

Guess who's coming to dinner?

A word from the NSW President - Mal Hewitt



NSW Friends of the ABC is delighted to announce that the guest of honour at the 2009 Annual Dinner will be distinguished ABC journalist and, for many

years presenter of the 7.30 Report, Kerry O'Brien. Kerry will speak to us about his long career with the ABC, give us some insights into the workings of ABC TV's flagship program, and reflect on the many hundreds of political and international figures he has interviewed over the years, as well as answer questions from the audience. If you have another engagement on Friday 2nd October, cancel it! The dinner promises to be one of those memorable occasions in the life of Friends of the ABC. Details and booking arrangements can be found in the box on page 3 of Update. Non-FABC members are most welcome to come.

FEDERAL BUDGET RECOGNIZES IMPORTANCE OF THE ABC

In a very difficult budget climate, when in the space of a few months a \$20 billion surplus very quickly became a \$58 billion deficit, the ABC was extraordinarily successful in receiving an increase in funding of almost \$160 million over the next



Kerry O'Brien

three years. There will be \$67 million for the new digital children's television channel (aiming for 50% Australian content in 3 years), \$70 million for new Australian drama (most of which will go to independent studios in co-productions), and \$15 million for around 50 new regional broadband "hubs," interactive local "town squares" where individuals and organizations will be able to contribute content and react to material being broadcast. Again the ABC will be a leader in new styles and techniques of communication, highlighting the importance of the ABC as a source of news, information

and entertainment, local, national and international, particularly in rural and regional Australia.

The budget success of the ABC highlights the importance of Friends of the ABC maintaining regular contact with Federal Members of Parliament. We must keep reminding Canberra that the ABC is a vital part of the life of every Australian, and must receive sufficient funds to enable it to continue to serve the Australian community, as well as our neighbours in Asia and the Pacific. One Federal MP, when asked why the ABC did so

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Who to write...

Anyone seeking basic information about writing to persons of influence might find it helpful to go to the FABC NSW website www.fabc.org.au where there are some menu items under "Be Active" leading to pages of information: *Who can I write to?* *What can I say?*

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well, indicated that in pre-budget discussions in Canberra the ABC was a recurrent theme amongst our political representatives. A letter from Mark Scott thanking Friends of the ABC for their support during the budget process is reproduced elsewhere in Update, along with further analysis from Darce Cassidy.

Without wishing to seem ungrateful for the Government's recent generosity, it is necessary to point out that the additional funds are tied to specific programs, and that funds for the daily operation of the ABC remain desperately short (about half what they were in 1986 in real terms), particularly in news, current affairs and radio, as the never-released KPMG report pointed out to the Howard government. So the battle for adequate funding must go on. Roger Raven reminds us elsewhere that Friends of the ABC still has a very strong reason for existence.

NSW FRIENDS OF THE ABC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

An invitation to our AGM on Saturday 10th October is included in this edition of Update. It is very clear that Friends of the ABC still has a vital role to play in lobbying politicians for funding and support, maintaining a healthy dialogue with ABC management on aspects of policy and programming, and providing members with opportunities for further insights into ABC programs as well as opportunities to meet ABC presenters.

At the AGM you will find out more about FABC plans for the future, but most importantly you will meet and hear Jonathan Holmes, another veteran of a number of roles and programs in the ABC, and the current presenter of Media Watch, that indispensable program which applies the blowtorch to all types of media across Australia, including the ABC itself.

Please take the opportunity to have your say in future directions for Friends of the ABC, as well as to hear one of our most respected journalists and media commentators.

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL BLUE MOUNTAINS FORUM

On Sunday 26th July, over 250 people

crammed into the Wentworth Falls School of Arts to hear an expert panel of Mark Scott, Quentin Dempster and Annabel Crabb (SMH Journalist) discuss the positives and the pitfalls of the ABC's digital future.

The forum is reported in detail elsewhere in Update, but I take the opportunity to thank and congratulate the Blue Mountains Branch for yet another outstanding example of local branch initiative and organizational expertise. The forum has become an annual event on the NSW FABC calendar, and is always stimulating and challenging, as well as an opportunity to learn more about the ABC.

FABC LIST - END OF AN ERA

For a number of years, NSW FABC has provided members and non-members with an online forum to engage in discussion and debate on ABC matters. Maintaining the list has been an onerous and time-consuming task, carried out with great dedication by Chris Cartledge.

The time has come for Chris to "hang up his hat" on the list, and we express our deep appreciation to Chris for the time, energy and expertise that he devoted to the task. It was also becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the list in the current format and technology, so the decision has been made by the NSW executive that it will cease to operate. It is possible that a similar online forum will be developed in the future – anybody with an interest in this should contact me. Chris Cartledge continues the important job of maintaining the FABC website.

I also pay tribute to the work of two other FABC stalwarts in Val and John Carter, who for the past couple of years have been our mailout volunteers, another onerous, repetitive but vitally important job in maintaining communication with the membership. We thank Val and John for their countless hours of voluntary service, but the baton has been passed to Margaret Kitson, who continues this work. Thank you, Margaret!

Mal Hewitt
NSW President
Friends of the ABC



Mark Scott thanks Friends of the ABC for their support



Mark Scott

NSW Friends of the ABC received the following letter on 13th May:

Last night the Government announced a \$58 billion deficit. In the light of this enormous budgetary pressure, it is pleasing that we can press ahead with our plans for new services and distinctive content. Our new Children's Channel, ABC3, will be welcomed in the homes of Australian families across the country. We are going to significantly increase the levels of Australian drama on ABC television, working in partnership with the independent production sector. And regional and rural communities will benefit as ABC Local acts as a catalyst and host for the development of rich new broadband material.

This increased funding, the largest increase achieved by the ABC since the establishment of the corporation in 1983, is a robust vote of confidence in the work done by our people. Our Canberra strategy was based on highlighting the ABC's success as an innovator in new media, as a connector of communities, and a provider of distinctive and unique content. We received strong support for our conviction that, in this dramatically

changing media landscape, it was more important than ever that the ABC play a vital role in the lives of Australians everywhere. The increased funding is a vital stepping stone towards establishing the ABC as a great public broadcaster in a digital media era.

In doing this work, we had strong support from industry partners and key community organizations like Friends of the ABC. Thank you for your support while our funding bid was considered by Government. The outcome does not bring to an end our discussions with Government around funding and strategic priorities and we will continue to engage over the role the ABC plays in Australia's digital future, including the allocation of new digital spectrum. The creation of broadband content to take advantage of the National Broadband Network will be a subject for discussion, as will Australia's international broadcasting opportunities.

Clearly, in these tough economic times, we have not been funded for everything we wanted. We need to find ways to press on with our moves into digital radio and continuous news. These areas are set to be very important to the future of the public broadcaster.

