

ABC Submission Disappointment: Aims at only 12 extra drama hours.

When Friends are tested: friends will speak out. Loyal they may be, but FABC branches share both surprise and mutual concern that the ABC's latest triennial funding submission is modest, if not "minimalist"

For funding for the three years 2006-09, the ABC seeks an extra \$38.4 million a year to meet three key objectives covering new radio services, digital TV and broadband content, and more Australian documentaries, adult and children's drama and arts programs for TV.

It wants \$4.5million a year to improve radio for under-served audiences in outer metropolitan and regional areas, requiring employing 36 additional radio producers across Australia.

It also proposes an additional \$13.9 million a year to spend on creating and buying in 200 hours of additional content for ABC 2 to further develop and expand its digital television outlets and its broadband platforms.

NSW FABC President, Gary Cook, said those proposals were realistic and not 'over the top'. "They are obviously not an ambit claim; they're to meet basic needs and I can't see that they leave any room for negotiation," Gary said.

"Naturally Friends support the ABC's funding submission – but how much better and stronger could it have been."

The submission contains only an extra 12 hours of adult drama. Last financial year the ABC showed 11 hours of first-release drama, upgraded this financial

year to an expected 20 hours. So it lifts the ABC's annual Australian drama level to 32 hours, far below the 90 or 100 hours a year produced by the commercial networks...and still far below the ABC's one-time copious output of Australian drama.

The submission argues that an investment of an extra \$15 million in 2006-07 would boost its TV production sector with a potential to generate productions worth almost \$40 million. It would then spend another \$20 million in 2007-08, rising to \$25 million in 2008-09.

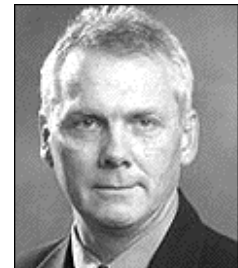
The money would go to a new fund committed to developing Australian content through the independent production sector, spending on average over the next three years, \$20 million a year to lift the level of high-quality "landmark" Australian programs across a number of genres, not just drama.

In that category of course the ABC no longer has the capacity or resources to produce drama in-house.

Friends disquiet

FABC conducted an internet hookup of interstate branches and these are some of the reactions: expressed:

(continued on page 4)



Head of ABC TV Kim Dalton's Solid Track Record

Former Chief Executive of the AFC 1999 to 2005, Kim Dalton, has a 30-year association with Australian Film and TV production, including helping develop and finance Muriel's Wedding and The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert.

Responsible for restructuring the Film Commission and shifting its focus, Kim Dalton had previously operated his own production company, worked with the Australian Childrens Television Foundation and the Australian Film Finance Corporation in senior management and, prior to joining the AFC, with Beyond International in the development, financing and production

(continued on page 4)

INSIDE:

The President's Report	3
Managing Director Wanted	5-7
ABC Walkley Awards	9
Free Film Night	9
Bias Claims Demolished	11-14
ABC Tours Resume	14

Northern Rivers Hosts Terrorism Discussion



The Northern Rivers branch of the Friends of the ABC is gearing up for a high profile visit to the Tweed District by Four Corners' reporter Sally Neighbour.

On 24th March Sally will discuss the threat of terrorism in SE Asia and explore links between JI groups in Asia and Australia.

Sally will draw on her breadth of experience as an award-winning journalist with the ABC and as prize-winning author of **"In the Shadow of Swords"**, her recent book. The address will take place at the Tweed Heads Civic and Cultural Centre, Brett Street, Tweed Heads with doors opening at 7.30 pm (NSW) time.

Admission by donation (\$10 or \$5 concession and \$2 for schoolchildren.)

On Friday afternoon Sally will work with aspiring journalists from local schools and Southern Cross University's Tweed Gold Coast campus. For bookings contact Neville Jennings on: **0405 244 903.**

Byron Bay Members

Branch members in Byron Bay are planning two events later in the year: one with a focus on freedom of speech, the other on film-making and measures to enhance the quality and quantity of Australian Drama on free to air TV.

At our last branch meeting members were pleased to note the return to good health of Vice President Doug Myler. Members of the executive had a fun night out at a comedy event in Byron Bay with Mandy Nolan and Sandy Gandhi.

Next branch meeting is set down for 7.30 pm on Wednesday 26 April at the Lismore Workers Club. New members are always welcome.

Coffee with Hunter Friends

The Hunter group has initiated a number of coffee afternoons to be held at Panthers Newcastle on the fourth Saturday afternoon of alternate months.

These will replace the scheduled committee meetings, held at the Trades Hall, for those months, and all members and guests are welcome to attend both.

The next coffee get-together is the fourth Saturday in March, and then again in April, and so forth. Committee meetings will be held in March, May, etc. For more information, ring Allan on 4930 7309.

Lisa Thomas, Secretary

A Sunday Afternoon...great music...and a heritage setting



Parramatta FABC
invite Friends and their friends to a
free orchestral concert
in Parramatta Town Hall
on Sunday 26th March at 2.30 pm
with Mal Hewitt & The Occasional Performing Sinfonia

It's to celebrate 125 years of community involvement in Parramatta Town Hall, and the City Council's renovation of a beautiful Victorian building.

A varied program: Aaron Copland, Shostakovich and other music timing the history of the hall – Tchaikovsky, Elgar, Ravel and a salute to the Broadway Musical with suites from **West Side Story** and **My Fair Lady**.

