previous incarnations he was also an executive at the ABC and Fairfax. Anderson bemoaned the fact that opinion is

overwhelming original news coverage.

He also flagged a crisis of confidence in mainstream media quoting a previous Olle lecturer Eric Beecher, who in one survey found 70% of Australians relying on non-media sources for their information.

However the best solution Chris Anderson could come up with was the idea that networks should pool audio and video coverage of press conferences to free up journalists to generate more in-depth coverage.

The Olle Lecture was established in 1996 by presenters and staff at 702 ABC Sydney to honour the memory of Andrew Olle and assist the Andrew Olle Memorial Trust raise funds for research into neuroscience, particularly brain tumours.

While not wanting to take away from the contribution the Lecture makes to the Trust, I left the evening wondering how far this kind of Lecture advances the ideal of the public interest as championed by the late broadcaster.

David Barrington
Vice President

FABC COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The NSW Committee meets on the third Monday each month (except December and January) at 6.00pm at the Gaelic Club, 64 Devonshire St., Surry Hills.

Members are welcome to attend as observers. Please make arrangements in advance by contacting a member of the Executive.

FABC NSW Executive Committee

*(back) Janet Crennan, Bob Kijurina,
Mal Hewitt, Alison Rahill, Correll
Fawcett, Jason Lowe, Nance Loney,
Brian Davies, Mike Hudson.
(front) Jon Phillips (since stood down),
James Buchanan, Gary Cook, David
Barrington, Carolyn Green.
(absent: Klaas Woldring)*

PRIVATE LIVES VS THE PUBLIC BROADCASTER

The ABC is pushing ahead with attempts to peer into the private lives of its staff.

In the September edition *Update* readers were informed of the ABC Human Resources department's push to introduce a draconian Draft Code of Conduct.

Recapping briefly, the Draft Code threatens to limit the ability of ABC staff to involve themselves in public debate, by prohibiting any kind of personal behaviour that could, in its words, 'reflect on the standing or integrity of the Corporation.'

Questions have been raised about the arbitrary nature of judging exactly what might amount to such behaviour.

As FABC NSW President Gary Cook pointed out at the time, the Draft Code could be applied favourably for some, while becoming a gag for others.

As if that wasn't enough it also includes a clause that says cash prizes won by staff must be returned to the ABC in full!

None of Your Business!

After a joint campaign by the ABC's three unions, CPSU, MEAA, and APESMA, and widespread publicity among Friends groups and the media, the push to implement the Draft Code seemed to have gone on the back-burner.

That was until late October when staff in ABC Local Radio complained that they had received 'disclosure forms' as part of their job plans for the coming year.

Then in the first week of November, the Director of News and Current Affairs John Cameron sent out an email to all staff.

It stated: 'All requests to perform work outside the ABC or in areas of the ABC other than News and Current Affairs, paid or unpaid must be referred in writing to your supervisor, who will decide what action is necessary'.

The email said this would apply irrespective of any outcome reached about the Draft Code of Conduct!

ABC staff unions are advising their members to write "None of Your

Business" on any declaration forms handed to them.

Storm clouds

For the record, *Update* believes ABC staff should be free to pursue whatever interests they choose in the private time outside work hours, provided the work they produce for the ABC doesn't contravene the ABC's editorial policies.

It's been pointed out that prominent broadcasters are usually great ambassadors for the ABC, and during the 1990s a policy of taking the ABC to the community won the ABC many new followers.

The Friends cannot support any measure that jeopardises that community involvement.

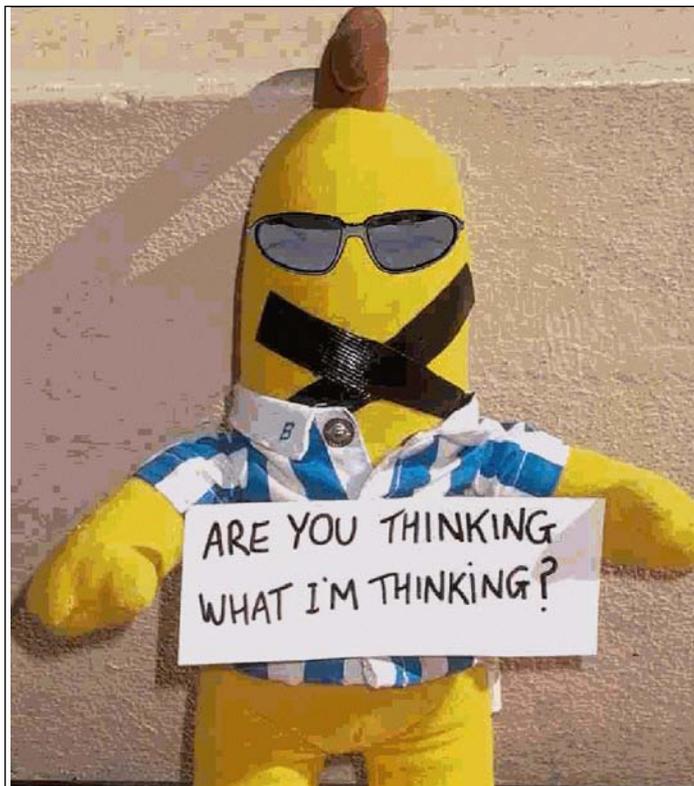
Alas, *Update* fears there will be more reports about conflicts on this front in 2005.

Excerpts from draft "Code of Conduct" for ABC Employees

Employees should exercise care and discretion when making public comment on their own behalf, because a statement made in a public forum as outlined may not, in all circumstances, avoid a conflict of interest or conduct that brings the ABC into disrepute. Sometimes employees may need to refrain from making public comment if a conflict cannot be avoided.

