

# update

Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.  
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friends of the abc

## Russell Balding's big bid: "Crunch Point"

*The ABC's MD may not have been at the Senate to Santo Santoro's chagrin but, a few days later, perhaps more profitably he appeared in the Financial Review - the author of a blunt, unvarnished plea for greater funding for the ABC. Here are some of his arguments.*



"Funding of the ABC over the past 20 years has declined significantly. There is so much the nation misses out on as a result – missed opportunities to enrich our lives through the powerful media of radio, television and on-line."

Mr Balding then gives as an example, the television documentary Frank Hurley: The Man who Made History, pointing out these stories cost "more often than not these days more than the ABC alone can afford."

"Consider Hurley's credits: Film Australia, the NSW FTO, the Film Finance Corporation, the production company Real Pictures and the ABC of course...the BBC, AVRO (Netherlands), NDR Germany, and History Television from Canada. Nine partners! It took almost three years for the producer to round up funding.

"If the ABC was able to contribute more to projects like this at beginning, it would...ensure more Australian documentaries (were) commissioned and broadcast by the ABC."

### Beyond our reach?

"Are these programs too, like drama, moving steadily beyond the reach of the ABC... If a central role for the ABC is to reflect our own culture and inform us about ourselves and the world, why do

we screen far more British than Australian history - programs like Monarchy?

One, because Australians love it and will watch it. Two, because it's far less expensive to import these programs than to produce our own."

Balding points out that in 2002 David Starkey signed a \$4.9 million deal with Channel Four to present the Monarchy series while Simon Schama made a television-book deal with BBC and HarperCollins for \$7.3 million.

"(But) no matter how great our patriotism, no one will watch a program simply because it's Australian history – the production benchmark must be reached.

"Here's the crunch: the ABC can no longer bring to the screen depth of programming to match the depth of our history or the story must too often be told on a scale too modest to match the expectations of its audience."

### Now is the Time

"Surely we owe it to ourselves to see the immense power of television brought to the cause of Australia's history.

"Next year we will celebrate 50 years of television in Australia. Those who want programs that reflect more about who we are

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## Is the Media failing Australia? Basically... "Yes!"

*Professor Robert Manne discussed his point of view and those in his new book "Do Not Disturb: Is the Media Failing Australia?" on RN's Media Report with Richard Aedy. There was, he said, a lot to fix.*

Such as? "...for me the biggest element of the problem is the absurd size of the Murdoch press (with) News Corporation interested in shaping minds... I think Murdoch is the most influential neo-conservative on the globe and 60 or 70% of the Australian mainstream press is owned by News Corp.

"Second, the ABC has been attacked so often it no longer provides a kind of ballast in the

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Eric Campbell



The crowd at Northern Rivers

## Northern Rivers FABC, a magnet for speakers

**Friends of the ABC continue setting high standards for public forums on the Northern Rivers, and consistently big audiences for major ABC guest speakers, the most recent of whom was ABC Foreign Correspondent Eric Campbell**

With well over 100 Friends crowding the regular venue, the Lismore Workers' Club, Eric outlined his experiences in Moscow, Beijing, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and Niger, some of it already summarised in his book *Absurdistan*.

He made it plain that in view of the loss of his close friend and cameraman Paul Moran in the early days of the Iraq War and narrowly missing being seriously injured himself, he had no intention of returning to Iraq because of the continued violence and "bad memories". He had no wish to revisit that particular nightmare.

Discussing Afghanistan, he noted the Taliban leaders took a fundamentalist approach on almost every issue except drug trafficking; also his meetings with Taliban leaders were often problematic.

On China as an emerging superpower, while acknowledging its economic growth, he felt China was heading for a massive correction where further economic growth would be stymied by the political system. He was aware this view wasn't that of the government but he was drawing on his personal experience of the regime to make his prediction.

Eric fielded a wide array of questions - the millionaires' fair in Moscow, embedded journalism, Osama bin Laden and supporters, corruption and Al Jazeera as "an Arabic version of Fox News."

He discussed the advantage of the ABC having foreign correspondents in a range of locations - often in isolation from other Australian journalists. He was pessimistic about the ABC being able to restore the cadet journalist program that was once a hallmark of the organisation and he questioned the integrity of those who made claims about bias on the part of ABC journalists. Instead of issues in only black and white terms, his aim was to explore shades of grey by providing viewers with background information from a variety of perspectives.

Eric's visit to Northern Rivers was the latest in a series of talks by distinguished ABC reporters, including Greg Wilesmith, Sean Dorney and John Highfield. "We are encouraged by the support we have received for each event - especially from ABC North Coast and the local media," branch president Neville Jennings said.

The next event Northern Rivers Friends were organising was to be a "conversation" on media policy between Mungo McCallum and Mick O'Regan at the Billinudgel Pub in mid-November.

Neville Jennings, President,  
Northern Rivers Friends of the ABC

## "The ABC, the ears and eyes of Australia"

**Central Coast FABC. Branch has launched another letter writing program for the ABC with "the ears and eyes of Australia" as its slogan.**

All members and supporters were called to the Central Coast Leagues club at 2.00pm on 10th December to sit and write as widely as possible.

Numerous issues to be canvassed: from funding to Board appointments and not overlooking bids for the contract for the Asia-Pacific broadcast service in 2006 and that certain media moguls have their eyes on this important element in the ABC's area of responsibility.

### The whole range

But to support the slogan "The ABC, the ears and eyes of Australia" letters were to be considered in support of the whole range of ABC current affairs programs, radio and television.

Our branch has embarked on a membership and publicity drive by making use of public libraries and community centres which have shown a willingness to accept forms and flyers advertising our various programs throughout the year. Members volunteer for duty to visit the centres in their suburb and ensure that the material is available and well displayed.

**The FABC Central Coast's AGM will be held on Saturday 11th. February at 2.00 pm in the Central Coast Leagues Club, Gosford.**

John Hale, Convenor.  
Central Coast Friends of the ABC

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# THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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A further spate of unwarranted attacks on the ABC has again galvanised our members into staunchly defending the national broadcaster. Predictably, it has come from two sources – the Murdoch camp and Queensland Senator, Santo Santoro – and the accusation, as usual, is left-wing bias. The Santoro farce is comprehensively dealt with on page 9.