The Federal Member for Parramatta, Julie Owens, in a previous life a concert pianist, will join the orchestra for Mozart's **Piano Concerto in D minor**,

although a year or two ahead of the Victorian era - Mozart has just celebrated his 250th birthday.

Parramatta composer Graham Howard has written a piece commissioned for the occasion – **Footprints at Four Creeks**, those that feed the Parramatta River...their musical premiere

Mal Hewitt asks: is there is a better way to spend a Sunday afternoon than listening to great music in a beautiful building, with afternoon tea also free.

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT



It was again a pleasure to meet so many members and their guests in the familiar surroundings of the Dot Strong Terrace at the ABC Ultimo Centre for our annual Christmas Party.

It was an opportune time to reflect on the past year and to look to the new year - one of many challenges as usual, particularly the funding decision for the next three years. The occasion also coincided with the announcement of the Walkley Awards, with the quality and talent of ABC journalists and program makers again being the highlight.

I had the pleasure of presenting our annual award for "Excellence in Broadcasting" to the AWAYE program on Radio National. AWAYE is Australia's only national indigenous arts and culture program. AWAYE means "listen up" in the Arrernte language of Central Australia. The program is presented by Rhoda Roberts, Rhoda is a member of the Bundjalung nation. Rhoda was present to receive the award on behalf of her colleagues. It was a delight to see the pride evident amongst the AWAYE team in receiving the award.

The Funding Adequacy and Efficiency Review ("FAER") commissioned by the government was recently completed by KPMG. The ABC is confident that the review will clearly demonstrate that the ABC is under funded and deserving of a significant boost in funding. The Minister

will not release the review for public scrutiny, claiming that it contains confidential ABC material. The Minister's decision is unacceptable. At least, a summary of the findings should be released. After all, the cost of the review to taxpayers was \$417,000.

At about the same time, the ABC made available its Triennial Funding Submission which, together with the FAER, forms the basis for the government to fund the ABC for the next three years. The submission features as our lead story in this edition (p.1) and is available for viewing on our web page at: www.fabcnsw.org.au

In February, a delegation of state branches met with the Coalition Back Bench Committee on Communications. FABC put forward solid and convincing evidence of the distinctiveness and comprehensiveness of the ABC, funding benchmarks compared to public broadcasters around the world and the public's willingness to pay more for the ABC (currently 10c per day). It was also put to the committee that the manner of funding should not be targeted and with no content quotas. The committee was impressed with the presentation given by the Friends but, disturbingly, they raised the question of "carefully controlled, limited advertising", pointing to the ABC's promotion of its own products and programs as a precedent. Our position remains diametrically opposed to advertising, in line with the ABC Charter.

In the last edition, I headed my report with examples of allegations of left-wing bias against the ABC. I am sure that it is as repetitive and tedious for you as it is for me to draw your attention to no fewer than five articles in this edition dealing with further claims of left-wing bias and entrenched culture.

We have come to expect that *The Australian* will regularly attack the ABC but, recently, *The Sydney Morning Herald* columnists, Gerard Henderson and Michael Duffy joined them in the space of a week. And it was a week when the Howard government was on the defensive over the AWB scandal. Henderson and Duffy avoided that issue like the plague and ran a nice little diversion on left-wing bias in the ABC. More disturbing, though, was the failure of the Herald to publish Managing Director, Russell Balding's reply to Henderson's article.

This will be the last edition of Update prior to the government handing down the budget, which, of course, will contain the decision on ABC funding for the next three years. Please write to the Minister, your local member or the Prime Minister. Tell them how much you value the ABC and how it deserves a boost in funding.

Gary Cook
President, FABC

DID YOU KNOW?

Friends of the ABC (NSW) celebrates the 30th anniversary of its founding in April. It was formed in protest at funding cuts (familiar?) imposed by the Fraser Government.

Here we are thirty years later with many of the same issues existing in 1976 and some additional ones to challenge us.

Submission Disappointment

Continued from Page 1

"This is very much a minimalist set of requests...certainly less than last time around, and less than the Macquarie Bank's recommendation, 3 years ago, for an increase of \$200m; but of course we support funding for innovations - production costs, digital content and online radio for under-serviced areas - operations which currently survive on a shoe-string"

"It appears the ABC Board has taken the view that they should where possible avoid saying anything the government doesn't want to hear. Unfortunately this is also a further acceptance of tied funding."

"Overall, the specific amounts sought are very modest and would seem unlikely to be adequate for any significant improvement in overall services...if the ABC is going to whisper about its underfunding it can hardly expect many to hear."

"While the ABC will do what it considers needs to be done to achieve what it believes to be 'realistic', the reality is no government will ever provide more than it's seeking, it is the FABC's role to take the principled position."

Media response

For comment, the mainstream media turned to Richard Harris of the Australian Screen Directors Association and Geoff Brown, executive director of the Screen Producers Association of Australia.

Their verdict: the ABC would need to double the money in its funding submission if it were to come close to the amount of drama required of commercial broadcasters.

Richard Harris estimated the ABC would need between \$40 million and \$50 million a year to increase drama to a level even approaching that of the Nine, Seven and Ten networks. "The ABC proposals are modest and at

the lower end of the scale we expected".

SPAA's Geoff Brown said the submission was a watered down version of the 2003 triennial submission.

Both industry groups want the ABC to be subject to the same Australian content standards as commercial TV is. Mr Brown said the Broadcasting Services Act or the ABC charter should be amended.