Full-time employees of the ABC must gain the written approval before engaging in work outside for any person, firm or corporation. This applies irrespective of whether employees are working for the ABC, or are on paid or unpaid leave, or whether the work is paid or unpaid.

If an ABC employee wins an award that includes a cash prize for an ABC (internal) program then the cash prize is to be returned in full to the ABC.



ABC Staff unions have been actively campaigning against the Draft Code of Conduct.

INTRODUCING THE FABC BULLETIN

Matters Aunty have attained greater public prominence now the election is over (sadly.) To tell the truth it's hard for many of us, your beleaguered *Update* editor included, to keep up with it all.

The NSW Friends energetic Vice President David Barrington has come up with the perfect answer. It's called the FABC Bulletin.

Those readers who aren't totally unreconstructed Luddites (ie lacking an email address) may have noticed it already in their Inbox.

Basically, it's a compilation of a series of headlines, some of them with hyperlinks, on the latest news about the ABC.

The easiest way to subscribe to the FABC Bulletin is to join the FABCLIST.

To do this, send an e-mail to fabclist@fabcnsw.org.au with SUBSCRIBE as the only entry in the Subject line and your full name and phone number in the body of the e-mail.

If at any stage you don't wish to receive these Bulletins simply reply to your e-mail and write "Unsubscribe Bulletin" in the subject line.

For those rusted-on *Update* readers who prefer the printed word, we'll reproduce the best of the Bulletin in every issue of *Update*.

BEST OF THE FABC BULLETIN

ABC EXECES DOING WELL The best-paid director, assumed to be Russell Balding, made \$385K in 2003 and \$495K in 2004, a 28.6% rise. Other directors, like TV's Sandra Levy, made \$318K in 2003 and \$430K in 2004, an increase of 35%. The ABC staff unions say employee wages and salaries have dropped by 1.4%.
(*The Australian* 11/11)

BBC MAY LOSE HALF ITS STAFF BBC insiders say drastic re-structuring may be announced within weeks. Director-General Mark Thompson, who took over the job in June, is expected to make the cuts as a result of four enquiries into commercial activities, regionalisation, cost-cutting and production and commissioning.
(*London Evening Standard* 10/11)

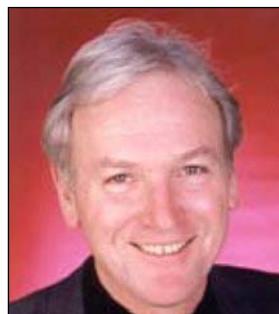


David Marr has stood down after three years on *Media Watch*

DRAFTABA BIAS REPORT LEAKED

The draft report upholds 7 of 43 complaints of "Biased, and in particular anti-American coverage" of the Iraq war by the AM program made by ex-Minister Richard Alston. *Media Watch* presenter David Marr said "I've had to read a stack of ABA reports in the three years I've been presenting *Media Watch* but this is probably the silliest so far".

Media Watch 1/11, *The Australian* 4/11



Peter Thompson is leaving *RN Breakfast* after two years.

PETER THOMPSON TO LEAVE RN BREAKFAST SHOW Peter has been attempting to negotiate "a more sustainable workload" recently but "budgetary restraints were going to limit the possibilities". The show will now go into 2005 without an executive producer or a presenter.

SMH The Guide 8/11



Geraldine Doogue :
Saturday morning show?

RADIO NATIONAL'S SATURDAY MORNING LINEUP of *Asia Pacific Highlights*, *The Buzz*, *Earthbeat* and *The Comfort Zone* could be replaced by a single "flow" program hosted by Geraldine Doogue.

The Australian, 4/11

OUR ABC: A DYING CULTURE?

Martin Harrison is a former ABC radio arts broadcaster, now a poet and critic who teaches at the UTS.

Here he provides Update readers with a summary of his provocative critique on the ABC's approach to arts and drama programming.

There is an evolving debate in the arts community about the arts, public media and the ABC, exemplified by decisions such as the recent slashing of ABC Radio's internationally acclaimed new music program, *The Listening Room*.

My recent essay, *Our ABC: A Dying Culture* addresses this debate. But it also responds to a sense, overwhelmingly apparent whenever you switch on Channel 2, that there has been a lapse or loss of direction at ABC TV where both drama and arts programming are concerned.

I am by no means alone in noticing a marked lack of new TV programs in the arts area or that, at the time, *Fireflies* was the sole local drama offering.

There is little sense, too, of anticipation about great new offerings to come.

I am not the only one to notice that there has been a huge reduction in the amount of money available for commissioning new work in radio – in drama, in sound work, in new composition, in literary review, in experimental work.

I had hoped the essay would act as a reminder.

I did not want it just to be a reminder of what have been the ABC's past achievements or its reputation for quality and innovative drive.

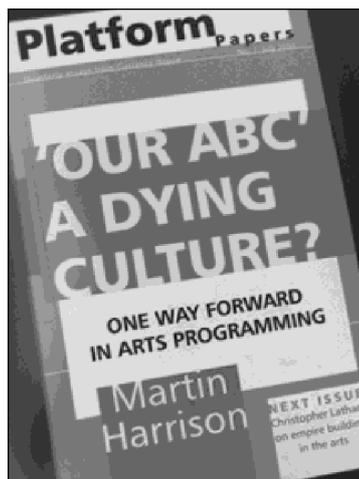
Rather, I wanted the essay to be a reminder about some of the current challenges and opportunities for creative programming.

My essay is, in many ways, a plea for the ABC to renew its acknowledged creative energy, to move with the times and to revive a core debate, about its key function in relation to the creative arts.

While it is hard to define precisely – or, indeed, briefly – what that creative, initiating role of a public broadcaster is, it seems fairly clear that the ABC is regrettably relinquishing its role as a major creative 'maker' in Australian arts.

Variations would have to be made to that statement if we looked across the total range of ABC productions in any given year.