The Murdoch press has several columnists who regularly take aim at the ABC, but this time the honour was given to a columnist from Melbourne's Herald-Sun, Paul Gray. Gray's diatribe against the ABC and the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance is well summarised on page 13. When this article appeared in The Australian, I immediately replied in writing to the Editor as did several other members to my knowledge. I took issue with Gray's outrageous assertion that "the problem with the ABC is that the majority of their staff hates the values of ordinary conservative Australians". I also attempted to set the record straight regarding inaccurate figures quoted as the purported ABC budget allocation. The Australian did not print any of the letters countering Gray's wild claims but, fortunately, the next day the Editor found space to include another (unrelated) letter critical of the ABC. One week later, I wrote to the Editor, Michael Stutchbury, to point out that "any journal of repute pro-

vides both sides of a story. Your newspaper is regularly critical of the ABC, accusing it of left-wing bias. Your actions in permitting Paul Gray a free kick at the ABC while ignoring alternate views smacks of bias of the worst kind."

As we go to press, we are working with other state and territory FABC bodies and the MEAA to highlight the plight of the ABC – its paltry drama production and the cause of it – a totally inadequate funding position. I am asking you our members to be prepared to support our campaign. It is likely to be held before the next edition of Update is printed, but all interstate and rural/regional branches will be advised in sufficient time for them to become involved as will those members who have provided their e-mail addresses. The more widespread and consistent our message is to the government and politicians the more pressure can be brought to bear. This is no small task, particularly with the government in control of both houses of the Parliament, but, in the Senate, there is still a degree of unpredictability.

ACT Senator, Gary Humphries (a member of the coalition communications backbench committee), recently issued a media release advocating advertising on the ABC with a fixed percentage of the proceeds to be allocated to a "drama fund". Apart from the

ABC Charter stipulating that no advertising is to be carried on the ABC, such a proposal must be strongly opposed. The great investigative tradition of the ABC cannot be compromised in any way by advertising or sponsorship and, it wouldn't take long for the government to reduce its funding by whatever the ABC earned from other sources. There is no point in the government crying "poor mouth" – we all know how lined its coffers are.

We wish the ABC and its presenters well in the forthcoming Walkley Awards. It has all nine finalists in the radio awards and 21 of 25 finalists for television. Clearly, the industry recognises the quality of the work produced by ABC journalists, presenters and technicians. It is a testament to the dedication of ABC people that they continue to excel in spite of the funding crisis.

A warm welcome to our newest branch, Nambucca Valley, formed at its inaugural meeting in early November. We look forward to another strong local voice for the Friends and the ABC.

The committee of FABC (NSW) wishes all our members, their families and friends a very Happy Christmas and a bright and healthy 2006.

Gary Cook  
President, FABC

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## Rupert as above... wrapped in the flag

**After Hurricane Katrina British PM Tony Blair - the word leaked out - believed the BBC's coverage of the event had been anti-American.**

Who said so? Rupert Murdoch...Blair went to Rupert privately to complain and dob the BBC in...(not that there were many plaudits jostling for air space to applaud President Bush's rapid response reactions to the hurricane.) But a concerned Rupert recounted the conversation at a panel discussion in New York hosted by former U.S. President Bill Clinton.

"Perhaps I shouldn't repeat this, but Tony Blair told me he turned on the BBC World Service to see what was happening in New Orleans and he said it was just full of hate of America and gloating about (it's) troubles.

"And that was his Government. Well, his government-owned thing," he said of the publicly owned broadcaster.

Mr Murdoch went on to say that anti-American bias was prevalent throughout Europe. "I think we've got to do a better job at answering it. And there's a big job to do," said Murdoch.

# Illawarra's software hit wins new members

Chris Cartledge, Illawarra Branch FABC chair, was recently guest speaker at a meeting of the Illawarra Computer Enthusiasts Club. Chris, as Moderator of FABC NSW E-mail List & Digest, was invited to speak about the software used to operate the FABC List.

FABC Illawarra member, Penny Ferguson, with a foot in both camps, arranged the session. A frequent contributor to the FABC List, Penny Ferguson, is also a computer enthusiast.

Not to let an opportunity go past, Chris talked "Friends" to the meeting – what motivates us and why, its significance, the structure of the Friends and then details of Friends' activities and communication methods. That last provided the link for an explanation of the software used for the FABC List.

Using an overhead projector Chris provided screen dumps of the software's various menus

and facilities, with the final slide detailing and promoting the five ABC radio stations available to Illawarra locals. At the windup, a number of Computer enthusiasts took away membership forms, declaring they would join us.

## "Keep Fit"

Chris also provides prospective members with a health and fitness pitch: his own prescription to keep fit both physically and mentally with early morning walks.

Like those who can "walk and chew gum", Chris says he feeds his brain with Radio National while on the move...up at 6:30am, on the road for breakfast with Fran Kelly and the 7am news, followed by Radio National's AM. Then he's ready to face the rest of the day.

"It's a great motivation to get out of bed and catch up with the day's breaking events" Chris says. "Some people drive to a

new location to avoid the boredom of walking the same streets around their home, but short trips are not good for your car - or the environment. Go 'head-phone radio' instead," he said.

"You see people out walking with their walkmans or portable CD players but I'm more of a news junkie than a music fan" says Chris. "I bought a Sony stereo headphone radio and have been walking and listening M-F ever since...highly recommended," he said, "keeps you fit...and smart! "



Chris Cartledge



Eastern Suburbs FABC staffed a stall in the Pavilion at Bondi Beach's annual Festival of Winds. The sales crew – (l to r) Nizza Siano, ESFABC Secretary, Cr Peter Moscat then also Mayor of Waverley and Nance Loney ES President – reported successful fund-raising sales, signing up of new members and some pertinent lobbying for support for the ABC.



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# John Doyle on when the ABC is serving its charter.