"There has to be some statutory obligation that says the national public broadcaster at least reaches the minimum of commercial broadcasters," he said.

"We can no longer allow our national public broadcaster to be marginalised. The industry's concern is that with the lack of Australian drama, the ABC itself is at risk."

Continued from Page 1

New Head of ABC TV Kim Dalton

of television and feature film projects.

Mr Dalton's appointment comes four months after Sandra Levy unexpectedly quit.

He told *The Australian* it was far too early to say whether there would be changes at the national broadcaster.

"I go into this job with a belief that the ABC must program across a range of genres," he said.

"Australian drama is very important and I go into it with a commitment to Australian content across the schedule."

Executive director Screen Producers Association of Australia Geoff Brown said it was "perhaps the most significant appointment at a critical time in the ABC's history", given the "appallingly low level" of Australian drama on the ABC.

Dalton said he looked forward to continuing to work closely with Australia's independent film and television production sector.



Situation Vacant

As this issue of Update goes off to the printer, the 'Managing Director wanted' sign was still on display outside the ABC's Harris Street headquarters, it could even still be there when the next issue comes out. Filling the vacancy is a worldwide task and quite likely a very protracted one.

The ABC Chair, Donald McDonald, is expected to take over as interim managing director when Russell



Balding leaves in March. His term is up in July, but it's safe to assume the Government will invite him to stay on for at least a year and it will end any speculation about his full time reappointment.

The existing board - McDonald, John Gallagher, Ron Brunton, Janet Albrechtsen, Steven Skala and Ramona Koval - will effectively operate as the selection panel throughout the entire process, for which the executive consultancy Egon Zehnder has been appointed.

The quest to replace Balding could take months, so McDonald's presence provides continuity. He was appointed Chair by Richard Alston in July 1996 and he will soon exceed the length of terms of previous ABC chairmen, with the exception of the late Richard Boyer, chairman for 16 years.

The recruiting net will be cast wide. Balding, originally Director of Finance, was the first managing director appointed from the staff since Talbot Duckmanton took over from Sir Charles Moses. Other appointees, including Brian Johns, David Hill and, indeed Jonathan Shier, were recruited outside the corporation.

Current 'insiders' obviously to be considered are a Balding protégé, Chief Operating Officer, David Pendleton and, replacing Sandra Levy, the recently appointed Director of Television, Kim Dalton who's only been in the job since January. Levy herself may be a contender, although one reason for her departure last year was said to be her disillusionment that politics and

finance made working for the ABC a thankless and frustrating task.

Director of the Australian Film Television and Radio School, Malcolm Long, a former ABC insider and head of SBS, has been short-listed for the post in the past and is thought to again be a keen applicant.

Former BBC head, Greg Dyke, has also been mentioned, but the longer the appointment takes, the more names will be mentioned... those of leading political, media and arts executives will feed the speculation, although the successful candidate should combine something of all three backgrounds...even more according to one speculator - *The Australian's* media writer, Errol Simper (see below - **Away with the Pixies!**)

But as the recruiting consultants Egon Zehnder hunt overseas, it's well to remember the last successful candidate from overseas with hidden talents was Russell Balding's predecessor, Jonathan Shier.

Away With the Pixies!

The Australian's television critic, Errol Simper ('The Scribe'), took a break from the serious business of the delphic politics and manoeuvrings and rumours of war in Australia's broadcasting environment to daydream about Russell Balding's impending departure...

Balding brought maturity, sanity, credibility and competence to his office. Yes, he was an accountant who lacked journalistic background, but you can't have everything. Unlike some of his predecessors he was more interested in managing the organisation than in pirouetting around, making hyperbolic, self-important declamations. Those who've doubted his worth might care to ask themselves why the tough, ruthlessly pragmatic Max Moore-Wilton chose to recruit him (to run) Sydney Airport, by wide consensus, a ghastly place. Cross your fingers and fervently hope he can improve it.

Anyway, Balding's resignation will undoubtedly precipitate one of those unfailingly popular guessing

games about potential successors (including): Pru Goward, Greg Dyke, Sandra Levy, Kim Williams, Sue Howard, Paul Kelly, Bob Mansfield, Sam Kekovich, Max Uechtritz, Trevor Kennedy, Marcos Baghdatis, Eddie McGuire, Bob Dylan, Nicole Kidman, Bert Newton, Kerry Packer, Diego Maradona, Andy Warhol and so on. Such lists will undoubtedly grow. Perhaps they'll recall Shier from his tax-funded retirement.

In truth, there are few people with the perfect credentials of an ABC managing director. You need the combined skills of a journalist, politician, public relations guru and trade union official. You require all the standard managerial abilities of a senior executive, yet - very importantly - must remain in touch with a broad mainstream consensus (and) an individual can have some of the requisite skills, but rarely all of them.

Errol Simper The Australian Feb 2nd '06

Another chance to neuter the ABC

The daily electronic News Sheet, Crikey, sewed Balding's resignation into John Howard's long-standing, sometimes frustrated, plans for dealing with the national broadcaster; and, as Stephen Mayne wrote, here was another great opportunity to neuter the corporation – with some bizarre suggestions for successors.

The Howard Government has waged a long campaign to rein in what it regards as institutional bias at the ABC and (Russell Balding's) resignation provides another big opportunity to attack that culture.

The original appointment of John Howard's mate Donald McDonald as chairman in 1996 was meant to kick-start the process, but it didn't take long for him to go native and become a passionate advocate for the ABC.