But, at heart, that sense of the ABC as a cutting edge production



Platform Papers: Our ABC: A Dying Culture?

house-- working across TV and radio drama, new music composition, innovative feature making, new ideas about art, experimental sound-art and innovative documentary-making--has given way to the ABC we mostly have now: **a middle-of-the-road, politically dumbed-down commentator, a purveyor and reviewer of accredited, mostly already established ideas about art, literature and the art world, and only an**

occasional player at the risky, exciting end of town.

Ultimately, my view is that those of us interested in art and media will have to sidestep the problematic, underfunded world of public broadcasting.

That is one reason why, I suggest the development of a national media arts endowment.

This endowment, acting as a source of project funding, would seek to be innovative, and it would not tie projects to the ABC or a single media platform.

In reality, it may well be a few years before such proposals can gain a hearing in the current political climate.

Martin Harrison's latest book is a collection of essays about Australian culture, contemporary poetry and creative practice, *Who Wants to Create Australia?* (Halstead Press).

His essay, '*Our ABC: A Dying Culture?*' is available from Currency House and bookshops.

To subscribe to *Platform Papers*, see the website www.currencyhouse.org.au or email to: info@currencyhouse.org.au.



*Have a wonderful
Christmas and
a great 2005
from the
Friends of the ABC
Committee.*

THE YEAR THAT WAS

Update charts the peaks and troughs of 2004 and looks ahead for the ABC in 2005.

THE HIGHS



Angela Catterns knocks the Parrot of his perch. (It was only one survey and we really don't care about ratings... but how sweet it was!)

Australian Story. From Wendy Whitley and Hazel Hawke to Ivan Milat and Gyuto monks, this superb program continues to unearth wonderful and diverse tales about us.

Media Watch. Reveals ABA head's David Flint obsequious correspondence with Alan Jones ahead of the Cash for Comment inquiry.

Strictly Dancing on Friday nights

Angels in America – quality international drama

ABC Radio coverage of the **Athens Olympics.** Live and sweaty (unlike the TV coverage.)

The return of Kath & Kim. For some of us, this is a documentary.



The Movie Show moves to the ABC

THE LOWS

Coalition Government rejects ABC application for extra funding for Australian drama and an all-Australian digital channel for kids

ABC Board buckles and pays \$200,000 to Rehome to monitor broadcasts for bias.

(At time of publication the ABC

was refusing to release any of the reports as they would result in the disclosure of trade secrets to the detriment of Rehome. a media monitoring company)

The Federal Government continues jurisdiction—shopping with its bias complaints against AM over its coverage of the Iraq War. David Marr describes the latest leaked ABA report on the Alston files as probably the silliest report he's read in his three years at Media Watch.

ABC staff unions report bullying is on the rise in a number of ABC workplaces.

ABC TV refuses to cross live to the Prime Minister's press conference announcing the election; then broadcasts the election debate at 10pm instead of live.

ABC Enterprises refuses to licence ABC file footage of Peter Reith to a documentary maker.

- Conservative columnists Gerard Henderson (despite all that ABC air time he gets), Frank Devine and co. do their best to perpetuate the bias myth.

ABC's annual report shows only 48% of programs between 6am and midnight last year were Australian, compared with 58 per cent in 2001.

Spending of nearly \$1 million on consultants.

THE YEAR AHEAD

Australia US Free Trade Agreement comes into force on Jan 1. Australian content in new forms of media will not be protected.

Government review of the 'adequacy and efficiency' of the ABC's use of its funding as set out in the Liberal Party election policy. The review is 'to ensure that the ABC is using its funding to its greatest potential.'

ABC prepares submissions for the next round of triennium funding for 2006-2009

(Are these last two items related?)

1 July 2005. The Coalition takes control of the Senate.

A new set of faces on the ABC Board. The terms of Professor Judith Sloan and Ross McLean ended in 2004.

Another Board member Maurice Newman resigned, while John Gallagher QC's term expires this month. Leith Bouilly's time is up later in 2005.

The Chairman, Donald McDonald's term expires in July 2006.



Cartoon courtesy local FABC Illawarra member Alan Mackay

FUNDING FIASCO THE ROOT CAUSE

"Bloomin' Outrage!" screamed the headline in the Hobart Mercury, at the ABC's decision to move production of the proudly-Tasmanian *Gardening Australia* program to Melbourne.

The phrase captures perfectly the clamour surrounding two particularly controversial programming changes by Our ABC since the last issue of *Update*.

The transplanting of *Gardening Australia* from Hobart to Melbourne and the axing of *George Negus Tonight* have caused a torrent of complaint.

Thousands of angry viewers have jammed ABC switchboards around the country to voice their displeasure.

That anger has been further fuelled by accusations that the only reason for the changes is that the

The options mooted to fill the shortfall in production in Hobart are two studio-based shows, one on collectibles, the other on alternative medicine.

That's a significant downgrade from the high production values of *Gardening Australia*.

Politicians from all sides have weighed in, from members of the state government to government ministers such as Tasmanian Liberal Senator Eric Abetz, who's called for an inquiry into the alleged manipulation of National Interest Initiative (NII) funds.

ABC MD Russell Balding has hotly denied that allegation. But those involved in the dispute say managers told them directly that this was indeed the case.

So why is the ABC pushing ahead with these changes?

Despite being a successful regional program since 1990, *Gardening Australia* (6:30pm Fridays) never received a cent from the NII. (It wasn't a new program.)

By contrast *George Negus Tonight* (6:30 Mon-Thu) and its predecessor *Dimensions*, were produced in Melbourne, but were still funded out of the NII money.

GNT occasionally goes on the road and includes a broad range of colour pieces from all parts of Australia – but it is still based in Melbourne.

It's worth noting that there's a new round of triennial funding looming for 2006-2009.