*In what is widely regarded as perhaps the finest Andrew Olle lecture since its inception, broadcaster and writer John Doyle proposed a tax deductible levy on commercial television networks' pre-tax profit of around 25% to 30% to be pooled exclusively for ABC Drama. How did he justify this?*

"Because historically the ABC has been the powerhouse for new ideas often taken up by the commercial networks, perhaps the time has come for those networks to subsidise the ABC. After all, the ABC has been the training and testing ground for the commercial networks for fifty years - it's about time the situation was redressed.

"In return (for the tax), the networks would get second viewing rights and the right to franchise any series on a rotating basis, deemed commercially viable.

"...only the ABC by virtue of being unencumbered by what is popular, is capable of taking risks. Why is there such a paucity of great locally made drama? Because the ABC isn't doing it.

"The Americans would hate such a plan and see it as not being in the spirit of the Free Trade Agreement, but so what? This isn't cheese or rice we're talking about. It actually is Culture. A fully funded ABC Drama unit

would be to the advantage of the commercial networks.

*Hard to argue with such an inspired idea; although one can hardly imagine the commercial networks rushing to subscribe. What else did Doyle have to say about the Australian media, broadcasting and ourselves.*

"I notice this year has seen Seven's Today Tonight and Nine's A Current Affair put to air the same story at the same time on the same night. As nearly as I can tell the programs are the same: same old foot in the same old door philosophy, same mock outrage at feuding neighbours and total dependence on losers, or sad losers, or violent losers, or losers ripped off by shonky gold tooth rat type losers.

## Forget diversity

"They now make the ABC's



brilliant 90's farce *Frontline* look less like parody and more like reality television. Both current affairs shows depict a world where it's not only not safe for anyone to leave their home, it's not safe to live. And the commercial news

services are carbon copies of each other as well.

"So forget diversity of opinion - it's out there on the margins. If you really want diversity go to SBS or the ABC.

"The ABC still provides the best news services in the country, arguably among the best in the world. Radio National is still impossibly excellent. ABC TV too has managed to survive with its current affairs programs intact, loathed by Labor and Coalition alike, as it should be. And as it should be, it still strives to put forward an alternative view.

So when the commercial media dictated to by intrusive ownership and ill-informed populism, is forced to make irresponsible programs that lack both style and substance, caresses (the) inflammatory, that describes the world in simple terms, then the ABC will always seem to aggravate, annoy and frustrate and it's precisely when the ABC is doing this that it is serving its charter".

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## ABC MEMORABILIA FOR SALE

One of our members, Arthur Tupman, of Salt Ash (north of Newcastle) has been cleaning out his collection of "paraphernalia" collected over many years.

Arthur is offering for sale to the highest bidder (with all proceeds to go to the Hunter Branch of FABC):-

- 418 copies of the ABC Radio Guide (1975-1984)
- A copy of the ABC Year Book, 1930
- A colour magazine celebrating the 50th anniversary of ABC Radio (1982)
- A 50th anniversary guide listing special radio programmes

Please make your offers to:-  
FABC, PO Box 1391, North Sydney NSW 2059  
OR by e-mail to: [lourmar@idx.com.au](mailto:lourmar@idx.com.au)  
OR by phone to: 9810 3358



Above right: Mungo MacCallum  
Below right: Mick O'Regan

## A Useful Afternoon at a Pub

**Political analyst and author Mungo MacCallum entertained 150 friends of the ABC at the Billinudgel Pub in November fielding questions on media policy, journalism and public broadcasting in company with media analyst Mick O'Regan. The event was organised by the Byron Bay sub-branch of Northern Rivers FABC.**

Mungo MacCallum noted the increasing difficulties journalists faced in seeking information from public servants, the politicisation of the public service and the process of "plausible deniability." He believes that many journalists are primarily concerned about promotion and suggests that the present government has elevated the strangling of information to an art form.

Mungo believes preferred journalists receive leaks from the government and he mentioned Piers Ackerman, Andrew Bolt and Glen Milne, noting that Greg Sheridan of The Australian had been duced by Washington - but at least was open about it.

He observed that old Parliament House was like a rabbit warren where journalists could mix freely with politicians. The new parliament house had been designed to keep journalists away from the corridors of power.

Regarding the ABC, he asked "Who will report at length on Aboriginal issues if the ABC and SBS don't do so? The other players

are just looking for dramatic headlines." It was important for people to be engaged in public debate and not just as consumers of ideas that agree with their own. Mungo noted that few young people seemed to read newspapers and were enraptured by the "Blogosphere", but that information on the internet often tended to be uninformed opinion, rumour and chit-chat.

### Downturn

Mungo believes the ABC is being starved to death and points to the downturn in ABC drama as a case in point. On the issue of serious investigative journalism he argues that there are many forces acting against it: its high cost, the legal system in Australia, self censorship on the part of some journalists and pressures applied by government.

Northern Rivers branch president Neville Jennings said the Byron sub-branch planned a similar event next year to coincide with the National ABC Awareness campaign.

Sub-branch convenor Val Philips

said "We were thrilled with the response from the local community and indeed a wider area, including people present from Lismore, the Tweed, Gold Coast and hinterland and Brisbane, ABC RN presenter Sandy McCutcheon among the gathering.

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# On Guard! How will the ABC's Triennial Budget submission fare?

*There may well be a contest between the submission and KPMG's inquiry into how the ABC is spending its money on what, but the battle field is much wider: will the Federal government continue to enfeeble the Corporation, while pretending otherwise by distorting the sums, or will it come to terms with the ABC's role in present-day Australia; at its simplest will it be given the money to resume producing great Australian drama?*

Several years ago a mass rally of Friends at the Sydney Opera House stunned the government of the day & produced extra funding for the Corporation. Friends nationally are now planning something similar...when the Corporation is no longer able to produce more than just a few hours of Australian drama - a direct breach of its charter - something drastic needs to be done urgently.

A phone-hookup of NSW and ACT Friends' committees set the ball rolling, resolving to mount a major campaign to promote "Awareness of the ABC" as widely as possible, to the discomfort of the Government if need be, once the 2006 Australia Day weekend is over and Parliament is turning its attention to funding the ABC, early February. All other state FABCs have now responded and the intention is to develop a series of rolling actions to capture media coverage and politicians' attention.

## Action stations

Members should - in the phrase of the day - stay alarmed and alert and ready for action. We will advise.