We also need to review our stretched operational budgets to ensure a focus on programming and service delivery.

We have a lot of work to do, (but) the ABC approaches this new era with vigour and excitement. We look closely to working with Friends of the ABC over the coming years as we pursue our goals of being a new media innovator, a connector of communities and a trusted source of distinctive and unique content.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Scott
Managing Director



Come and join Kerry O'Brien at our annual dinner

Kerry will speak between courses with sufficient time to answer your questions.

Date 2nd October.

Time Doors open 6pm sit down 7pm,

Location Cello's Restaurant* in the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel 169 Castlereagh Street, Sydney.

Cost \$57 per person including two drinks. Bookings must be made via telephone to either Ivy 9481 0381 or Joy 9502 2335 or Paul 9888 3797.

*Cello's Restaurant was opened in 1927 and is now one of the last grand dining rooms in Sydney.

War on The Chaser



Risk-taking may not be the quality which first comes to mind when "ABC" is mentioned. However, controversy has never been far from the ABC's programming. Even 'Playschool has had its share (remember 'the two mothers' issue?); but that was mild compared with complaints of bias in the coverage of topical issues like the Iraq War (Radio National's *AM*) or climate change (*The Great Global Warming Swindle* on Lateline); or in drama productions like *Bastard Boys*. JJJ's feisty presenters often incur the wrath of the public figures they don't take seriously enough.

Taking risks is what the ABC does - or should do. As a public broadcaster, the ABC has the huge advantage of not being constrained by having to deliver audiences to advertisers. It is constrained, of course, by its various audiences; but that is a very different thing from the requirement to conform to the standard of acceptability of one mass audience. The ABC can be more edgy than that.

And nowhere is that more evident than in comedy. It is indeed a boast of the ABC that it can and does take

risks with comedy. Unlike the commercial networks which take a show off air after a couple of weeks if its ratings are low, the ABC can allow the program time to develop and to attract its own audience. And what a triumph when the risk pays off!

As an illustration of the ABC's handling of a distressing situation, it is telling that, in its apology, the ABC acknowledged that "in hindsight, we feel that we should have alerted the Catt family to the situation in advance of the broadcast."

The ABC had a comedy-ratings boom in 2007 with *Summer Heights High* and with *The Chaser's War on Everything* (not hurt by the APEC stunt - which we must remember, however, teetered on precarious popularity for a while back then).

www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/media/s2025852.htm

Both these shows, like *The Glasshouse* before them, were run late on a Friday night while the ABC took its risk until audiences had grown, and then they were given prime time in the middle of the week. And what an excellent risk *The Chaser* proved to be: in 2007 an average audience, nationally, of 1.4 million people.

And the boom continued. As recently as May this year the ABC proudly proclaimed the return of *The Chaser's War on Everything* - with an audience of 1.5 million people on its premier showing.

www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/media/s2584206.htm

However risks, by definition, don't always pay off. Last week, two weeks after *The Chaser's* triumphant return, its sketch, Making a Realistic Wish Foundation, met with outrage and upset from a large slice of its audience. The Chaser apologised, saying they hadn't intended to hurt anyone who had been affected by the terminal illness of a child. They also mentioned that it was "a satirical sketch and black comedy".

www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/media/s2589338.htm

Black comedy is surely the riskiest form of comedy; it mentions the unmentionable and brings taboo subjects into the open. In making fun of the unfunny it can bring into the light of day subjects which are usually shaded by the conventions of polite society. Think back to *Aunty Jack*, *The Norman Gunston Show*, *Mother and Son* - or to the British productions *Little Britain*, *The Office*.

Who would dare to criticise the playing on our emotions or the exploitation of our guilt by an organisation which brings a little happiness to the life of a terminally ill child? No one much; with the result that very few will say - what Suresh Viswanathan wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald* (5 June) - that what a dying child wants is two things: to get better and to go home; it would be much better for people to donate to the research which has found cures for many formerly terminal illnesses.

This is not to justify everything about black comedy in general or about this skit in particular; errors of taste can be made; the unfunny may remain unfunny; but its place in the scheme of satire is a daring one, and that makes demands on the broadcaster.

In *Media Watch* this week Jonathan Holmes itemised those demands: that if content looks as if it might be controversial, the producer should either notify someone higher up the chain of command or ask their approval for it to go to air. In this case Amanda Duthie, Head of Arts, Entertainment and Comedy at ABC Television, did neither of those things.

As Jonathan Holmes summed up, the problem was "a single manager who made a bad decision. And that will always be a risk, whatever the system".

www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcript/s/s2592383.htm

Risk again - but risk-free comedy production is horribly likely to be comedy-free production. Surely one error of judgment, from the ABC's former Commissioning Editor and Executive Producer responsible for *At the Movies*, *The New Inventors*, *First Tuesday Book Club*, *Painting Australia*, *Spy Shop* - must be allowed for in a

particularly creative and idiosyncratic position?

However, Amanda Duthie has been removed from her position as Head of television comedy for her error of judgment, even though it is her judgments that have brought such glory - and audiences - to ABC viewing. To move her aside is to cast a chill over her, or whoever succeeds her in creative decision-making. The risks in taking an inventive decision will become too high to take.

Why not do what the ABC did in a situation at least as controversial in *Summer Heights High*?

It was not until three weeks into the popular 2007 series that the ABC realized "the extremely unfortunate co-incidence" that one of its characters had the same name, and some similar qualities, as a young woman, Annabel Catt, who had died of a drug overdose in February of that year.

The ABC admitted that it became aware of the horrible co-incidence eleven days after completion of the production, but that had been two years in the making and could not be changed.

As an illustration of the ABC's handling of a distressing situation, it is telling that, in its apology, the ABC acknowledged that "in hindsight, we feel that we should have alerted the Catt family to the situation in advance of the broadcast."

www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/media/s2042337.htm

All of which seems perfectly understandable: an admission that distress had been caused, an apology, an explanation for the show going ahead, and an acknowledgement that, in hindsight, the people who the ABC knew would be distressed should have been informed about the show before it went to air.

It is less understandable to move an executive sideways, unless blandness is what you understand as comedy.

The ABC should take to heart the comments made by a former ABC creative chief, Maurice Murphy, on the occasion of the ABC's 75th birthday celebrations in July 2007. *Sydney Morning Herald*, June30 -July 1 2007, p.13

He was writing about the development from a very English-oriented ABC television diet in the

60s to a new Australian sense of humour including *Aunty Jack* and *Norman Gunston* which he produced. Lamenting that after 51 years the ABC remains "BBC South" he went to ask:

"What will historians write about the ABC of 2007? It won't be the quiz clones, news or current affairs clones, the lack of drama, or the appallingly inept jtv. It will be The Chaser's War on Everything, the only original show on Australian TV".