The ABC Board, despite being hand-picked by the Prime Minister, have been spectacularly unsuccessful in winning any extra funding for the Corporation.

The NII funding was one of Jonathon Shier's few achievements. The prospects for any increases in funding seem slim.

The ABC barely rated a mention during the great election spend-a-thon.

Earlier this year the ABC was also knocked back when it asked for money for more local drama and an all-Australian children's digital TV channel.

In such a climate, it's understandable that the ABC's bean-counters would be somewhat sensitive about anything criticism that might give the government an excuse to tamper with NII funding.

On October the 28th, management rang in the changes. There would be new national programs for the 6:30 slot Monday to Friday.

No details on what sort of programs they'd be, just that they'd be produced in Queensland, WA, SA, and of course Tasmania



Peter Cundall and Gardening Australia staff confront ABC TV's Denise Eriksen

ABC wants to re-route misdirected federal funding meant for regional programming.

Angry Tasmanians

Angry ABC production staff in Hobart and local Friends of the ABC turned out in force as the executive responsible for overseeing the changes, Denise Eriksen, flew down to explain the situation in early November.

Tangled Web of N.I.I. Funding

Since 2001-2002 the Coalition has provided the ABC with \$17.8 million in funding a year for what was originally called National Interest Initiatives.

It was meant to be for new regional programming. When he announced it then-Minister Senator Alston said the funds 'should enable the ABC to increase local production and programming in regional Australia significantly.'

BEHIND PROGRAM CHANGES

Gardening Australia would be shuffled back to 6pm on Saturdays – a slot usually reserved for re-runs of British comedies or netball – and production moved to Melbourne.

The ABC Section of CPSU, the union responsible for ABC produc-

kudos for the extra cash. That meant launching new regional programs even if that meant sacrificing existing regional programs...

ABC Section Secretary Graeme Thomson said the situation underlined another long-held concern:

The Coalition has already promised another inquiry into the 'adequacy and efficiency' of the ABC's use of its funding.

So what lessons should the Government really take out of this fracas?

It should be obvious...

1. The overall level of ABC funding is so tight that it's unsustainable.
2. Tied funding doesn't work. It distorts programming decisions, often to the detriment of successful programs.

There's something Senator Abetz and his colleagues can do if they're genuine in their concerns about programs like *Gardening Australia*.

They can push Peter Costello and the Prime Minister to reach into their deep pockets and scatter some more funding in the direction of the ABC.

Until that happens and adequate levels of funding are restored to the ABC, any pronouncements on programming by members of this government are just a load of fertiliser.

A special website has been set up for those who want to support *Gardening Australia* staff www.cpsu.org.au/campaigns/GA.

It allows visitors to send protest emails to the ABC and local MPs.

Or you can write directly to protest against programming changes.

Russell Balding,
Managing Director,
c/- ABC,
GPO Box 9994
in your capital city.

Declaration: The Editor of Update is an employee of the CPSU Community and Public Sector Union I am also a former ABC employee.



Tasmanians sign petitions to protest against transplanting *Gardening Australia*

tion staff, smelled a rat. It told its members:

"Despite the absolute requirement for the ABC to be independent, Russell Balding, the ABC Board and senior management apparently decided that the Federal Government needs to get some

"We've always complained about tied funding because it produces bad programming decisions."

For all the denials though, Balding didn't give a detailed deconstruction as to why two plainly successful shows were being chopped and changed, other than 'a more effective use of ABC resources.'

Sound Editorial Reasoning'

Balding issued a furious denial. He said it was 'false' that the ABC had made programming decisions based on funding considerations.

He called claims that the ABC had 'mismanaged' and 'manipulated' NII funding 'palpably untrue,' and he said that the CPSU's suggestion that the ABC plans to replace GNT with new programming because there had been a 'misuse' of the NII funds was 'arrant nonsense.'

He went on to insist that the ABC had made its decision based on 'sound editorial reasoning.'

More Funding is the Answer

Senator Abetz has asked Communications Minister Helen Coonan to look into whether regional funding is actually going to areas for which it's intended.

WINDFALL FOR ABC EXECUTIVES

Continued from Page 1

According to the Annual Report the highest paid director -- assumed to be Managing Director Russell Balding -- earned \$385,000 in 2003 and \$495,000 in 2004. **That's a pay rise of \$110,000 or 28.6%.**

His directors, who include television director Sandra Levy, news director John Cameron and radio director Sue Howard, earned \$317,632 in 2003 and \$430,132 in 2004. That's an increase of 35% and over \$112,500. 81 senior executives also received performance bonuses totalling \$382,312, an average of \$4720.

Brickbats & Bouquets

An easy way to send your brickbats and bouquets to ABC Management is to telephone 02 9333 5566 and have your thoughts recorded.

'Comments are monitored daily and referred to management.'

Or you can write to The ABC National Advisory Council.

The role of the Council, under Section 11 of the ABC Act,

is 'either on its own initiative or at the request of the Board, to furnish advice to the Board on matters relating to broadcasting programs and television programs of the Corporation.'

National Advisory Council
c/o Manager Government and
Community Affairs
Box 9994 GPO Sydney 2001
Phone 02) 9333 5310
Fax 02) 9333 5305
E-mail: nac@your.abc.au"
Or visit their Internet site:
www.abc.net.au/corp/nac

Or you can write to the Staff Elected Member of the ABC Board. Ramona Koval is the staff elected ABC Board member.

If you have an issue that you think requires the ABC Board's attention send it to Ramona.

Ramona Koval
ABC
PO Box 9994
MELBOURNE, VIC 3001

Fax 02) 9333 5305

VALUE FOR MONEY AT THE BBC

There's a climate of fear and loathing at the BBC, as rumours fly about a pending budget review. The recommendations of the so-called Value For Money review won't be known until the 7th of December. However the British press has carried leaks suggesting anything between 6000 and 14000 jobs could go. That's in a workforce of 28,000.