However, McDonald and his board, including *Crikey* publisher Di Gribble, did appoint Jonathan Shier as managing director in 1999 in what amounted to the biggest attempt to shake up the culture.

The former Young Liberal turned out to be an unmitigated disaster and was fired on the eve of the 2001 Federal election. After that, McDonald and his board went for the safe option of Russell Balding despite the Howard Government preferring another outsider, like disgraced Swiss bank account customer Trevor Kennedy.

Since then the stacking of the ABC board with conservatives has continued, most notably with the appointment of former IPA ideologue Ron Brunton in May 2003 and *The Australian's* conservative columnist Janet Albrechtsen in February 2005.

The other members of the board at the moment include respected Melbourne lawyer Stephen Skala, John Gallagher QC and the staff-elected director Ramona Koval, whose ongoing presence demonstrates how hard it is to control what many still regard as a staff-captured organisation.

Some critics regard the presence of Gough Whitlam's press secretary Kerry O'Brien presenting *The 7.30 Report* as the ultimate yardstick of the ABC's ongoing editorial independence. The new CEO would have a good deal of difficulty moving on O'Brien because it would require John Cameron, the head of news and current affairs, to support the move.

However, that doesn't mean the government won't press for an outsider...Importantly, Donald McDonald's second five year term as chairman expires on July 24 this year.

Perhaps the government should install its new chairman before a decision is made on replacing Balding. Peter Reith would certainly make a controversial choice given he was seriously considered as a director two years ago. Or what about Sam Chisholm as the CEO? He'll soon have some time on his hands and would really shake things up.

A Reith-Chisholm combination would cause a fire-storm but the government would then discover that ABC audiences are happy with what they're getting and there simply aren't the right wing journalists or commentators prepared to work for the pittance that Aunty pays.

*Stephen Mayne,
Crikey January 20 2006*



ABC Local Radio's best year

The ABC has had another exceptional year across its Local Radio networks for 2005 in the Nielsen Media Research radio ratings.

Russell Balding said "ABC Local Radio is often the heart of local news and information for communities throughout the nation."

Highlights of the survey include:

- ❑ An annual average reach of 2.2 million, an annualised share of 10.3%.
- ❑ Local Radio's share was up on 2004 in every city, except on 612 ABC Brisbane, which remained steady.
- ❑ 702 Sydney's share of 9.1% was the highest in over 25 years. 720 Perth's share of 12.1% was the highest in over 20 years and 891 ABC Adelaide's 2005 share of 11.5% was the highest on record.

Balding – "few options but flight"

Under that heading The Australian's coverage argued Balding's job options were few and his chances of ABC contract renewal negligible, something he was aware of...but the timing could hardly have been worse...

When Max Moore-Wilton approached Russell Balding just before Christmas to replace him as Sydney airport chief executive, Balding had every reason to say yes. At 54, there might not have been too many more attractive job opportunities...

By the time (his) contract expired in the middle of next year, he would have been answering to an essentially new board and could count only on chairman Donald McDonald and staff-elected director Ramona Koval to back him for a further five years.

Balding, a survivor from the ABC regime put in place during the years of Paul Keating's government by Brian Johns, is rumoured to have had equivocal relationships with board members such as Ron Brunton, Janet Albrechtsen and McDonald's deputy, John Gallagher.

Senate snub

It was never nasty or unworkable (with) respect on both sides. But Balding can be stubborn, as he demonstrated in November when, knowing he would face another gruelling bout of questioning about alleged corporation bias at a Senate Estimates Committee hearing, he simply did not turn up.

"I just had the view it's not necessary for the managing director to attend each and every Senate hearing," Balding said last night. "I had a strong, capable executive team there, capable of answering all their questions."

As Balding was snubbing the Senate, Moore-Wilton was looking for someone in a prominent managerial job with experience dealing at state and federal levels, and young enough to have a career ahead of them. "My board and I knew what we wanted," Moore-Wilton said yesterday. "We talked to a lot of people and

we weighed up the options. And we unanimously selected Russell."

"A bit dull"

ABC board members yesterday declined to comment on Balding's reign, except for Ramona Koval. "After the turmoil of the Shier years, Russell has been a steady hand on the tiller," Koval said. Director of Radio Sue Howard, agreed Balding had brought stability to the ABC. "...with dignity and a lot of (management) skill. I'll miss him," she said

Balding's greatest flaw seems to have been that he was "a bit dull". One well-placed insider said: "He may not have been exciting but he brought a calm which pretty well everyone appreciated."

Even so, the timing of his departure - planned for late March - could hardly be worse. Balding has been integral to the broadcaster's input into the Government's funding adequacy and efficiency review and to the corporation's submission for its next three years of funding.

"The timing might not be perfect," Balding said. "On the other hand, I believe I'm leaving the ABC in good shape. I don't think we have a thing to fear from the funding adequacy review."

"By the standards of any national public broadcaster, we're under-funded. And the Government will already have been deliberating the triennial funding deal so I suspect nothing I could say at this stage would make much difference."

*Errol Simper and Steve Creedy,
The Australian 21 January 2006*

Asia Pacific TV Broadcasts To Continue

First Good News item for 2006

A recent announcement from Canberra says the ABC has been selected as the preferred provider to continue to operate Australia's Asia Pacific television service.

ABC Asia Pacific, which boasts an annual growth rate of 54%, is Australia's international satellite television and online service.

The future of this broadcast link has been in question.