We cannot simply sit back and acquiesce and do nothing when the ABC's drama capacity is a haunted, cob-webbed ghost of past glories, abandoned to the sometimes dubious merit of the commercial networks or a hurricane of US productions.

A powerful ally turned up

unexpectedly in September when the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance announced the beginning of the very sort of campaign we had in mind (but probably not the funds for).

Their online campaign began with a launch in the Museum of Sydney featuring a splendidly polished, powerful telescoped summary of all the great things the ABC does, including drama, news and current affairs, TV and radio...and the message? "ABC: The eyes and ears of Australia."

NSW FABC and the MEAA's Sydney head office are now in discussions about uniting our two campaigns.

The MEAA's is on its website - [www.alliance.org.au/OurABC](http://www.alliance.org.au/OurABC) - featuring the 20-page booklet (pictured) which is dotted with information and argument. Also on site are some of the rousing speeches that marked the launch including Penny Chapman's fierce account of drama and funding shortfalls - itself a drama.

The MEAA stresses that the campaign is not about money - it is first about content and the ABC's future, then money is involved, but likewise says the booklet: "The ABC needs us...members can voice their hopes for the ABC...We have an opportunity to stand up for the ABC's future"



## Key Facts and Figures

For about two-thirds of individual commercial TV budgets, the ABC provides two TV stations, four national and 60 local radio stations, two digital stations, ABC Online and Radio Australia.

- The ABC's budget has declined 25% in real terms in the past 20 years.
- The 20 hours of ABC TV drama expected next year approximates 3-and-a-half minutes a day.
- In 2001 it totalled 102 hours.
- The ABC is broadcasting about 50% less Australian content than 7, 9 and 10 are required to.
- Of 17 OECD public broadcasters publicly funded Australia comes 16th, way behind Belgium, Ireland and NZ.
- Macquarie Bank has advised the Government that to catch up the ABC needs additional funding of, minimum, \$200 million up to \$700 million a year.

(continued from page 1)

## **Balding on Finance**

and where we come from...should be able to rely upon the ABC.

"It is now time for the adequacy of the ABC's funding to be addressed and brought to public attention.

"The outcomes of the Funding Adequacy and Efficiency Review and the forthcoming triennial funding negotiations present this opportunity."

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## **Play School goes on the road – free to air**

***Play School celebrates its 40th birthday next year and to help do so it's taking to the road, live, to entertain outback children***

The Play School Birthday Live Show will give 40 free concerts at 18 destinations including Alice Springs, Darwin, Thursday Island, Weipa, Broome, Derby, Port Augusta and Coober Pedy.

ABC Managing Director Russell Balding said for pre-schoolers who might never have seen a live show designed especially for them, it will be an experience they'll never forget. "It's also another way of showing the meaning the ABC has for Australian children and the unique role it plays in Australian life and communities all around the country."

Head of Children's Programs Claire Henderson said: "this is Play School's "thank you" to the children of Australia and their parents for their support for Play School over 40 wonderful years."

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## **Community sentiment for ABC stronger.**

***A national survey in June '05, and the sixth carried out by Newspoll since 1998, found; nine-in-ten Australians endorsing the broadcaster "as providing the community with a valuable service."***

Eighty percent of Australians surveyed perceived the quality of programming on ABC Television as being good, up from 75 percent since 1998.

Three-in-four Australians (up from 69 percent in 2004) believe ABC TV does a good job in terms of the number of shows it provides they personally like to watch.

Seventy-one percent of teenagers aged between 14 and 17 said that ABC TV did a good job of providing shows that they personally liked to watch...up from 51 percent in 2004.

Nine-in-ten ABC Online users describe the quality of the site's content as good; eight-in-ten believing the website adds to

the value and relevance the ABC has for them.

Thirty percent of ABC Online users said the website prompted them to turn to something on ABC TV or Radio within the last three months.

Eighty-two percent of people thought the ABC did a good job of being balanced and even handed when reporting news and current affairs.

There was an increase among those in country and regional areas that believe the ABC and its services are valuable, up from 88 in 2004 to 92 percent this year, indicating - Russell Balding said - "how vital a service the ABC also is to those living in Australia's more remote areas."

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## **'Retiring' but appointed – ABC's new board member, Skala**

***In October, Minister for Communications Helen Coonan appointed arts bureaucrat Steven Skala to the ABC Board – a man prominent in corporate and cultural boardrooms, but publicly and politically low key.***



*The Age* last year named Steven Skala as one of a "new breed of power-brokers", a member of what the paper called the city's "new establishment" and as "a rising leader in Melbourne's influential Jewish community".

When contacted by *The Age* the new member remarked that he had always "lived below the radar and that's where I prefer to stay."

Steven Skala is vice-chairman of Deutsche Bank (Australia and New Zealand), chairman of Film Australia and a director of the

Australian Ballet and the Centre for Independent Studies. He's a former director of the Ten network and for 19 years headed the corporate and commercial division of the legal firm, Arnold Bloch Leibler. A former chairman of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art he is also is a member of Cricket Australia's grievance tribunal.

If Britain's Nolan Rules, or similar, applied to appoint ABC board members, Skala's credentials would certainly qualify him for serious consideration, but in the absence of competing candidates other qualities and appropriateness go untested.

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# The posturing senator from Queensland...

**...the one from the Deep North, Santo Santoro, the strident advocate hammering the ABC's sins, springing his surprise WMD on the public. A sensation - his own opinion poll which would confirm his allegations of an ABC corroded by leftwing bias. Gary Cook explains...**

Here's how the saga ran. When the Senate Estimates Hearings opened on 31 October, Senator Santoro was quickly into his stride, foaming at the ABC, ranting about its leftwing bias - which seems to be all he is recognized for. A ripple got as far as most mainstream media, but *Crikey.com.au* took it up if only for its comic value but also as an instance of blatant waste of the taxpayers' money.