Jill Greenwell
Vice-President Friends of the ABC (ACT & Region)



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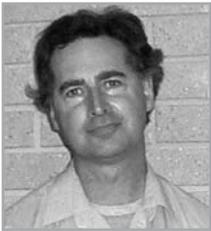
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www.friendsoftheabc.org.au

WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR FRIENDS OF THE ABC IN A MORE BENIGN CLIMATE?



Roger Raven, former WA FABC President, writes:

Howard Government hostility towards the ABC made the big issues quite simple. As the struggle over Board appointments has been won by FABCs, and the Rudd Government has none of the overt hostility of Howard et al, the topical issues have become less sharp and less simple. Now, the issue is more the challenges posed by the differences between the ABC as senior management is running it, and our ideal of the ABC as an excellent independent public broadcaster should be.

While all who want an dynamic and progressive support group for the ABC will be disappointed at the loss of the discussion list, I for one hope it may be resurrected at some stage, in some form. We are all well aware of the criticisms that could (sometimes fairly) be made of it, but such things are there to benefit the organisation, not individuals. Anyway, a big thank you to NSW FABC and Chris Cartledge for running it for so long.

Even funding is not the straight forward issue that it was - is the sort of ABC being created by Maurice Newman and Mark Scott the sort for which we can enthusiastically petition for more money?

I'd submit that the cumulative effect of most extra funding being tied is that the ABC's structure is now seriously distorted into an untied-funded portion that supplies the truly necessary and popular services, and the tied-funded portion for those bits of the ABC that return a political dividend to the government of the day. Untied general-purpose funding appears to comprise only about 10% of the last Budget increase.

While there is sometimes some overlap the result is not much improved. True, the last Budget "will provide the ABC with \$136.4 million in new funding over the next triennium to support the ABC's plans for an advertising-free, digital children's television channel and a significantly increased annual output of new Australian drama". But though welcome, the drama funding is not enough even to meet Labor's election commitment "to require ABC television meet the Australian drama production standards met by the commercial networks", since 120 hours per year of broadcast TV drama is required, but the funding is likely to provide 90. ABC3, the digital children's television channel, is an addition that will further stretch the ABC's support resources (yes, the backroom people – researchers, archivers, librarians, translators &c do matter), though welcome enough in itself. It is of course intended to assist the government's desire to increase the adoption of digital TV receivers.

There is plenty of material for sub-campaigns by FABCs:

- bias and self-censorship at the ABC
- opposing political pressure on the ABC
- pressing for the reintroduction of a staff-elected director. While the reintroduction of a staff-elected director was promised, when?
- opposing "contestable funding"
- reaching a position on a full or partial merger of ABC and SBS
- reaching a position on the ABC being flogged-off
- pursuing SBS issues to the extent that they are relevant to ABC issues
- campaign strategies
- examining the extent of excellence/quality at the ABC
- paid advertising on "non-core" ABC websites

- in-house versus out-house production (i.e. flogging-out), particularly TV
- fees for archival material
- policy on inter-FABC conflicts
- a supportive culture for effective campaigning
- pressuring the ABC to be open, including accepting legitimate FoI requests
- seeking more quality and depth at Radio National
- relatively low pay levels at the ABC compared to private broadcasters
- probing transmission and distribution costs and arrangements
- funding, both more and untied
- opposing media spin, sensationalism, and deceit

Some specialisation within and between FABCs would seem even more desirable than usual.

Very few of those can be successfully pursued by way of petitions, or by respectful murmurs from within the tent. Effective action will require discussion and planning and research, and a willingness to politely – but firmly! – disagree with senior ABC management, government, and non-government politicians.

Another good example is the Nolan approach to appointing directors. While it is a great improvement on the Howard approach, it does not – nor was it ever intended to – guarantee that we'd have no grounds for criticism or disagreement. But, again, whereas once sweeping criticism would suffice, now our criticisms will require more discussion and planning and research.

While "\$15.3 million to encourage and assist the development of user generated content and to establish community web sites and portals, creating 'virtual town squares' for communities to share experiences" is clearly useful, FABCs would seem

entitled to complain about the lack of extra funding for the ABC's mainstream services such as Radio National.

In that context, the NSW President noted, "There was no sign that the ABC will reverse the programming decisions recently made [to Radio National], and Mark was either unwilling or unable to react to our expressed concern that recent changes have provoked an unusually strong reaction amongst listeners, or that the ABC stands to gain from a more consultative approach." It is hard to avoid the conclusion that serious action will have to be visible.

It seems clear that Radio National is being cut both in funding and in status in comparison to the 24-hour-a-day newsroom approach. Quentin Dempster and others would seem correct to suggest that "Radio National listeners are now seen by management as split between those over 50 who listen to its content via broadcast radio ["radiophonic chin strokers"] and those under 50 who listen to podcasts and other online content - a brutal and imprecise way of looking at your audience".

Yet we would generally agree that Radio National is the jewel in the ABC's crown. Indeed, a funding campaign focussed specifically on Radio National would seem fully justified, given its neglect both by successive ABC

managements and by governments. In Howard-speak, and to some extent in Rudd-speak too, Radio National may be unpopular because it may be seen as "our enemies talking to our friends", but we need that sort of conversation much more than we need the mindless and empty (and voluminous) chattering of twitter or facebook.

Unfortunately, there is little to indicate that Mark Scott, Maurice Newman, or the Board value such an ideal. Indeed, the closure of Radio Eye and other programmes, the sale of ABC content, the advertising on ABC-associated websites, and talk (well before Murdoch's recent comments on news-articles-for fees) of charging fees for archive access, all suggest quite the opposite. Their focus on making the ABC more of a leader in technological change has real merit, but change for the sake of being the first to change has lost all sensible perspective. Their aim seems more to convert the ABC into another Murdoch media clone, with its technical "leadership" being more to ensure that the post of ABC MD remains the most prestigious in the Australian media.

Quality requires quality resources, quality people, and a management committed to quality. Both in its lack of any obvious scrutiny of the stories that come its way, and its trivialisation and

sensationalism, ABC News seems more and more like a centrefold Murdoch tabloid. It has also been said that "there are a lot of people now in particularly local radio, who've never had training as a journalist [but] who are asked to do interviews with politicians, [and] with various members of the community". Mark Scott has made it quite clear that there will be money for the new News facilities, but that Radio National and NewsRadio will have at best nothing more.

Indeed, as more production is flogged-out, and the ABC's output becomes higher in quantity and lower in quality, flogging it off becomes both easier and more attractive. Or Sydney Institute or the Institute of Public Affairs could put forward yet another voucher approach, in which ordinary people can be deluded that they have real choice, but the reality being that quality is ignored, profit is all that matters, and the consumer is left with choice - perhaps a wide choice - of equally bad services.