Funded separately under a contract with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the service currently broadcasts into 41 countries through 158 re-broadcasting partners and into 200,000 hotel rooms in the Asia-Pacific region.

ABC Managing Director Russell Balding said, "We are delighted the ABC will continue to broadcast to Asia Pacific audiences. The Australian Government has shown great confidence in the ABC to present a window to the region of modern Australian life and importantly provide continued access to independent news and current affairs."

"This outcome is particularly gratifying given the amount of hard work that has gone into the service over the past four years to make it the success that it is today," Mr Balding said.

Chief Executive of ABC Asia Pacific Ian Carroll said, "The re-engagement of the ABC as the preferred supplier of this service is further testament to the professionalism of our team."

ABC Walks Away with the Walkleys

The awards were handed out last December, but so comprehensive were the ABC's victories the run-away winner of reporting the night was The Australian's television and radio 'scribe', Errol Simper, whose column reported it thus:

"Aunty managed to pick up a total of 14 Walkleys, including every radio and every television award. Congratulations to all the winners, especially Tim Palmer who won for the best radio news reporting, the best TV news reporting and the Gold Walkley for his stories out of tsunami-flattened Aceh.

Joining Palmer in the multi-Walkley hall of fame was Monica Attard, the former Russian correspondent who now presents Sunday Profile on ABC radio. She must be running out of space on her mantelpiece now that she has five gongs.

All this amounted to a huge win for the ABC, but it was also a devastating indictment of the commercial radio and TV sector. Not one commercial radio station or network was able to get a finalist into any of the three pure radio and one broadcast categories. That's 12 finalists, all from the ABC.

What does that say about the commercial sector? That it doesn't try to bring first-class news services to its listeners? That it doesn't enter awards? That it is no good, next to its ABC brethren? That it's under-

resourced? What's your excuse, guys?

The ABC constantly whinges about its lack of resources and maybe that's true when you look at the woeful Australian drama output. But clearly it has the people and the budgets to be in the front line when news breaks. No wonder its radio audiences are at an historically high level.

The silence from the commercial sector has been deafening. There's nothing to say except: "We have failed our audiences."

It was almost as bad in TV. Just one commercial network was represented among nine TV-only finalists and that was Mark Riley, of Seven, who brought us the story of Tony Abbott's love child who wasn't.

Again, this was an appalling performance by the commercial TV sector. If the three networks between them can't manage to get more than one piece of their work into the finals of an annual awards event, it poses the question: Is this the inevitable result of the dumbing down processes we hear so much grumbling about?

Clearly, the TV networks are not serious about journalism or excellence."

**MEMBERS ARE URGED TO SIGN UP
2 NEW FABC MEMBERS
TO HELP THE FRIENDS
SUPPORT THE ABC**

TV Commercials new US Targets

Update's layout and design man, Irwin Kurtz, recently spent a month in the US - his homeland of several decades ago - and came away appalled at the range and diversity of medical commercials.

Rediscovering the remembered rural richness and beauty of the American landscape was one thing, but many nights watching TV in various hotels in New York, Virginia, Georgia, Florida, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, California was altogether another.

There was a plethora of quasi medical ads offering to improve one's ability to sleep, to eat (less), obtain plastic surgery, overcome fatigue, cure headaches, handle asthma or arthritis, obtain a knee replacement, or whatever you might or might not have...and there's a product for it.

It seemed to me that these commercials overwhelmed other product commercials. The number of commercials between shows also seemed to be

greater than the equivalent number on commercial TV in Australia. Having spent many years in advertising both in the U.S. and Australia I was interested in seeing what was currently being advertised on US TV.

It got to the point that we hit the mute button when the medicinal commercials came on; sadly, I guess, reflecting the ageing of the population.

It was a pleasure and relief to return to the ABC and not have to sit through a range of commercials devoted to improving one's sleep, weight, shape etc.

But with the audience for Pay-TV growing here one is exposed not only to the ads on the commercial free-to-air channels but now to commercials on Pay-TV.

If the ABC were ever opened up to "limited" commercials, one would dread not only the commercials - - but the content!



Part of the audience at the FABC Illawarra's 2005 Christmas event.

Friends Illawarra Branch Party

The Friends of the ABC Illawarra Christmas Party/Afternoon Tea was a great success. Over 50 members enjoyed an entertaining and informative afternoon at the Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Wollongong.

The big draw card was guest speaker Col Wilson a.k.a. *Blue the Shearer* – the poet lorikeet. Blue is a regular on ABC radio with his highly amusing and politically cutting poems.

"We knew we would have a good roll-up once *Blue* agreed to be our guest" Chris Cartledge, Chairperson of the Illawarra Branch said.

"We invited everyone on our membership data base, including those whose membership had lapsed for some years," he said. "And it paid-off."

"Apart from two new associated members, five lapsed members who attended our Christmas event became financial once again," Chris said. And a raffle, the prize a gift voucher from the ABC Shop (of course), meant the event turned a small profit.

The gathering also gave an opportunity to talk directly to the troops about the current triennial funding campaign. A range of handouts including a contact list with local politician's details were available for members to take away. The 'Sea Change' postcard

proved very popular.

One member, Jane Taylor, was so enthused at the meeting she volunteered to conduct a street stall at Thirroul in January 2006. This was also a great success. Jane, assisted by her husband enrolled another ten associate members in a three hour session in the shopping centre.