***I responded via Crikey to defend the ABC and to put a few questions to Santoro.***

"Senator Santo Santoro (Lib, Qld.) is an affront to democracy. Monday's posturing performance before Senate Estimates is typical. He said he had 973 questions to ask MD Russell Balding (curiously absent) and threatened to seek an inquiry into ABC bias. People like Santoro continually bleat about how much taxpayers' money goes to the ABC (usually their figures are fabricated). Well, let's have the Senator answer some questions. How many taxpayer-funded dollars are being spent on this witch hunt? How many Santoro staff are ABC watching and listening? Who are the 28 spies around Australia? When is the Prime Minister going to pull him into line to do a decent day's work and properly represent the people of Queensland...look at Hansard for the Senate Estimates. Kindergarten stuff!"

***On 7 November, Santoro, in Crikey, counter-attacked, unctuously: how often he made a point of "the magnificent job" the ABC does as a public broadcast service; with credit for its coverage of the Boxing Day Tsunami; and, a noble concession, "there'***

***unquestionably a place for the ABC as a public broadcaster." But...***

"...bias is demonstrated by the many examples I have presented to the Senate since 2002. My complaint is neither with the broad scope of ABC programming nor with the...majority of broadcast and support staff.

"It is simply that the natural bias of many of its leading broadcasters, coming as they do from a background in liberal arts and working in a broadcast culture that has (wrongly) come to presume that it possesses the only acceptable wisdom in political and social affairs, (it - bias) is permitted by the ABC to flow through on the publicly funded airwaves... In fact, the problem is much worse: there is no acceptable direction...by management that results in proper balance and objective reporting.

"The bias manifests itself in many ways - (the) ridiculous such as the editorial ban on referring to Australian Defence Force personnel serving in Iraq as "our troops" on the specious grounds that "the ABC does not own the troops...that is Orwellian newspeak:...it manifests itself in "progressive" thought that plainly does not mirror the attitudes of the bulk of the Australian people. Nowhere in its charter is the ABC required to be an arm of the extra-parliamentary opposition. (All the usual program targets are nominated.)...many Australians... believe the ABC has become the plaything of special interest groups and a vehicle for particular views on social and political issues. (All) can be resolved immediately by management if it has

the will to..."

***Along with other obvious ABC supporters, I replied in Crikey, in part:***

Santo has delusions of grandeur...keen to ingratiate himself with his leader...he believes he (Santo) should be the sole arbiter of determining bias or balance in the ABC. He should be brought back to earth. After all, he hasn't faced a Senate election yet. His approach is typical of that of Richard Alston, who constantly attempted to bully and brow-beat the ABC into submission by accusing it of bias. We don't need Santo's opinions on whether ABC programs mirror the attitudes of the "bulk of the Australian people" when we have any number of independent surveys which confirm overwhelmingly that the ABC is even-handed and one of the most trusted institutions in Australia.

***And so it went...into delicious, blistering irony:***

Boastfully confident that his attacks on the ABC, would be confirmed by polling and calling all his loyal followers, spies and others to log on, Santoro launched an on-line survey on his web site, inviting the electorate to convict the broadcaster of bias...Huh oh Santoro! Talk about opening your mouth and putting both feet in...The results showed that more than 70% of respondents believed that ABC journalists were fair and balanced or even right-wing in their reporting and less than 30% thought them to be left-wing. Thank you Umpire... thank you ballboys. At time of writing, our mate Santo had closed the poll down.

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# Aunty wins first round

***In a late change to tendering rules, Foreign Affairs and Trade modified the requirement that the successful Asia-Pacific Television Service operator delete any program that DFAT considered not to be in Australia's best interests.***

The concession came after representations pointing out the demand was incompatible with its code of ethics and its governing act of parliament. Tenders to run the service until 2011 closed in October, two days later.

The rival bidder Sky News Australia is a joint venture between Kerry Packer's Nine Network, Kerry Stokes's Seven Network and Rupert Murdoch's News Limited and in The Australian Mark Day\* said it was understood the Sky bid proposed a code of ethics for the channel that called for an independent news service.

However, said Day, unlike the ABC, Sky News was not governed by any legislation that would protect it against interfer-

ence. In the absence of "applicable legislation", DFAT's proposed powers of proscription would apply, setting the scene for "a battle over the channel's credibility."

The ABC argues a large part of the audience for its existing Asia-Pacific channel, available in more than 39 countries across the region, is made up of non-Australian viewers attracted by the service's independence. "...any service subjected to government control would be less effective and even counter-productive," an ABC source said.

Day claimed the ABC had beefed up its Asia-Pacific operation to strengthen its hand in the tender process and was hiring new correspondents to report specifically for the service, to be based in Jakarta, Beijing, New Delhi and Fiji. A decision on the tenders is expected early next year.

Mark Day  
The Australian,  
20 October 2005

## New Editor needed for FABC Update



Think about this: Update needs an Editor to take over from January 2006!

This could be you! Not only a Friend, but one with a hand on the tiller. Not too taxing - a quarterly publication. Action Stations for one month a quarter.

Think of the kudos!

Skills needed - both obvious and diverse.

Share the production of the March issue of Update with the current Editor.

Contact Brian Davies  
9977 7130

### "Somerville being moderately fond..."

We wish Update's generous, pro bono 'resident' cartoonist Pip Somerville a Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year. We can do both by buying another Friend (or relative) a copy of...

### "I am Moderately Fond of Australia"

...soft-cover collection of Somerville's wry take on these troubled times - cartoons both black & white and full colour. A perfect gift, discounted to Friends at \$22.00 including post & packing.

Send cheque or money order (made out to "Philip Somerville") plus return mail address and order details to:  
3 Fairview Road, Lawson, NSW 2783  
Phone 4759 2078 or  
email pipsomervill@hermes.net.au



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# "News looking for Breaks"

**The Director of ABC News and Current Affairs, John Cameron, was NSW Friends of the ABC's keynote speaker at the branch AGM. Speaking off-the-cuff, he outlined goals, obstacle and aspirations, mindful of the 'cash register.'**

First, basic task: maintaining quantity and protecting quality. "It sounds simple," he said, "but it is a consistent, enormous challenge."

"The ABC has done well in the last few years sustaining both - quality and quantity. It's an outcome of budget efficiency, but the reality is - and I don't want to cry poor mouth - but the reality is, what we have at our disposal is not a large amount of money for what we actually do".