To answer my earlier question, the ABC indeed does seem to need a better direction. FABCs are relatively well-placed to provide it. So FABCs sometimes should not support what the ABC is doing, but push our own view of what an excellent and independent public broadcaster should do.



Notice of Annual General Meeting

10 October 2009

The Annual General Meeting of Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc. will be held at:

Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts
Level 1,
280 Pitt Street,
Sydney (Between Park and Bathurst Streets)

Saturday 10 October 2009,
commencing at 1.00 pm.



Our guest speaker will be **Jonathan Holmes**, prominent ABC presenter and current host of Mediawatch.

Following the address, which will be at 1.00 pm, the meeting will commence with presentation of reports, election of office bearers and general business. We expect the meeting to conclude by 4pm.

A better process, but what about the product?

Darce Cassidy

The new method of appointing staff to the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) boards is certainly more open and transparent. However this process, in itself, has not guaranteed good decisions.

The old appointment process was conducted in private - almost in secrecy. Vacancies were not advertised. No selection criteria were disclosed. If there was a selection committee that made recommendations to the minister its membership was not disclosed. There was a widespread perception that both Labor and Coalition governments had stacked the board with their supporters.

On the face of it the new process established by the Rudd government, as promised in the election campaign, is a great improvement on the old. Vacancies were advertised. A nomination panel was chosen consisting of Ric Smith AO PSM, Professor Allan Fels AO, Leneen Forde AC and David Gonski AC. The panel was well qualified and non-partisan. More than 300 expressions of interest were considered.

However, under the ABC Act members of the ABC board are required "to maintain the

independence and integrity of the Corporation".

Were the members of the selection panel aware for example, that as Acting Director of Corporate Relations at the ABC, Dr Julianne Schultz's was involved in a past attempt to tie the ABC into a strategic commercial alliance with Telstra - arguably Australia's largest, most powerful, and most aggressive communications organisation?

In recommending her appointment to the minister, were the nomination panel aware of the Senate inquiry into the ABC Telstra deal, and Dr Schultz's advocacy of the ABC relationship with Telstra at that inquiry?

Dr Schultz is a distinguished academic and is very highly regarded as the founding editor of the Griffith Review. She is also a former senior executive with the ABC. However in this role her advocacy of the Telstra alliance has been criticised by a fellow academic, by unions representing ABC staff, by former members of the ABC board, and by Friends of the ABC.

Fortunately the proposal was leaked before a contract between Telstra and the ABC could be signed. The Senate established an inquiry at which Schultz, as the main witness for the ABC, pursued the management position forcefully.

In a study of the evidence presented at the inquiry, published in the academic journal Human Relations, Dr André Spicer argued that the ABC-Telstra deal was an attempt "to shift the broadcaster's website from being a technology used to achieve public service goals to being a revenue generator".

A key part of the deal was for the ABC to provide news for display on Telstra's website, where it would be surrounded with advertising. In return the ABC would receive a substantial fee.

But the deal went well beyond simply supplying a news feed. It also potentially gave Telstra even more influence over the ABC than a commercial advertiser would have over a commercial broadcaster. The proposed agreement allowed Telstra to "consult" with the ABC about future content, co-productions and e-commerce ventures. In effect, Telstra could have input to the ABC editorial process (although the ABC would not have been legally bound to accept Telstra's suggestions).

The "terms sheet" made available to the Senate envisaged the ABC promoting Telstra's Easymail service and that wherever possible the ABC would use Telstra's broadband service as a back channel. The ABC and Telstra would be obliged to treat each other on a "most favoured nation" basis.

This caused distinguished investigative journalist and former ABC board member Quentin Dempster to describe the ABC-Telstra relationship as a "strategic alliance". He told the inquiry that this alliance involved the ABC:

...in a fully commercial business plan

*I'm proud to be Australian.
I'm proud of the ABC. I'm
proud of the 21st Century
Broadband we are bringing.*



*Now every Australian will
be able to enjoy podcasting
the quality TV content...*



*...we import
from Britain.*



with another operator and a delivery system. This arrangement will cause us all sorts of trouble with Optus, with any other player. I am basing this on my bitter experience being on the board of the ABC as we did a deal with Fairfax and Cox Communications for pay TV.

In evidence before the inquiry Schultz was unapologetic about the commercial thrust of the Telstra deal.

She told the hearing that it might be necessary to pursue an increasingly commercial approach that; "would involve a fundamental change in direction to move into a very commercial space where very large amounts of money are being spent at this stage for very little return but for great speculative gain."

Fortunately the deal was never

signed. The new ABC Managing Director Jonathan Shier killed it, not because it was too commercial, but because he thought the ABC was selling its content too cheaply.

Julianne Schultz is a very intelligent person. As she joins the ABC board we must hope that she has learned from her earlier experience.



A MOTHERHOOD STATEMENT AND A BOOBY PRIZE

How the public broadcasters each got its just deserts in the federal budget

Mark Scott made it difficult for the government to say no to the major part of the ABC's funding requests. The ABC's plans for a dedicated commercial-free children's TV channel amounted to a motherhood statement. The ABC was promising a channel that mothers (and fathers) could trust to entertain and educate their children without pushing junk food at them.

The budget provided the ABC with \$136.4 million in new funding over the next triennium to support the children's channel and significantly increased annual output of new Australian drama.

The ABC was also successful in getting funds to improve its regional services. After mothers and children, who is more deserving in the public mind than the battlers in the bush? The ABC will receive \$15.3 million over three years for the regional and rural broadband initiative. This will provide more than 50 enhanced ABC local broadband hubs in regional areas. The ABC will create community websites and portals and create online avenues for local communities to connect and collaborate.

There will also be an additional \$13.6 million over three years to help the ABC maintain its asset base.

In all, the ABC will receive an additional \$165.3 million over the triennium.

Meanwhile over at the SBS Managing Director Shaun Brown and his board were following in the footsteps of the discredited Sol Trujillo and the Telstra Board. Like Telstra the SBS board and management managed to antagonise both their customers (the viewers) and the government.

Thousands of viewers complained about Brown's decision to interrupt programs with advertisements. Senator Conroy, both in opposition and later as the Communications Minister also questioned the practice.

Pursuit of the advertising dollar also resulted in SBS TV moving away from its multicultural charter. Programs in languages other than English are being crowded out of prime time, while scarce funds have been directed to the underwhelming Australian version of the motoring program *Top Gear*.

The ABC based its funding bids on the concept of public service, and won first prize of \$165.3 million.

The SBS board and management acted like boobies, and received a booby prize of \$20 million.

This is a tragedy for the SBS, which despite recent shortcomings, is still a unique and valued organisation. Just as the Telstra board looks like it is re-evaluating the Trujillo years, so it is time for the SBS Board, which has just acquired two new members with impressive credentials, to review program output in the light of its public service obligations.