Blue kindly dug out all his poems about the ABC and made them available as a handout at the event. In total nine poems including the classic 'Jonothan' – "Hullo, my name is Jonothan. I run the ABC". Readers of this item can obtain a copy of these poems by e-mailing Chris. Cartledge at:

telledge@bigpond.net.au



Col Wilson a.k.a. *Blue the Shearer* spins a yarn at the FABC Illawarra's Christmas afternoon tea.

Bathurst Friends Dramatising Drama

Bathurst ABC decided at its February meeting to hold an evening to support Australian drama.

Noting the dearth, if not death, of Australian drama on ABC TV, with original production last year down to 11 hours, Bathurst FABC is also seeking wide community support for their campaign.

Branch secretary, Tracey Carpenter, said that at a time when the ABC was lobbying for its Federal funding to be restored, and at a time when our national identity was being so vigorously debated and redefined cultural institutions should be adequately supported to explore, challenge and express our identity. "Here's a chance to put substance behind the rhetoric of our political leaders," she said.

The Branch decided a play written by a local writer - Ray Harding, a Charles Sturt University lecturer - to be staged at Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre in June, provided a good opportunity to demonstrate support for Australian drama and the ABC.

A pre-show supper and discussion with guest speakers is planned. The Branch will keep members posted and urges them to invite along as many as possible of their friends and others "within their sphere of influence."

Meantime with the ABC's submission already with the Government, the branch reminds members, readers and friends to write urgently to the Minister, Senator Coonan, demanding sufficient funding for the ABC to return to producing significant Australian drama and many more hours than just eleven.

Tracey Carpenter

The truth about the fiction of ABC bias

Under which heading David Marr, who has worked at various times for ABC radio and television, as well as the SMH, explodes some myths.



The article should have been required reading across town at News Limited.

Somewhere high above Ultimo, the little board of the ABC is already engaged in the task of finding a new managing director. They're an eclectic bunch - a banker, an anthropologist, a newspaper columnist, a barrister with a special expertise in liquor laws plus a staff journalist, all chaired by a former arts administrator, Donald McDonald.

With money so tight at the ABC, it's fortunate these men and women have been offered so much free advice to guide them since Russell Balding (announced) that he was off to run Sydney Airport.

The Queensland Liberal senator Santo Santoro sent word that this was finally an opportunity to break the "entrenched, culture of left-leaning bias" at the national broadcaster. He told Brisbane's Courier-Mail: "Now is the time to appoint a managing director who will not be afraid to enforce those rules and restore respect for the balance and quality of the ABC news coverage."

It's the dream that never dies. Santoro's message chimes perfectly with the mood of a board once

again talking culture-busting - this time not just to the editorial stance of the ABC but to its history of offering journalists and producers the security of long-term employment. The key words are balance and flexibility. And despite the ABC's own research, the culture-busters claim urgent public clamour for these changes.

They have been disappointed so often before. Jonathan Shier was given the gig all those years ago because he was thought to have the courage, the flair, the insight etc to break the old culture of the ABC. Alas for his backers in the Victorian Liberal Party, those hopes went up in smoke. He wasn't up to the job of running - let alone transforming - the place.

Shier's backers next picked Trevor Kennedy. Nice man. When he didn't make the shortlist, Peter Costello, put public pressure on the board. In May 2002, he told Melbourne radio 3AW that the ABC was dithering over the appointment - its entrenched left-wing culture "even left of the Labor Party."

McDonald rebuked him fiercely. "It is the sole responsibility of the board to select the managing director. The board will continue to defend the ABC's independence, where its strength and relevance lies. To do otherwise would be an abrogation of its legislated duty to the public of Australia."

The culture-busters - on and off the ABC board - are not deterred by their track record for picking duds to do their work. Nor does public indifference to their great quarrel with the ABC put them off. Culture-busting voices such as *The Australian* simply insist there is mass support.

But despite *The Bill* twice a week and all those other British fillers, the appalling lack of new drama, too much cooking, the budget-forced summer suspension of nearly every show worth watching on television, dud arts coverage year-round and the creeping political caution of programming, the public still love the ABC.

The figures aren't secret. The May 2005 survey commissioned by the ABC found "nine in 10 Australians continue to believe the ABC provides a valuable service to the community, and half believe it provides a very valuable service."

It's not all pluses for the ABC. Viewers and listeners want more of this, less of that, but there is no support for the argument that Australians are crying out for root-and-branch change at the ABC.

A couple of years ago, *Readers Digest* asked its Australian subscribers to name the brands and institutions they most trusted. The responses were weighted by age, gender etc to translate them into a true community verdict. The ABC came in as the sixth most trusted government service between public schools and public hospitals. It beat universities, the CSIRO, the weather bureau, the governor-general and - in 23rd place - Federal Parliament. Among trusted brands, ABC News beat all the other television news services - in a list bottom-heavy with fast-food chains and banks.

So how can the culture-busters claim to be speaking for the people in the face of community verdicts like that? They can't...

SMH 27th January '06

Another Manic Murdoch Onslaught

Balding's resignation provided The Australian with an opportunity to launch yet another of its anti-ABC tirades...full of contumely, far-fetched and too offensive to be included here in full. We marvel that Friends, anyone else for that matter, persist in reading the paper; here are some of its wilder flights of fantasy...

**Mr Balding did not interfere with the way the keepers of the corporate culture ran the ABC – like a student newspaper, selective in its stories, blatant in its bias and utterly opinionated

** Mr Balding failed to ensure the corporation acted according to its charter, to provide "a balance between broadcasting programs of wide appeal and specialised broadcasting programs".