Looking to future news and current affairs output, Mr Cameron said his current main aim was to have TV news overcome its historic inability to go to air with breaking news stories as they happened. In similar fashion he was hoping to place news in ABC broadcasts on the hour, every hour, 24-hours a day on at least one outlet, whether it be Online and/or the main channel or ABC2.

"I know it's a cliché but the News is the jewel in the ABC's crown. We have about 60 newsrooms around Australia and 12 bureau around the world doing a fantastic job," he said.

"At this year's Walkley Awards" there are 27 news and current affairs finalists, including a dozen for overseas coverage. Nine and Ten got none; seven received one and the ABC captured the market."

## Monumental

Taking stock of the last few months, he described the changes to the 7pm TV news bulletin as "monumental and largely well accepted."

"It involved new music, new sets, new colour and new content, and..." - no, in response

to a question, the little breaks reprising main stories and foreshadowing others to come, were not preparation for advertising breaks, but a recognition that people often come in late and often left early.

*Political pressure was a major question time issue Friends raised: "... pressure on editorial freedom... is there more at the moment...how is it exerted - by budget, directors or board members...?"*

The News and Current Affairs Director's reply was frank and realistic, ignoring 'conspiracy theory subtleties': "there are real pressures on us all the time and our responsibility is to resist them and to be accounted as impartial. We strive to discharge that burden credibly. On the other hand there are complainants whose pressures border on the vexatious."

## News 'audits'

Mr Cameron went on to remind his audience that every day across Australia ABC News put out hundreds of news bulletins.

Just as TV's 7 pm bulletin had undergone change, a similar 'make-over' of radio news was in "stage one" as it were - an audit of style and presentation.

"I've got a committee looking at it and issues of presentation, writing and style...with a similar plan for television and radio current affairs to follow that review".

And finally, the 'cash register': "there isn't a lot of money to support our goals and aspirations. News and current affairs have been spared a lot of the corporation's financial agonies; but of our annual budget of \$M130, half goes on salaries, a

quarter on resources and about \$M30 is left as "discretionary". In the world in which we live and the pace at which events and issues demand coverage and analysis - that's not a lot of money for what we do. We have to spend it very wisely to maintain the quality and quantity of news and current affairs programming".

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## Getting Rid of the Friends' Discount

**Could the ABC be readying itself to sell its shops and publishing arm? After all the ABC isn't producing much drama or comedy to sell these days. And all the sites such as Frenchs Forest and Gore Hill have gone. Not much left, writes Penelope Toltz, except the business arm.**

The Friends of the ABC is well aware that the ABC itself is strapped for cash. We know, only too well, that its Federal Government Funding has dropped effectively by one third in the past 12 years and that it is getting even harder for the organisation to fulfil its charter and now we have further cause for concern.

Frequently, when an organisation (especially one in public ownership) is readying itself to sell a non core division, it "tidies up" any loose ends. Cancelling the 30 year custom of a 10 per cent discount for the Friends

*(continued on page 13)*

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# FRESH ATTACK: "ABC hates values of ordinary conservative Australians"

**At those times when Ministers and the Government aren't hoeing into the ABC their stalking horses in the print media, particularly News Limited, take up the charge: think Piers Ackerman, but in this instance the baton was passed to Melbourne Herald-Sun columnist Paul Gray**

On the day the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, (MEAA) launched a nationwide campaign to "take a stand for the ABC", Gray used his column to hit out at the ABC as the 'national broadcaster of the secular Left' full of hatred for the values of ordinary conservative Australians.

If that wasn't wild enough the rest of the article contained the usual invective, misinformation and bias hidden in a stream of words - a smoke screens to hide close scrutiny of his claims. And what did he say?

- In this "stirring endeavour", the union (obviously a pejorative) was backed by organizations of Authors, Screen Directors, Writers and Screen producers (the sneer was almost audible...they would, wouldn't they!)

- After all, with a **\$773m** taxpayer-funded budget (emphasis ours) and a "largely tame board" (really) it faces no perceptible threat to its existence. (!) (And of course the budget figure is exaggerated by \$150m.)

He describes the ABC funding adequacy and efficiency inquiry as the MEAA's "excuse" for acting and claims the aim is to lobby for increased funding and to give the ABC resources equivalent to its commercial competitors and to mandate increased Australian-made content on the ABC. So what's wrong with that? Except that it's not as bald as Gray makes it.

Then he sneers again - "All this and heaven too?", he asks, and proceeds to dismiss the MEAA's booklet accompanying the campaign as painting a "piteous picture" of the ABC.

On the contrary it's a stylish, explanatory booklet presenting a portrait of a strong ABC, but under financial siege. It's entitled "ABC: the Eyes and Ears of Australia."

As Gray concedes, one claim it makes is that commercial networks are obliged to air 150-200 hours of new Australian drama per year, while the ABC, by contrast, is to broadcast less than 20 hours of new Australian drama in 2005.

According to Gray this is "presented as self-evidently bad... but is it?

Thereafter Gray's column gets exceedingly tortuous. Logic and any sense of quality seems to desert him and he concludes that "where commercial, not public broadcasters, must produce a higher quotient of local TV drama makes perfect sense", restraining the commercials' profit motive by forcing them to commission higher levels of Australian drama.

But that's not the argument. The issue is the ABC's ability to produce Australian drama and to a greater extent than the projected, miserable 20-hours a year.

The union's "Eyes and Ears" campaign - writes Gray - seems designed...to extend the power and prestige of the ABC within the Australian media. (yes - what's wrong with that?)

Gray goes onto claim that in the absence of market forces in the ABC's environment, some other factor must "dominate its day-to-day working culture." That factor, he says, is staff control.

And the evidence he offers? In another 500 words of spe-

cialous argument from dubious claims including the Sydney Institute as an authority (!) the only tangible example Mr Gray can find - if such it is - is the Iraqi war and the ABC's coverage thereof - Alston revived, but not acknowledged. Gray rambles on citing the Guardian and the BBC before coming to his shaky but excited conclusion:

"...ABC bias is not fundamentally a question of news and current affairs coverage, but rather a problem of class sociology. ABC executive Sue Howard has referred to this as a vague sort of "middle-classness". More savage critics call it a hatred of the Australian masses and their conservative values."