The BBC's Director General Mark Thompson says the rumours are "simply preposterous." Britain's National Union of Journalists is threatening strike action to defend jobs and the future of the corporation as a public broadcaster.

The Guardian

HOUNDING FOX

The American website *MoveOn.org* has lodged a complaint with the US Federal Trade Commission about Fox News' use of the trademark 'Fair and Balanced.' *MoveOn.org* says the trademark is deceptive and misleading, and as false advertising, in breach of the US First Amendment.

Anyone who's caught Robert Greenwald's excellent documentary *Outfoxed* would find it hard to disagree.

MoveOn.org is joined in its campaign by the independent non-profit news service, AlterNet, and the lobby group, *Common Cause*. Supporters are being asked to volunteer 10 hours a month for one year to organisations working for media reform and accountability.

SPIN-DOCTOR

When ABC Publicity broke the news of the changes at *Gardening Australia* and *George Negus*



Tonight, it did so with a press release titled, "Good News for Regional Australia."

Claims that Peter Cundall was "delighted" and that GNT's ratings hadn't really improved quickly unravelled under scrutiny.

Cundall was quoted in the *Hobart Mercury* saying he was concerned for the futures of program staff in Tasmania who'd worked hard to make his program, "extremely good, successful and popular."

Crikey's media columnist Terry Television also pointed out that the ABC was being selective in its comparison of GNT's ratings, comparing them to previous British comedies not the show's predecessor, *Dimensions*.

Media commentary on the release has ranged from 'daffy' to 'utter stupidity.'

BIAS MONITORING: AT WHAT COST?

Peter Reid, a former executive producer of Four Corners and former head of ABC TV current affairs programs wrote on this subject in The Australian on the 11th of November.

Here's a short extract.

Hypothetical performance indicator of ABC news and current affairs coverage in the future: Prone to creeping self-censorship, particularly during election campaigns. Some interviews, especially with senior politicians, tend to be bland and sanitised rather than incisive and hard-nosed. A once-resolute spirit of inquiry and challenge in tackling contentious issues risks lapsing into inordinate caution and compliance.

Over the top? No way, according to some ABC journalists and program-makers perturbed by the corporation's controversial move to subject its news and current affairs programs to intensified external monitoring for potential bias in coverage of federal and state election campaigns. They warn that increased vetting by hired firms risks inhibiting ABC political reporting, to the detriment of public trust in the national broadcaster's editorial credibility.

Newsroom disquiet surfaced after expanded monitoring of ABC political reporting was outsourced to the private sector in May during the protracted lead-up to the federal election campaign, following Coalition complaints about alleged partiality in the ABC's Iraq war coverage.

For much of this year interviews, reportage and visual footage of election-related events and issues have been meticulously checked for possible bias and imbalance in ABC TV's *7pm news* and current affairs programs *The 7.30 Report*, *Lateline*, *Four Corners* and *Stateline*, and the radio programs *AM*, *PM* and *The World Today*.

Most news and current affairs journalists, according to editorial sources, knew nothing about the decision to increase scrutiny until ABC TV's *Media Watch* revealed that extended monitoring of programs had been commissioned, unannounced by senior management to staff at the time, starting after the May budget.

The cash-strapped ABC hasn't yet disclosed total monitoring expenditure, apart from a \$200,000 initial budget; the extended monitoring period means that the cost could be higher.

The Australian, 11 November 2004

WHAT WOULD \$200,000 BUY AT THE ABC TODAY?

4 to 12 minutes Australian drama or miniseries
5.6 junior journalists on a salary of \$35,354
24 minutes Australian studio-based drama
40% of Russell Balding's salary
6677 copies of *Enough Rope 2* (the paperback, not the series!)

IS SBS THE NEW ABC?

During the recent AGM one Friend pointed out to Sandra Levy that SBS was running a lot of documentaries one would normally expect to see on the ABC.

Recent innovative and comprehensive productions that contribute to a sense of national identity include *John Safran vs God*, *The Food Lovers Guide To Australia*, *Fine Line*, *Everyone Loves a Wedding*, just to name a few.

It was a theme that Mick O'Regan from Radio National's *The Media Report* also visited in his program on the 4th of November this year.

He asked SBS's Head of Television Shaun Brown (a Kiwi) how he saw the role SBS played in the broader media.

Brown said: "I think SBS needs to... dramatically increase the amount of Australian content..."

"...our Charter says that we're obliged to reflect Australia's multicultural society, not reflect the world to Australia, and I don't see how I can do that unless I start making more Australian programs which are relevant to Australian audiences, and speak to the multicultural experience of Australia."

IS LANDLINE NEXT FOR THE CHOP?

Not long after the news about *Gardening Australia* and *George Negus Tonight* rumours that *Landline* would be cut back to half-an-hour also began bubbling to the surface.

The very suggestion has caused a stampede of protest among a host of rural interest groups from the National Farmers Federation on down.

Agriculture Minister Warren Truss also fired off a letter to Russell Balding, saying any decision to cut *Landline* back to half an hour would be "out of touch with rural Australia, and ignorant of the significance of agriculture to all Australians."

"I call upon the ABC to ensure the *Landline* program has the resources necessary to ensure that its quality format, presentation and content can be maintained."

As we've pointed out elsewhere in *Update*, Mr Truss and his government colleagues are in a unique position to do something about programming cuts.

Try reaching into your wallets! As a senior Queensland National Party MP Mr Truss has more influence on the situation than most others, as his Party now controls the majority in the Senate.

So stop whingeing Warren and start negotiating!