Darce Cassidy



Fight for the mixed model of TV production – the problem with ABC outsourcing production.

We hear claptrap from management about their willingness to make the best programs available. But when the best is inside the ABC, and program makers like Dr Richard Smith, the producer of *Crude*, are denied the opportunity of making programs why? Because ABC management has made it clear that it prefers to do business with the private sector (and let us stop this nonsense about calling it the 'independent' sector - independent of what?).

Lest this reply be taken as a blind defence of internal production, the CPSU acknowledges that some of the most imaginative program material on our screens comes from the private production sector and could not have been produced inside. That is in part caused by the ABC's need to secure additional sources of finance not available to internal producers. It is also because the internal workforce does not claim to have a monopoly over creative ideas.

The ABC works best as a mixed model ... where the best creative ideas get to our screens. The ABC can provide a 'safe port' for producers, a training ground for up and coming TV, feature film and on line workers, and opportunities to produce programs that are different from the commercials.

"But the production model now used is one sided; one that works to the disadvantage of the ABC, its audiences and the private sector producers."

Graeme Thomson CPSU



Branch News

Illawarra

Nick Rheinberger talks to the Illawarra Branch of FABC

On August 9, just over fifty members of the Friends gathered for a 9 a.m. breakfast at the Links Golf Course restaurant at Shell Cove, Illawarra. After a substantial and satisfying meal in very pleasant surroundings, we were addressed by Nick Rheinberger, a Presenter at our local ABC radio station, 97.3FM. Nick had braved the cold weather and an early start from the Southern Tablelands, where he lives, to arrive at Shell Cove in time to join us – a particularly noble act in view of the fact that, as he told us with considerable vehemence, he is temperamentally unsuited to early rising, despite his many years of presenting breakfast programmes. He began with some good news for Illawarra listeners. The ABC is about to get a new studio in Wollongong and staff are looking forward to moving from their current overcrowded quarters where the equipment is officially the oldest in the ABC. He pointed out that the potential listening audience in the region is officially 400,000 and that listeners tune into Illawarra radio from as far away as the Blue Mountains. There are also hopes that the new extended premises will lead to the appointment of more staff.

Nick, who has worked for many years as a comedy writer for Australian radio and TV, then gave us a highly entertaining account of the progress of his early career. His father, who worked as an auctioneer in Narrandera, provided such good comic patter that even people who had no interest in what was being auctioned came from far and wide to listen to him. Both of Nick's parents were keen amateur stage performers in musical shows regularly staged at Narrandera. When the family moved to Dubbo, Nick found the change of

school hard to cope with, particularly when the other kids dismissed him as a poofter because he obviously enjoyed talking to girls – a contradiction he found hard to get his head around! Even when he defeated the school bully in a fight by using a Judo throw, his victory didn't count because it was held he didn't fight fair. Only when he performed with great success as a comic character in a school play, was he finally accepted.



Dorothy Jones thanks Nick Rheinberger for a great talk.

At university, Nick took greater interest in writing and performing in student reviews than in his studies and eventually became a professional busker with a group of friends who called themselves the Pickled Herrings. His first radio job was as a comedy writer for the breakfast show at a Canberra radio station where he had to start work at 4.30 a.m. because his job required him to comb through the first edition of the daily newspapers for sources of comic comment. He then ended up in a variety of breakfast shows in different parts of the country writing comic material. He told us that writing is easy, it's the rewriting which is hard and he also explained how important an influence the American comedian Stan Freburg had been on his work.

He then began to play us a Freburg sketch which was a sendup of Dragnet, and when the tape recorder failed, Nick, like the trouper he is, completed the sketch for us himself. He then played some of his own very funny sketches. One, which is now banned from the ABC, advertised a car alarm where the deterrence signal took the form of extracts from commentary by a well-known sports commentator. Nick was told the ABC had barely averted legal action over this! One truly brilliant sketch took the form of a fake promo for a dramatization of Lady Chatterly's Lover which would supposedly be played on ABC radio. The extract contained in the promo designed to entice listeners featured Geraldine Doogue as Lady Chatterly and Peter Cundall as the gamekeeper, Mellors. It was wonderfully funny!

We are very grateful to Nick for coming to talk to us and making our social gathering such a success.

Dorothy Jones

Blue Mountains

REPORT ON BLUE MOUNTAINS FORUM

On Sunday July 26th, over 250 people attended the 2009 Forum organized by the Friends of the ABC, Blue Mountains branch at Wentworth Falls School of Arts. It was a great occasion for all stakeholders in the ABC to have direct access and hear from their Managing Director, Mark Scott and two very prominent media personalities, Annabel Crabb and Quentin Dempster on the Digital Revolution, its perils and payoffs for the ABC. Everyone has an interest in the ABC either as a listener or a tax payer and this was an opportunity for everyone to listen and question ABC management and media personalities about this topic.

Mark Scott assured the audience that the ABC had approached the government before the last budget as a confident, innovative organization who could help deliver solutions to some government problems especially those related to greater children's programming; increasing the content standards of Australian drama and as the broadband revolution approached, help the delivery of

media throughout rural and regional Australia. Scott emphasized that the money available must go towards worthy content so that any 'razor gangs' of the future will be unlikely to cut the levels of budget allocation to the ABC because of its excellent standards. He stressed the excitement of the digital radio with its crystal quality of sound and ability for extra broadcasting in the same bandwidth. Scott mentioned the crisis engulfing



Annabel Crabb

traditional news outlets globally as newspapers and their audiences are moving online. This is increasing the importance of ABC radio journalists as

commercial radio gave away news journalists years ago.

Annabel Crabb picked up the point of newspapers' demise and referred to herself as a representative of a dying branch of the media. She stressed the problems of the 24 hour news services with could lead to lazy journalism exaggerating the significance of the items they are reporting to fill the excess space available without investigating the merits of what is being reported. She feels this could lead to a generation of cowards in politics who are afraid to express their opinions or emotions as they are immediately reported to the world. There is a challenge for journalists to give deeper thought in their coverage of politician's comments.

Quentin Dempster reiterated Mark Scott's point that if the digital revolution is used to increase the quality and Australian content of the ABC's programming this will definitely deter any future downsizing of the national broadcaster. He is confident the digital revolution will increase the quality of regional and rural broadcasters and that the dramas being produced will be edgier and more confronting. He stressed that the creative independence of the ABC is so important as is the training of young broadcasters and the diversity of content. He repeated many times that critical analysis is the most important role of journalists but it must be even-handed to prevent

accusations of bias in relaying information.

The audience then asked many probing questions and we were assured that the production of many ABC programmes in conjunction with other companies will enable it to draw on a lot more talent and allow a lot more flexibility.

There is an exciting era of interactivity ahead of us due to the digital revolution and this should enable us to become more, rather than less, critical of the information being presented to us.