*Herald Sun,  
10 October 2005*

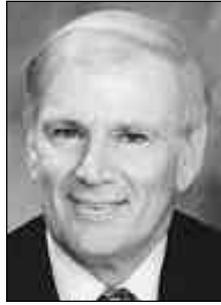
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" I've always loved radio. Mornings was Gary O'Callaghan and Sammy Sparrow until pop meant the 2SM Good Guys introduced the songs that would become the diary of adolescence. Many years later, what's changed? Talkback. That's all. Commercial radio now: AM, Bandwagon talkback, water cooler drivels as talkback thought-starters, competitions, finance and weather, quizzes, traffic, more talkback, then an inflammatory lunatic with talkback."

*- John Doyle at the 10th annual Andrew Olle Memorial lecture*



Prime Minister John Howard



Richard Alston



Michael Kroger

## Sticking with the devil we know

**History and skeletons: The Australian's "Scribe" wondered who would be best PM for the national broadcaster, Howard or Costello, and - drum roll - recommends Howard.**

The executive structure of the ABC could collapse like a house of cards without Howard. It was Howard who appointed - then reappointed - its chairman, Donald Benjamin McDonald. It was McDonald, with a little help from some friends, who disposed Jonathan Shier and installed Russell Balding in Shier's stead. Almost simultaneously, the ABC ceased to resemble a circus and went back to broadcasting.

But McDonald's second term expires in the middle of next year and Howard may be far more inclined to invite McDonald back than would Costello. The Treasurer is close to former ABC director Michael Kroger.

By wide consensus, Kroger isn't close to McDonald. In truth, there were boardroom occasions when McDonald, 67, didn't feel himself to be desperately close to Kroger. Nor is McDonald internationally famous for being all that close to another Costello ally, Richard Alston.

### Gently swayed

This could all contain ramifications for Balding, whose term expires in 2007. Kroger, Costello, Sam Chisholm and Alston constituted a formidable lobby to get Trevor Kennedy the managing director's job. The quartet didn't take it terribly graciously when, in May 2002, McDonald gently

swayed the then board towards Balding.

There'd be those who'd probably recall Howard's demeanour as chaos raged around the then troubled national broadcaster. Insofar as it could be judged from the outside, Howard took a statesmanlike step back.

Ignoring Costello, Kroger, Chisholm and Alston, the Prime Minister properly left the matter to McDonald and the board. Some may regard it as one of Howard's finest broadcasting policy hours.

"The scribe" tends towards encouraging the Prime Minister to reappoint McDonald. The chairman has made mistakes. But, then, who hasn't? He has learned a great deal about public broadcasting during the past nine years and it's always a pity to waste hard-earned wisdom.

### "captured"

(Those) already marshalling arguments as to why Howard shouldn't reappoint McDonald will remind you the chairman was seriously ill early last year and he probably doesn't want to remain...but it's also fact he made a solid recovery and would almost certainly consider another term. There are those who may misinterpret McDonald's various disputes with...Kroger and Alston. Instead of crediting McDonald with identifying a sensible and

proper demarcation between political associations and broadcasting independence, some claim McDonald has been "captured" by the ABC. This is probably more a matter of perception than fact.

Where all this leaves Balding, 53, is anyone's guess. Some believe Balding always saw the job in terms of a single, five-year incumbency. But he's relatively young. His low profile, hardworking, pragmatic persona has earned him a fair deal of internal and external goodwill. Perhaps Balding, too, should remain.

Anyway, it's just possible we've been overly kind to Howard. We may never really know how much of Alston's unrelenting hostility towards the ABC actually emanated from the Prime Minister's office.

*The Australian*  
15/9/05 (Abridged)

(continued from page 11)

### Getting Rid of Friends Discount

could be seen as an indicator that this commercial arm of the ABC wishes to distance itself from our organisation.

There is a certain lack of sense in getting rid of the 10 per cent discount to Friends of the ABC members. Many of us have preferred to purchase books, cd's and dvd's from the ABC shops which must have increased revenue. We believe most of us do it out of a sense of loyalty, more than the 10 per cent discount and because we want our money to support the ABC.

Management has also cancelled the custom of the last 30 years that allowed the Friends of the ABC to place its joining pamphlets and stock of the Friends' magazines in ABC shops. Both of these items have always been supplied and delivered free of charge to the shops and have only required a small amount of shelf space. Whatever will be next? Banning Friends from the ABC Headquarters?

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## ...an Australian content quota for the ABC?

*The Member for Hinkler (Qld), Paul Neville, is low profile but influential - Chair of the federal Backbench Communications Committee who took up an wide-ranging discussion on the 'media' with Stephen Crittenden on Radio National last October. With the Telstra legislation more or less out of the way, Neville's committee is beginning to turn its mind to other issues, such as the state of the ABC's drama production.*

**Stephen Crittenden:** Paul, I want to turn to content. I know you are particularly concerned about drama on Australian television – and the decline of drama particularly at the ABC, which is down to 20 hours this year.

**Paul Neville:** Yes, it's a big concern of mine, and I've expressed this concern in the Party room,

**Crittenden:** How widely is that concern shared in the Party room?

**Neville:** I don't think it's widely shared but there's a growing awareness. When you turn on and you have a lot of American police and courtroom drama-type shows, and reality TV like Big Brother I think there's a general realisation that – hey – we don't have any good shows anymore – or we don't have as many good shows, especially Australian ones, as we used to. And the cradle of a lot of that drama is the ABC. And if the ABC is not producing it – if the ABC is not giving leadership there – there's little incentive for the commercials to want to do it...they've got content regulations; perhaps it's time to consider whether the ABC should also have a content (quota).

**Crittenden:** Does the ABC need the same kind of minimum Australian content quota imposed on the commercial networks?

**Neville:** Yes, one of the reasons this hasn't been addressed very seriously in the past is that there was a tacit understanding that the ABC was the cradle of that sort of drama; and second the Act (gives) the ABC independence and free movement in the market. I suppose any government would be reluctant to change that. I don't think the alteration of putting a content level in there necessarily impinges on the ABC's independence. It just sets a benchmark (to) foster Australian content, especially drama.