2005 EVENTS NSW FRIENDS

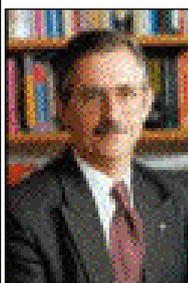


11th of February 2005

John Highfield will give a talk
on his 40 year career in
the ABC and commercial broadcasting
Pennant Hills Uniting Church
cnr Boundary Rd and Bellamy St.
Pennant Hills

For more information,
please contact Jason on 9489 1420.

ABC EFFICIENCY REVIEW



The Federal Government needs look no further than the seminal work of the ANU's Professor Glenn Withers if it wants to have yet another inquiry into the subject of ABC efficiency.

His research has found the ABC is not only more cost effective than its commercial counterparts in Australia, but it also has a lower overall public expenditure share and expenditure per capita per day than its public broadcasting counterparts, the CBC and BBC.

Further details are available at
<http://friendsoftheabc.org>

At Least One... (or two or three)

Ask a friend, relative, business associate or neighbour to join the Friends of the ABC.

Every person who joins makes the Friends a more effective organisation when it presents views to government.

Members also receive a 10% discount when buying items in ABC Shops.

Please use the application form on the back cover.

BTN IS BACK

Now for the good news...the late and much lamented education program, *Behind the News*, will return to ABC TV in 2005. ABC Managing Director Russell Balding broke the news on the 12th of October.

In performing the resurrection he gave ABC TV chief Sandra Levy all the credit, saying *BTN* was back due to 'cost savings and efficiencies identified and delivered by the Director of Television.'

While not wishing to seem churlish, it's worth pointing out that at this year's Friends AGM Sandra Levy said 'It's not a personality game'

when asked by *Update* whether she was the one who performed the last rites on *BTN* in the first place.

The ABC is promising a 'new updated youth-oriented series' to be produced in Adelaide and broadcast on Tuesdays at 11.30am and repeated at 11am on Wednesdays. We're sure *Update* readers will join us in warmly welcoming back *BTN* and wishing all those working on the program 'many happy returns.'



FORMER CHIEF JUDGE WARNS ABC AT RISK OF PRIVATISATION

The former Chief Justice of the Family Court, Alastair Nicholson has told the Friends of the ABC in Victoria to be wary of attempts to privatise the ABC.

Speaking at the Victorian Friends AGM in Melbourne on the 12th of November, Mr Nicholson said privatisation was not unthinkable.

However he said it was more likely the ABC would first be commercialised, and later sold to private interests.

Mr Nicholson warned there was a campaign by some government ministers to destroy the ABC, which he described as the last bastion of truly independent media in Australia.

He said the sale of the ABC into private hands was "a truly appalling prospect" and its destruction would be a blow for democracy in Australia.

"From a purely political point of view, the Howard government would regard itself as advantaged by the demise of the ABC," Mr Nicholson said.

"That would remove at one stroke the most significant source of independent comment about the performance of the government in Australia."

"It would enable the government to exercise unparalleled dominance over the electronic media and effectively silence criticism without acting overtly to do so."

"The consequences for democracy in this country would be catastrophic."

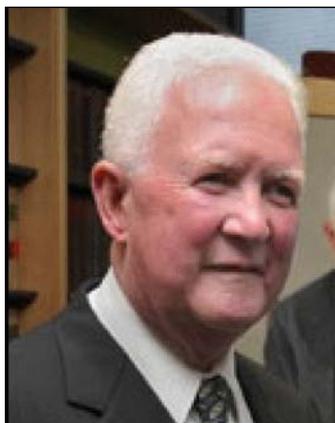
Mr Nicholson said he expected there would be more compliant appointments to the board of the ABC now the Howard government had been re-elected, adding that supporters of the ABC could also expect "a continuation of the sort of financial attrition that has occurred since 1996".

Mr Nicholson called on the government to clarify its future intentions for the ABC, and urged supporters of the national broadcaster to lobby individual MPs.

He said control of the Senate had given the government the power to act as it pleases to "reform" the ABC.

Mr Nicholson also despaired for the future of the commercial print and electronic media, which he said had become concentrated in the hands of too few proprietors.

AAP / The Age



former Chief Justice of the Family Court, Alastair Nicholson

THE ABC CHARTER

When we consider any programming changes at the ABC, it's worth reminding ourselves of Part (1) of the ABC Charter.

(1) The functions of the Corporation are:

(a) to provide within Australia **innovative and comprehensive** broadcasting services of **a high standard** as part of the Australian broadcasting system consisting of national, commercial and public sectors and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, to provide:

(i) broadcasting programs that **contribute to a sense of national identity** and inform and entertain, and **reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community**; and

(ii) broadcasting programs of an educational nature;

(b) to transmit to countries outside Australia broadcasting programs of news, current affairs, entertainment and cultural enrichment that will:

(i) encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs; and

(ii) enable Australian citizens living or travelling outside Australia to obtain information about Australian affairs and Australian attitudes on world affairs;

and,

(c) to **encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts** in Australia.

SNAIL MAIL IS BEST

It is our experience that for maximum impact snail mail is the best way to get notice taken. E-mails are quick but can be lost and/or ignored just as quickly. Faxes are also convenient but you cannot always be sure they are treated appropriately.

Letters that arrive by Royal Mail are treated more reverently. Most large establishments eg, a Minister's office or the ABC log all incoming post in a registry and keep track of progress, ensuring appropriate follow-up. So put a stamp on it!

Another way to increase impact is to neatly hand write your letters. Again it is easy to jump on a typewriter (old fashioned computer) and bash out a letter. But, that is how 99.9% of all correspondence is received.

Do you treat a handwritten letter as more personal? Most people do! Give it a go!