** The ABC is run by some staff – for themselves and their mates...a very small group...utterly unconnected to the vast mass of Australians, especially the traditional ABC audience.

** The ABC has abandoned new Australian drama. Only 11 hours were broadcast last year. ABC apologists argue this is because of inadequate federal funding. Fair enough. But look what (screened) instead...quizzes and contests.

** They are followed by chat shows where inner-city comedians sneer at everybody who does not support gay marriage and oppose genetically modified agriculture.

** Many metropolitan stations are in the hands of 40-something announcers obsessed with their inner-city leftie lifestyles. And woe betide any broadcaster who dares dispute their orthodoxies.

**It is the same in current affairs broadcasting, where the agenda is set not by the big stories that affect the Labor and Liberal parties but by the opinions of presenters on issues that fascinate them.

** The focus on gender issues, the environment, immigration, the rights of all minorities, but especially asylum-seekers, is all-consuming.

** Thus Tony Jones, who seems to mistake the television program Lateline for parliamentary question time, hammers away at hapless ministers about the needs of Cornelia Rau and the fate of David Hicks, while appearing less interested in the issues that matter to the vast majority of voters.

** Mr Balding is not entirely to blame for the way the ABC is held to ransom by its staff. His predecessor, Jonathan Shier, failed to clean out the collective and succumbed to his own eccentric management style.

** Under chairman Donald McDonald the board has never demonstrated anything other than a desire to surrender to the staff.

**But the ABC will never fulfil its function to inform and entertain all Australians while its agenda is set by staff who will brook no ideas other than their own. The new managing director must take them on by avoiding Mr Balding's fundamental error.

The Australian

21 January 2006



Facing a modest barrage of criticism, and that mostly in News Limited columns including that editorial, Russell Balding responded:

I suspect that the real disappointment of your leader writer at my alleged "failure" is that I did not drag the ABC into their preferred ideological comfort zone. I never saw my role as a cultural warrior but, rather, to effectively and efficiently manage Australia's national broadcaster and position it for the digital era.

Your editorial maligns ABC staff as "utterly unconnected to the vast mass of Australians, especially members of the traditional ABC audience". Strange, then, that same staff manage to reach more than 13 million Australians each week on television and 6.5 million on radio. That cannot be achieved by broadcasters who "brook no ideas other than their own"; it is done through talent and a genuine connection with the community.

I have learnt during my time here that the ABC is a resilient institution. It will long endure after my departure and the efforts of some to correct its uncanny desire to remain independent.

Russell Balding

FRIENDS WEARY OF 'BIAS' ACCUSATIONS...

The hoary old chestnut of ABC bias was raised yet again in a News Limited paper. Melbourne Herald Sun's Paul Gray advanced some startling theories...hints of paranoia and conspiracy...his column, reproduced in The Australian, discussed everything from Sandra Levy's successor to Gray's children's reaction to a Christmas Day "Spicks and Specks" broadcast, and a defence of Christianity.

Gray claimed the bias was so widely and deeply shared within the pro-ABC community, that it appeared to those who held it to be nothing more than..."natural truth and reason." In the next day's Australian's email forum, a number of readers disagreed:

"Gray's sensibilities were mortally offended when he saw a fleeting male-to-male kiss on the Spicks and Specks Christmas special. It seems that the program – "ideologically offensive" to Gray and his family – reflects the supposed left-wing bias in the ABC. His claim that the ABC is opposed to the influence of the Christian West is immediately exposed as bunkum when one considers the contribution made by the ABC to our knowledge of Western values. The ABC's commitment to religious programming is unique. Without the ABC, Australian TV would be a wasteland of hokey evangelism."

Neville Jennings Kingscliff, NSW

To say that "opposition to the influence of the Christian West abounds" within the ABC is breathtaking in its simplicity and incoherence. I don't begrudge Gray's right to being Christian, whatever that means...but is Gray saying that a diet of violence (Law and Order) and prurient sex (Desperate Housewives), utter banality (The Bachelor), the mainstreaming of paganism (Buffy or Charmed) or the confusion of entertainment and news (A Current Affair or Today Tonight) is likely to "build up the values of Australian civilisation".

Chris McKimm Karangi, NSW

Can you explain to someone on the other side of the country who Paul Gray is and why you give him large spaces to write the same column?

Kevin Firkins Claremont, WA

If Paul Gray doesn't want his children to be embarrassed by two men kissing then he should educate

them about sexuality, including homosexuality, and not bring them up in a neo-conservative ideological bubble.

Maxwell Warren
Windsor Gardens, SA

Despite the fact that ABC investigative journalism over the past 30 years has rendered enormous service to our democracy, bringing to book malefactors from the Left and the Right, he wants news and current affairs emasculated and replaced with such culturally positive offerings as pop-music quiz shows (as long as there are no homosexual references). This is all very well but there are many of us out here, reasonably intelligent taxpayers who, if not offended, are certainly exasperated by the self-righteous conceit of those like Gray who try to impose their religious delusions on public policy.

Clive Huxtable Beaconsfield, WA



Paul Gray

**To support the ABC, Friends need more Friends.
Your support is needed to obtain more members.
Talk to your friends and neighbours.
Ask them to join Friends of the ABC.
Use the form on the back of Update.**

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Finding the flaws, left and right

Above is an extract from a Sydney Morning Herald heading over one of its "First Word" letters describing the ABC's job: "Aunty's job is to find the flaws, left and right". The letter should be nailed to the wall at News Limited and inscribed in the minds of those tiresome, biased warriors, Gerard H, Piers A, Miranda D, Michael D, et al - supply other names as appropriate - unhappy victims of foaming abcphobia...