Look out for future events organized by the Blue Mountains branch of the Friends of the ABC in our area.

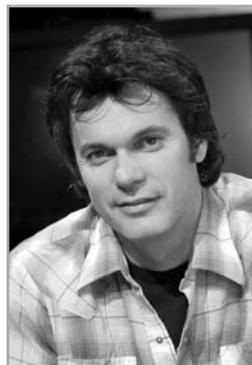
Pam Fitzpatrick

Central Coast

Mark Scott's positive assessment of the Federal government's funding for the ABC seems to have quenched the FABC fire in the belly for the time being.

Some discussion in our branch has been around the value of having a second TV station that may consume funds that might be better spent on programs and Australian content for ABC1.

Members have taken part in the forum on the media organised by the Community Network Unit of the Gosford Uniting Church, titled "Does the 'tale' wag the dog?" These forums which include a variety of topics, give the opportunity to show the FABC flag and gain two or three new members. On 2 August we organised an information table at the local "Footprint Festival" which created some interest, but we will have to



Steve Cannane

wait to see if the membership forms taken, become new members.

We are looking forward to an Evening with Steve Cannane on Friday 21

August. Steve is presently presenting the five part series on ABC 1 titled "Whatever!The Science of Teens." While this program may not be a big drawcard for some of our older members, we are hoping to attract a younger audience as well.

John Hale

Cowper

As all seems quiet on the ABC front of late, no political parties attacking, no attacks from within management of the ABC, no staff attacking management, except the Chasers War on attacking its feet....it has been a good time to contemplate all things ABC. Our committee has come to the conclusion that the good ship ABC is in calm waters and sailing well!

June saw Cowper Branch hold its A.G.M., which was well attended, with all committee positions filled.

This year we turned to our 'Local ABC' for our guest speaker. We asked Helen Merckell who is journalist in charge of news for the Mid North Coast region to speak to us about her very interesting life, how the news is gathered and put to air.

Before joining the ABC, Helen spent many years overseas in south east Asia, Japan, India, Africa the United



Jane McLeod talking to Helen Merckell

States and Latin America. Because she spent some years at school in Spain as a child, Helen is fluent in Spanish and spent much of her time in central America working with films and television news crews covering the political upheavals in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.

When she first joined ABC Radio, she was a casual reporter, attached to the Kempsey newsroom by phone, typewriter and fax. However, after putting the case to management that



Tony Waugh (President) talking to Dina Wallbank after the AGM.

Coffs Harbour warranted a high profile presence, the ABC built a state-of-the-art studio in the city's CBD. Recently, March this year, saw this studio go under water in Coffs Harbours devastating floods, causing hundreds of thousand dollars in damage.

Helen said that, as a radio journalist she is trained to present the news in 15, 30, or 60 second grabs and thought it was going to be a problem speaking for over a half an hour. As you can see from above she had no problem. A wonderful, informative and interesting talk.

Martin Miller

Northern Rivers

Over the past decade, the Northern Rivers branch of the Friends of the ABC has been a strong supporter of the Byron Bay Writers festival. At the most recent festival in the first weekend of August, ABC identities such as Kerry O'Brien, Michael Cathcart, Jane Hutchin and Elly Varrenti made substantial contributions to the program. On site also were Geoffery Robertson, Tim Bowden and Robert Dessaix – all of whom are well known to ABC viewers and listeners. ABC North Coast had a



Kerry O'Brien and Geoffery Robertson at the Byron Bay Writers Festival.

live broadcast from the festival on Friday 7 August.

The Northern Rivers branch has helped to organize two Living Connections seminars in Tweed Heads and Lismore in recent months. These seminars have featured panels of people from diverse backgrounds exploring the ways in which their personal beliefs have developed and how those beliefs provide a connection with the local environment and community. The aim is to generate discussion of



Rabbi Serebryanski talks to Bunjalung Elder Dorothy Gordon at the Tweed Heads Living Connections Seminar.

philosophical, scientific and theological ideas at a local level. The seminars are linked to the local ABC web site. To access the Living Connections group discussions go to "Contribute" on local ABC web sites. Contributions from people in other branches are welcome. In the future there are plans to hold similar seminars in Byron Bay and Grafton.

At a brief AGM on 13 August existing members of the executive were elected for another term. Branch president Neville Jennings is keen to hear from any supporters in the Northern Rivers region who would like to join the branch executive.

Neville Jennings - President

Armidale

SBS newsreader, journalist and author, Anton Enus, is visiting Armidale in early September at the invitation of the local FABC group. It is cooperating with the Faculty of Arts at the University of New England and with TAFE to have Anton share his expertise and enthusiasm with their students. Anton will give a public lecture in the Arts Theatre on the evening of Thursday 3rd September

and a seminar for media students on the following morning. An SBS officer is organising most of publicity and the regional ABC station is assisting, not least by broadcasting an interview with Anton. It was thought appropriate to invite Anton as this year's speaker in view of the relationship between the two public broadcasters and the group's concern for both. Moreover, Anton came to a neighbouring village a few years ago as its Australia Day ambassador. There he met Friends' current president, a fellow émigré from Southern Africa, who has been keen that more people could learn of his experiences and charm.

The mention of Armidale often evokes comments from outsiders on its cold climate – an impression that ABC weather forecasts and reports can reinforce. Certainly it was a chilly morning that the committee set up its stand at a late April monthly market. Its banner, 'join the Friends of the ABC', evoked much warm discussion, the recruitment of 17 new members and a number of renewals. Perhaps the bright sunshine and brilliant autumn colours played their part.

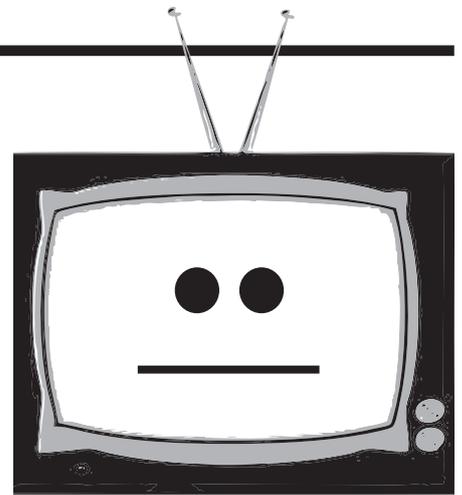
The Armidale and surrounding communities have been generous in supporting FABC's fundraising functions. This enabled the group in November last year to hold a film evening at which Julie Rigg was a speaker and through which \$1000 was raised in support of the annual International Film Festival. Friends are pleased to report that, on the weekend of July 31st-August 2nd, 13 movies were shown to packed houses. Organiser of the festival were also grateful to regional radio based in Tamworth for the superb publicity which it gave in the weeks prior to the festival.