**Crittenden:** Well I should ask you to express a view directly. Is it time for the ABC to be given some kind of minimum Australian content quota – perhaps even a minimum Drama quota - and funded to produce it?

**Neville:** Yes, that's my view. That's strongly my view and it's a view I put to my colleagues. I'll tell you why, Stephen. I think at the training level Australia has probably never been at a better state. We have NIDA in Sydney and WAPA in Western Australia. We have a lot of universities now turning out excellent students - some of them going into teaching but others are going into the industry. There's a wealth of great talent available in Australia and some of the more mature talent holds its own in Hollywood and London, on the West End, and so on. It seems incongruous to me when you've got that level of expertise that our drama content on the national broadcaster should be dropping.

**Stephen Crittenden:** I must say you're the only politician apart from Jeff Kennett that I have ever heard make this connection between the outlets and the ramifications that occur all the way along the line for actors and writers and directors, even in the area of innovation in television.

**Neville:** Well, I make no apology for it. I had an early grounding in the arts and I think in some respects that regional Australia is less well served now than it was 35 years ago. When I was State Secretary of the Arts Council we toured such things as the Australian Ballet, the Elizabethan Trust Opera Company (now Australian Opera) – J.C. Williamson shows when they were international toured country areas. The symphony orchestras played in the major provincial

cities. Very little of that's going on now, it's becoming less accessible to ordinary people in the capital cities. I don't want to sidetrack the interview by going down that path –

**Crittenden:** But they are connected, aren't they?

**Neville:** They are. If you're not fostering an atmosphere of excellence in drama you get what we're now experiencing on commercial television – Big Brother Uncut and Survivor and so on – really dumbing down national television. And while those programs are flourishing there's going to be fewer opportunities for our young drama graduates and practitioners of the theatre to get a fair slice of radio and television opportunities.

**Crittenden:** Coming back to the ABC, how do you ensure the extra money the ABC would presumably be funded to do all this is actually spent on drama and not more crappy panel shows?

**Neville:** In the past I would have said you needed some legislative guidelines, but I must say Russell Balding I think has a more pragmatic view of things - because of that he's trusted and understood. If you were going to have an Australian content quota there would have to be something implicit...I'd like to see the funding segmented. ...you don't want one section more dominant than another – News and Current Affairs is important, rural broadcasting is important, drama and television series are important...it's important balance be maintained –

**Crittenden:** but isn't it undermining the ABC's independence and the right of the Board to allocate resources?

**Neville:** Yes to a point...

**Crittenden:** You're saying you don't trust the Board to allocate to the things you want to watch.

**Neville:** What I am suggesting is that there be some intervention to boost the level of drama in this country, not just for the sake of the ABC and for the sake of the viewers of the ABC but for the whole free-to-air television community so that we have a better standard of drama from this country.

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(continued from page 1)

### **Is the Media Failing Australia?**

balance of opinion which we need...and third in the 'commentariat' as it's called, there's a very aggressive right-wing pack which goes for people who dissent... with a sort of viciousness I've not previously experienced in Australia. It's had a big effect on public debate.

**Richard Aedy:** The ABC, in two articles by Margaret Simons ('Fear and Loathing at the ABC') and also by Quentin Dempster, comes off as "timid, under funded and really not what it was.

**Robert Manne:** ...the ABC is self-conscious about accusations it's left-wing and it bends over backwards not to allow the criticism to hold...I think it has a nervousness and lack of toughness which in my view in the last few years were needed...not as robust as it's been...

...one example...the asylum seeker issue...one of the really great scandals...we lock up people on Nauru, don't allow journalists to there...for years. I would have liked the ABC to play a major role in putting pressure on the govern-

ment to turn it around...to say it's intolerable...people locked up and journalists (not) allowed to see what's happening and the consequences of that detention. I think the ABC would have been, to be honest, frightened to make a campaign of government policy on Nauru to go there for years.

It seems to me Australia has passed through a sort of counter-revolution and many people who are small-l liberal, not necessarily left-wing, understand something big has happened to the country ...and they wonder whether there's a coming back from it or how long it will take...one of the reasons is...we have a media which hasn't held the government to account.

**Aedy:** What's to be done? If these are problems, what are the solutions?

**Manne:** First thing is identify the problem and debate it. If there was a big argument about the role of the Murdoch press in national politics...in particular about media regulation laws...and deregulation...if those debates took place...and it would have to be in this case Fairfax and the ABC...it's not possible the Murdoch press (would) describe things honestly...discussed with a sort of intensity – Murdoch's absurd dominance of the mainstream press...the need to break up what might be called a duopoly...almost a monopoly in the mainstream press and if we discussed television becoming dominated by those who dominate the newspapers – then I think something good will have come from the book.

*"Do Not Disturb: Is the Media Failing Australia?"* (Contributors include David Marr, Jack Waterford, Richard Glover, and Margaret Simons) from Schwartz Publishers – Black Inc. Agenda. Rrp \$29.95

## **How will the new Anti-Terror Laws affect the ABC?**

To what extent will the new Anti-Terror laws limit the ABC's capacity to maintain its investigative reporting? If a reporter sees something "classified" happening in the suburbs of any state of the nation, will he or she be prevented from reporting altogether because of risk of being prosecuted for breaching "security"?

In a democracy, one of the duties of the media is to report on what is happening in the nation. Whether it relates to the police, business, ecology, just about anything, including organisations such as the ASIO. All should be held accountable otherwise our democracy is compromised. If some areas are out of bounds to reporters then what will be in place to ensure the new powers are not abused?

Please write to your local member and your state Senators of all parties and tell them how distressed you are at the possibility that we will have an even more truncated ABC. Keep on telling them. It often looks like nothing is happening, but if ENOUGH of you write – snail mail is best – politicians do listen. Our huge rally at the Sydney Opera House is credited with near-immediate special grants made to fund ABC rural and regional programs. So don't think what we do doesn't make an impression. It does. Keep up the good work!

Penelope Toltz

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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: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ (Please Print) 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 \$ \_\_\_\_\_