Following Gerard Henderson's recent predictable rant* against the ABC's "left-leaning bias", it was refreshing to read Michael Duffy's more thoughtful piece "Go back to the drawing board, Aunty" (February 10). There is certainly a case for the ABC to have a new charter, but who could we trust to produce one that would give us all that an independent public broadcaster could – and should – provide?

I have to take issue with Duffy when he claims that "the ABC ought not to provide middle-class welfare". A source with a strong commitment to the truth – and in particular to truths that those in positions of power would rather not have revealed – should not be seen as something only of benefit to the middle class. Nor should the provisions of quality material that, sadly, may only be of interest to minorities.

Duffy's reference to ABC left-wing bias "in more general programs dealing with values" is a provocation I would love to respond to if I had more space. But now I would just ask him "what do you mean by left-wing?" One can be dissatisfied with many of the "values" current in Australia – such as affluenza, degradation of the environment and incompetent, mendacious and secretive government – without being left-wing. The ABC must reflect this dissatisfaction if it is to do its duty by the Australian community. In short, the more the ABC annoys government in this way, the better it is doing its job.

When the government is conservative, it is easy but inaccurate to call its critics "left-wing". But we should remember that Bob Hawke and Paul Keating hated the ABC just as much as John Howard does because it was too good at revealing their flaws. Many state premiers have the same feelings. As long as parliaments in Australia fail to exert any effective surveillance or control over executive governments, the fourth estate has a vital role to play here. The ABC – and the Fairfax press – must remain among its most important warriors.

Gordon Pears, Cardiff South

* "*predictable rant*" conveys everything anti-ABC that Henderson always writes. Duffy is a relative newcomer to the ranks but touched off an even greater spate of letters when, among other things, he lauded American TV for the marvelous programs they supply us with. Gary Cook was amongst the letter-writers asking Duffy to tell us where they all were.

Join the brand new Friends' tours of ABC HQ

Two tours are booked for: Friday 7 April and Thursday 13 April at 12.20pm
Tours run from 45 minutes to 1 1/2 hours (depending on ABC productions on the day)

Meet in the coffee shop on the ground floor at 11.30am for a briefing.

The tours coincide with a new Powerhouse Museum exhibition
On the Box: Great Moments in Australian Television, including the ABC.

Tickets for our tours are combined with a visit to the Powerhouse before or after our ABC tour.

Costs:

ABC TOUR ONLY: Adults - \$7.50 Seniors/ Pensioners - \$6.50 Student / Child - \$5.50
ABC TOUR AND POWERHOUSE VISIT: Adults \$15.50. Pensioners need only their ABC Ticket.

Maximum number for each ABC tour is 30 people. You'll need to book fast.

To book please ring either:

Joy: 9502 2335 Ireen 9745 4487 Paul: 9888 3797

'Be alert and alarmed' - but be very afraid

Members and ABC loyalists turned up in the hundreds at flash points in the past for example establishing the Hunter Branch and at the Opera House in the days of Shier.



The Federal government - "informed sources" say - is about to make it easier for Australia's few media owners to expand their empires

Under what sort of pressure will that put the ABC and - its role.

Help us to help the ABC in its bid to obtain equitable funding in the next Federal Budget.

Our lobbying strength is based on our membership – the more members – the more effective we are.

Recruits are needed for the inevitable battles ahead.

Please persuade friends, relatives, work colleagues and fellow social club members to join the Friends. Consider a membership subscription as a gift.

Keep in mind that, 90% of Australians listen to or watch the ABC in any one week. Use the form on the back of Update or contact our membership line on (02) 9990 0600 for additional forms.



THE QUEST FOR MORE DRAMA

For how long can we tolerate the ABC's drama output being so abysmal.

We have produced the postcard above to be mailed to The Treasurer, Peter Costello, putting the case for more funds to bolster drama production on the ABC.

On the reverse of the card there is space so you can write your own message, address it and add a stamp.

Copies are available by contacting our membership line on (02) 9990 0600 or the President on (02) 9810 3358.

CALL TO ACTION!

Members - Go out and recruit new members.

Each one of you should sign up at least two new members - or more.

Do it this month.

STATE AND REGIONAL BRANCHES

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FABC 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	<input type="checkbox"/> 30 or under	<input type="checkbox"/> 31-50	<input type="checkbox"/> 51+
I would like to join <input type="checkbox"/>		I would like to renew <input type="checkbox"/>	
I am interested in helping <input type="checkbox"/>		I would like to join the email network <input type="checkbox"/>	
(and help pass on information to members)			
I/We apply for membership of FABC (NSW) Inc. and accept its objectives and rules. <i>Signature</i> _____			
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	1 Yr. 3 Yrs.	\$20	\$55
<input type="checkbox"/> Family/Household		\$25	\$70
<input type="checkbox"/> Student		\$15	\$40
<input type="checkbox"/> Pensioner		\$15	\$40
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate (covers 3 members)		\$60	-
<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to make a donation	\$ _____		
I am paying by <input type="checkbox"/> cheque in favour of FABC (NSW) Inc.		<input type="checkbox"/> money order <input type="checkbox"/> mastercard <input type="checkbox"/> visa	
Card number _____			
Name on credit card _____			
Expiry date _____			
Cardholders signature		Amount \$	