In the spirit of such cooperation FABC(Armidale) wants to donate funds to the municipal library for the purchase of ABC books, CDs and DVDs. First it is seeking the approval of its members. The conditions for the gift would be that the library buy direct from the ABC, that each item displays an acknowledgement of donor, and that media publicity be given to FABC for the donation.

Priscilla Connor



Too much screen time blanding us down?



We welcome the ABC's proposal to provide a dedicated Children's Channel, ABC3, to be launched later in 2009 which we understand will cater for teenagers as well as toddlers and inbetween. But can children have too much television?

The eminent British brain scientist Susan Greenfield told ABC Television's Kerry O'Brien the other day that six hours or so a day with a computer can effectively disenfranchise you from the real world. Greenfield, who heads the Centre for the Science of the Mind at Oxford University, was talking predominantly about young people and social networking sites. But it doesn't require lurid imagination to transfer many of her warnings across the wider computer-dominated society.

What Greenfield, 58, told The 7.30 Report was, in truth, fairly alarming. To paraphrase, she believes an over-reliance on computer communication can prevent users from developing a sense of the abstract and from understanding a metaphor. She fears it diminishes attention spans and cramps and limits a normal development of the imagination. And she draws a connecting line between what she calls "the screen culture" and heady increases in attention deficit disorders.

She feared a generation might be coming along that was all but unable to handle face-to-face communication, that could not deal with non-screen realities. She seemed to be saying a screen culture was quietly evolving a bland, virtual reality existence, one that could come to be as controlling as any totalitarian regime. The screen culture was embedding a "distanced and remote" personality type that precluded confrontation and interaction.

This latter, Greenfield hinted, was the core problem. She told O'Brien that without the occasional argument or row, without seeing someone upset or in tears, a generation would come to inhabit "a sanitised world where no

one is hurt, where everything is just a game, where everything is reversible, a bit like cartoon characters".

She went on: "I remember when I was a kid watching Popeye (the popular television cartoon sailor character). He used to be steamrolled over into two dimensions. But he'd jump up again in the next frame."

O'Brien ignored Greenfield's advice, declining to argue and opting to let her run. It was an absorbing interview and as it progressed the scribe found himself recalling that superb Peter Sellers film, *Being There*.

Some may remember the main character, Chauncey Gardiner, had led an extremely secluded life, an existence totally dominated by television. When he met someone he didn't like he'd try to flick them away via his remote control. He'd come to believe he could alter his environment and circumstances simply by changing channels

One of the few organisations in this country to specialise in what technology and its ancillary toys and devices do to young minds is the Adelaide-based Australian Council on Children and the Media, formerly known as Young Media Australia.

The council, alerted to some of Greenfield's research by an article in this journal in the middle of last year, asked Greenfield to be a council patron, an invitation Greenfield has accepted.

Barbara Biggins, a senior council figure for many years and now its honorary chief executive, collects every available scrap of international research relevant to Greenfield's studies and has as yet found no reason to disagree with the Oxford luminary.

Biggins would like to forge ahead with some Australian research but, as has been the case for many years, is hamstrung by lack of financial resources. Regularly bailed out by kind hearts in the Rann state Government and by the occasional project grant from Canberra, the council goes from year to year without an assured funding source. Thus can Biggins lean towards the trenchant about both the Rudd federal Government and John Howard's previous administration.

"Australian governments have been extremely slow in this area," Biggins says. "They've done very little. In fact, this country is still only beginning to evaluate the psychological impact of violent computer games. The nub of this problem is that many parents find the screen culture very convenient. They're stressed and busy, so they sit toddlers in front of a television. Later, they're happy to see them in front of a computer for hours. But governments owe it to parents to make them aware of the consequences."

Greenfield may have tapped into something quite crucial. It's difficult to say and, oddly, that may always be the case. Because by the time the full consequences of a screen culture are evident, Greenfield, Biggins, the scribe and O'Brien may well have departed to another place.

Who'll be left to make the generational comparisons?

Errol Simper

The Australian, 30 March 2009.

If you would like to know more about ACCM go to their website

www.youngmedia.org.au

email: admin@youngmedia.org.au



“Please keep broadcasting.”

It was a simple phone text message, but the desperation behind it was palpable. “We are trying to listen to you online but are having difficulty. Please keep broadcasting. You are all we have.” The cry of help, sent to the ABC last week, highlights the anguish within FIJI as the military government extends its grip on power while going to extraordinary lengths to deny its citizens access to information about its activities.

The abrupt switch off of the Radio Australia transmitters in Suva and Nadi by Fijian police came hours after ABC Pacific correspondent Sean Dorney was ordered out of the country. Combined, the two events represent a dark day for journalism and for democracy in the Pacific. They pose challenges for the Australian Government and for the ABC in the complicated new world of international diplomacy.

Dorney has been reporting on the region for over three decades. His authority and knowledge is built around a commitment to tell all sides of a story with a passion and affection for Pacific communities and their cultural richness and abundant potential. Radio Australia has been part of the strong tradition of Fijian independent journalism for seventy years. Seven decades of reporting on the achievements and challenges of the Fijian nation with a commitment to be fair and accurate.

It is too easy to shrug the shoulders and dismiss the pall of repression in Fiji as a sadly, all-too common consequence of Pacific political instability. These developments go to the heart of Australia’s regional interests. Our aspiration is for our neighbours to prosper in societies built on openness, fairness and opportunity for all. When independent scrutiny of government is thrown aside, we all suffer.

In international affairs, where words can be bullets, there is a growing appreciation of the role of “soft diplomacy” – using subtle methods such as the sharing of perspectives to deliver policy

objectives. It is not widely known how aggressively other countries, including our partners in the G20, are investing in international broadcasting as a principal tool of soft diplomacy. And how far behind Australia lags in this new race for influence.

The British spend \$868 million on international radio and television; the French \$618 million; the Germans \$532 million; and the Chinese about \$380 million. All this is government investment in international broadcasting. In Australia, we currently invest \$34 million in Radio Australia and Australia Network television. The ABC has long argued that we extract the maximum possible efficiencies from this outlay, delivering “good bang for our buck”. Out of this small sum, we broadcast on radio in seven regional languages and reach 44 nations in Asia and the Pacific on Australia Network.

the ABC serves as a trusted primary source of information

But the ABC – and Australia – risk getting drowned in the growing proliferation of broadcast voices. The Japanese, the Russians and the Germans have recently announced plans for new English television services in Asia and the Pacific.

The easy call, particularly in a tough global economic environment, is to sit back and do nothing. We do not have that luxury. The ABC’s regional footprint cannot be replicated. This is our neighbourhood.