BRANCH NEWS

NSW

The Friends held their annual stall at the Newtown Festival on the 14th of November. The stall was busy as usual, and the Friends were ably assisted by some bright young things from Pymble Ladies College (see photo.page 15) *Jason Lowe*

CENTRAL COAST

The end of year function organised by the Central Coast branch featured James Valentine who hosts the 1.00pm to 3.00pm slot on 702 each week day. James has had a varied career history through radio, television and writing and has recently sold a science-fiction trilogy to a US publisher and is the process of selling the film rights to a Los Angeles production house. Entertainment was provided by Krystel Keller, a local recording artist and Garry Lowe, prominent bush poet.

Our first meeting for 2005 will be our AGM on 14 February, 2.00pm - 4.00pm at the Central Coast Leagues Club, Gosford. All members are invited. *John Hale.*

GREAT LAKES

The Branch is still recovering from Grahame Burns' scoop interview with Andrew Denton. A Friends event with Geraldine Doogue was scheduled for October, but has had to be rescheduled for early 2005.

Grahame Burns

HUNTER

The Hunter Friends took out two ads in the Port Stephens Examiner prior to the election, and members handed out FABC pamphlets at Raymond Terrace and Port Stephens the weekend before polling day.

Now the dust has settled Hunter Branch is going on a membership drive. A soon-to-be-issued note to members will encourage them to give their friends a terrific Christmas gift – their own FABC membership! *Allan Thomas*

ILLAWARRA

Illawarra Friends drafted a questionnaire and sent it to nine candi-

dates in the three electorates. Replies were received from Joanna Gash MP (Lib – Gilmore), Sharon Bird (ALP – Cunningham), the Greens' Ben van der Wijngaart (Gilmore) and Michael Organ (Cunningham) and Megan Pikett (ALP – Gilmore.)

Two paid colour advertisements were placed. One in the free newspaper the Advertiser on the Wednesday before the poll and another in the Illawarra Mercury on the Friday before. Posters received from FABC NSW were also distributed in Wollongong and the Kiama area.

Jan Kent

NORTHERN RIVERS

Despite having two Committee members in hospital and another two overseas, the Branch put in a big effort to put the ABC on the agenda for the election..

Acting president Doug Myler distributed numerous flyers in the Lismore area, Jill Keogh and Jenny Coman arranged for an ad in the Byron Shire Echo. The Branch also placed ABC election policies and personal statements from candidates on the branch web site.

In the final analysis, National Party member Ian Causley was re-elected in the marginal seat of Page.

In the marginal seat of Richmond, Larry Anthony lost his seat to Justine Elliott (ALP).

Both members had given personal statements supporting the ABC. Green preferences were a significant factor in the electorate and they were very supportive of the ABC.

Members remain very concerned about changes to the local content rules associated with the FTA and any changes to the ABC's independence and funding as a result of the coalition gaining control of the Senate. *Neville Jennings*

ORANGE

The Orange Friends held their *Meet The Candidates* forum at Orange Senior Citizens Centre on the 29th of

September. All candidates were sent a question before the event. This asked whether they thought the ABC could meet its Charter obligations at current funding levels.

The sitting member Peter Andren turned up, as did the Nationals, Labor, the Greens, and Family First. The Liberal didn't show and later complained that he didn't get enough notice!

The forum attracted a crowd of 75 and received good coverage on ABC Central West radio and got a big write up in the Central Western Daily. Looking ahead to 2005, the Orange Friends have already booked their place for the city's annual Food Affair.

Bev Holland

PARRAMATTA

The Parramatta Friends held a *Meet the Candidates* Forum at Parramatta Town Hall on the 30th of September.

Nine candidates were present, with the Liberals the only party not represented and sitting member Ross Cameron conspicuous by his absence. All candidates spoke of their strong support for an independent and adequately funded ABC, and were passionate on the need for an alternative source of information and news to commercial networks.

Guest speaker was recently retired journalist and broadcaster John Highfield, who entertained and informed the committed audience of ABC supporters, giving some indication of the pressure under which ABC journalists now operate.

A footnote to the meeting is the fact that Parramatta was one of the very few seats where a swing was recorded against the government to the extent that Ross Cameron was removed, and replaced by the ALP's Julie Owens. *Mal Hewitt*

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:
Holding a Friends event? Don't forget your camera! We love your photos and we want to include as many of them as possible in future issues of *Update*.

FRIENDS HAD A STALL AT THE POPULAR NEWTOWN FESTIVAL



The Friends stall at the busy Newtown Festival



Some of our wonderful volunteers at the Newtown Festival

What is FABClist?

The NSW Branch of the Friends has an e-mail list for use by members with e-mail. FABClist is like a community notice board. Anyone can pin-up a notice (e-mail) and everybody in the Friends community (e-mailers who 'subscribe' to the list) can read the notice (by e-mail). The 'subscription' is free!

To join the List, send an e-mail to
fabclist@fabcnsw.org.au
with SUBSCRIBE as the only entry in the Subject line and your full name and phone number in the body of the e-mail.

To join the List Digest (sent Friday afternoon), send an e-mail to

fabclist@fabcnsw.org.au
with SUBSCRIBE DIGEST as the only entry in the Subject line and your full name and phone number in the body of the e-mail.

Of course, you can 'unsubscribe' from the list at any time.

If you want more detail call the FABCList Moderator Chris. Cartledge on 02) 4226 2323.

FABC (NSW) Inc. Executive Committee

President - Gary Cook
Phone: 9810 3358 Fax 9144 1351

Treasurer James Buchanan
Phone 9371 5621
email jebuchanan@bigpond.com

Secretary - Janet Crennan
Phone 9810 1758
email: crennan@bigpond.com

Membership Secretary - Carolyn Green
Phone 9144 1351 or 0417 650 443
fabcmem@fabcnsw.org.au

Update Editor: Alison Rahill
Phone 02 8204 6906
alison.rahill@cpsu.org.au

update

Print Post Approved PP 245059/00002

Update is published four times a year by Friends of the ABC NSW, P.O. Box 1391, North Sydney 2059.