We are not London or Bonn calling. We have a critical interest in climate change in the Pacific and the strong development of Pacific governments, business and society-all nurtured and nourished by a vibrant independent media. Every day Radio Australia broadcasts for several hours on Pacific affairs (Pacific Beat and In the Loop). Every week Australian Network

television airs content that identifies the aspirations and celebrates the achievements of Pacific communities (Pacific Pulse). We are committed to Pacific regional co-operation with ABC International Projects partnering with AusAID and national media to strengthen broadcast capacity in Papua New Guinea, the Solomons and Vanuatu and throughout the Pacific. In order to strengthen our focus we have established in Melbourne the Asia Pacific News Centre with 60 journalists covering the region on international radio, television and online.

In Asia, particularly in the burgeoning new markets of China and India, the ABC is committed to extending its presence. The international service is valued for the quality and accuracy of its news and current affairs reporting. Our audiences tell us that when big news event break in the region, the ABC serves as a trusted primary source of information. But the value is also in the underlying message conveyed by our programming to areas like Fiji where democracy can be a very fragile concept. Here, we have a very robust democratic model, where views and policies are debated and analysed energetically on programs like Q&A, Insiders, Lateline and Jim Middleton’s News Hour.

The federal Government is aware of our views on these issues. The ABC has argued strongly that the solution does not lie in outsourcing our diplomacy to commercial interests, as has been argued by one of our media rivals. We also believe the time is right for a bigger and bolder vision. With the value of old-order global institutions increasingly questioned, new bodies like the G20 3 have given Australia an opportunity to display leadership on issues ranging from financial regulation to Clean Coal. But we cannot afford to neglect the new tool in the diplomatic kitbag –the power of broadcasting. Just ask the poor text messenger in Fiji.

*By ABC Managing Director Mark Scott
SMH 20 April 2009.*



Nothing quite as it seems with News and ABC International

Canberra correspondent Bernard Keane writes:

Most of us never see it, but taxpayers pay \$20m a year for the ABC to provide an international television service. It's not part of the ABC's core functions, but is provided on contract with funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Now, the service had a tangled history under the Howard Government -- but not necessarily in the way you might expect.

The Howard Government's 1996-97 funding cuts savaged both Radio Australia and the subsidies paid to support the ABC international television service established by David Hill. The TV service was taken over by Kerry Stokes in 1998, with subsidised programming from the ABC. But in 2000, Stokes had had enough. He told Howard he was dumping the service.

At that point Alexander Downer intervened. Downer had been unhappy with the cuts to Radio Australia and wanted to restore Australia's broadcasting presence in the region. Downer successfully pushed for some additional funding for Radio Australia - not much, but enough to revive it from near-death -- and funding for a new television service, to be tendered by his Department. Broadcasting guru Malcolm Long was brought on board to advise DFAT. The tender drew an intriguing array of would-be broadcasters, including David Hill who led a private bid. Seven and the ABC initially declined to participate, until Jonathan Shier was encouraged by the Government to join in. The ABC's bid subsequently won a heavily-vetted assessment process, and the Government reluctantly signed up, agreeing to the ABC's demands for editorial independence.

Fast forward to 2005. The new ABC service has been running for four years of its five-year contract. It is expecting the contract to be renewed, by Sky News has other ideas. Led by part-owner News Ltd, Sky News tells the Government it could do a far

better job and that it should replace the ABC in running the service. Then News Ltd Corporate Development manager Malcolm Colless gets involved lobbying Cabinet ministers. The Government decides to conduct another tender process for a second five-year contract.

This was portrayed by some at the time as Sky News attempting to exploit the Howard Government's hatred of the ABC to get access to the \$18m-odd pa funding. That was probably accurate but it missed the point that the Government was perfectly entitled to re-tender for the service, and taxpayers in fact should have expected nothing less given it was their money. The only problem was whether, as many in the ABC expected, the Government was simply using the tender process as cover for making the switch to Sky.

If that was the case, Cabinet didn't count on DFAT. DFAT hired a consultant to revise the tenders terms and advertised it, then conducted the assessment process. The ABC had submitted a clearly superior bid, DFAT concluded in its advice to Cabinet. DFAT's case was rock solid, and, however grumpily, Cabinet endorsed its conclusions. The ABC was renewed for another five years, for \$20m a year, although the Government agreed with the consultant's suggestion that the name be changed so that "ABC" wasn't mentioned.

One of the problems with Sky's bid, apparently, was that it would have relied on existing News Ltd satellite distribution arrangements in the region. The ABC already had a head-start on them there, having spent several years negotiating rebroadcast arrangements in SE Asia and India, led by the late John Doherty, who impressed even Downer with his leadership of the new service. The ABC had been stymied for a long time in getting access to China because the Chinese insisted that access be somehow made reciprocal for its own CCTV services. The Chinese Government appeared not to

understand that the Australian Government couldn't demand that broadcasters run individual channels.

All that should be borne in mind when Malcolm Colless attacks the current ABC service, as he did late last year. Colless, it seems, hasn't gotten over losing, and blames the "precious egos" at DFAT.

Now we're having the preliminary rounds for the next iteration, with Angelos Frangopoulos and Mark Scott squaring off over the next tender for the service in 2010.

Keep an eye on The Australian's coverage of this. Last time around the Sky News bid was supported by anti-ABC stories and op-Ed pieces. As the national broadsheet, The Oz thinks foreign policy is its patch, and the idea that a non-News entity, and worse yet the ABC, is a major player in that space galls them.

Sky News argued in 2005 that the ABC service lacked sufficient news and current affairs content, although that missed the point that the service was not intended to be news and current affairs only, but also project images of Australia via drama, documentaries and sport. Moreover, the region is already served by dozens of news, current affairs and business channels, and the ABC's \$20m pa effort is unlikely to compete with the big international players.

Radio Australia, which has greater population reach via radio (both shortwave and rebroadcasting) and is an institution in the Pacific in particular, might actually provide greater soft-power benefits than just another TV service in the clutter of channels available on satellite.

This is something friends should be vigilant about, and lobby to see that News Ltd does not get the contract. The news that comes out of Australia to the world and in particular S.E. Asia and the Pacific should be unbiased and the truth. 95% of Australians trust the ABC.

Martin Miller - Cowper Branch



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National Web Portal
links to all State Branches.

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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.

First Name _____ Last Name _____ Email: _____
(Please Print)

Partner
First Name _____ Last Name _____ Email: _____

Address _____ Suburb _____ P/Code _____

Phone (Home) _____ (Work) _____ Mob _____

I would like to join I would like to renew Membership No. _____

Age Group 30 or under 31-50 51+

I would like to receive my copy of
Update Magazine electronically.

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

	1yr.	3yrs.
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$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 people)	\$60	-
<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to make a donation	\$ _____	
Total \$	_____	

I am paying by cheque in favour of FABC (NSW) Inc.

visa mastercard money order

Card Number _____

Name on credit card _____

Expiry date _____

Cardholders Signature _____

Date _____