Phone 9810 3358 Fax 9144 1351 To become a member phone 9990 0600 or visit our web site at: www.fabcnsw.org.au/

Extracts from newspapers and other publications appearing in *Update* do not necessarily reflect members' views.

Update goes to all members of FABC (NSW) Inc., as part of the membership fee. *Update* is also supplied to journalists, politicians and libraries across Australia. It is produced and edited in Sydney but contributions are welcome from NSW country and interstate branches. Material may be freely quoted or reproduced from the newsletter provided the source is acknowledged and reproduction is sent to FABC's President Gary Cook, Editor Alison Rahill, Layout, format and assembly Irwin Kurtz. Unattributed text is by the editor. email: fabcnsw@fabcnsw.org.au

FABC Update

Post The Editor
C/-FABC Update
PO Box 1391
North Sydney NSW 2059

State and regional branches of Friends of the ABC

New South Wales
Gary Cook
PO Box 1391
North Sydney 2059
Ph: 9810 3358
Fax: 9144 1351
fabcnsw@fabcnsw.org.au

Albury
Jim Saleeba
621 Lindsay Ave.
Albury 2640
(02) 6021 5690
saleeba@albury.net.au

Armidale
Priscilla Connor
41 Judith Street
Armidale NSW 2350
Ph: 6772 3454 or 6772 2217
vsherrwell@yahoo.com.au

Bathurst
Norah Taylor
254 Keppel St
Bathurst 2795
Ph: 6331 1273
djtaylor@tpg.com.au

Bega
Alec Bacon,
25 Surf Circle,
Tura Beach 2548
Ph: 6495 9029
alecandnella@dodo.com.au

Blue Mountains
John Derum
P.O. Box 469
Springwood 2777
Ph: 4758 6979
johnderum@bigpond.com

Central Coast
John Hale
21 Stephenson Rd.
Bateau Bay 2261
Ph: 4333 8107
jhale@tac.com.au

Eastern Suburbs
Nizza Siano (Secretary)
16 Holland Rd
Bellevue Hill NSW 2023
Phone / Fax 9327 3423
siano@tpg.com.au

Eurobodalla
Keith Simmons
1/29 Mathew Pde.
Batehaven 2536
Ph. 4472 9898

Great Lakes
Audrey Semon (Secretary)
P.O. Box 871
Forster 2428
Ph: 6554 8507
audrey_s1@tsn.cc

Illawarra
Jan Kent (Secretary)
Friends of the ABC Illawarra
PO Box 336, Unanderra 2526
Phone/Fax: 4271 3531
jankent@bigpond.com

Newcastle
Hank Willems
c/ PO Box 265
Merewether 2291
gstruck@optusnet.com.au

Northern Rivers
Neville Jennings
PO Box 167 Alstonville 2477
Ph/Fax: 6674 3830 (H)
njenning@scu.edu.au

Orange
Bev Holland
26 Sunny South Crescent
Orange NSW 2800
Ph: 6362 4744
bevholland@aapt.net.au

Parramatta
Mal Hewitt
31 Queen St, Granville 2142
Ph: 9637 2900
malandal@optusnet.com.au

**Port Macquarie/
Mid North Coast**
Drusi Megget
PO Box 1752
Port Macquarie NSW 2444
Ph: 02 6583 8798
drusi@felglow.com.au

Victoria
Friends of the ABC (Vic)
PO Box 2103
St Kilda West VIC 3182
Ph: 03 9682 0073
fabcvic@vicnet.net.au

Queensland
Don Sinnamon
Suite 14B1
7/421 Brunswick St
Fortitude Valley QLD 4006
Ph 0405 721 617
don.sinnamon@aph.gov.au

Gold Coast
Frances E. Rolls
PO Box 342
Nerang QLD 4211
Ph: (07) 5596 3835
frolls@fan.net.au
fracasau@yahoo.com.au

ACT
Jill Greenwell
GPO Box 2625
Canberra ACT2601
Ph: 6253 3531
jgreenwell@ozemail.com.au

South Australia
Joan Laing
P.O. Box 1758
Hutt St,
Adelaide SA 5000
Ph/Fax 08 8271 0751
jlaing@internode.on.net

Western Australia
Roger Raven
PO Box 179
Darlington, WA 6070
Phone: (08) 9370 1785
rogerfabc@optusnet.com.au

Tasmania
To be advised

Northern Territory
Brian Holm
PO Box 25
Howard Springs NT 0835
Ph: (08) 8983 1251
Fax: (08) 8941 3350
Mob: 0409 831 251
abcfriends_nt@we-wont-byte.com

National Resource Centre
Darce Cassidy
www.friendsoftheabc.org

Membership form *Please fill out the form below and return it with your payment to:*

*The Treasurer, Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.
PO Box 1391, North Sydney NSW 2059.*

Use only if joining or if your membership has expired.

Name _____ Email: _____

Please Print
Address _____ Suburb _____ P/Code _____

Phone (Home) _____ (Work) _____ Mob _____

Federal Electorate _____

**My details will be passed on to my local FABC Branch.
(Strike out if you disagree)**

Age Group 30 or under 31-50 51+

Membership No. _____

I would like to join I would like to renew I am interested in helping I would like to join the email network
(and help pass on information to members)

I/We apply for membership of FABC (NSW) Inc. and accept its objectives and rules. *Signature* _____

Individual \$20
 Family/Household \$25
 Student \$15
 Pensioner \$15
 Corporate (covers 3 members) \$60
 I would like to make a donation \$ _____

I am paying by cheque in favour of FABC (NSW) Inc.
 money order bankcard mastercard visa

Card number _____

Name on credit card _____

Expiry date _____

Cardholders signature _____

Amount \$ _____