

UPDATE

incorporating

Background Briefing

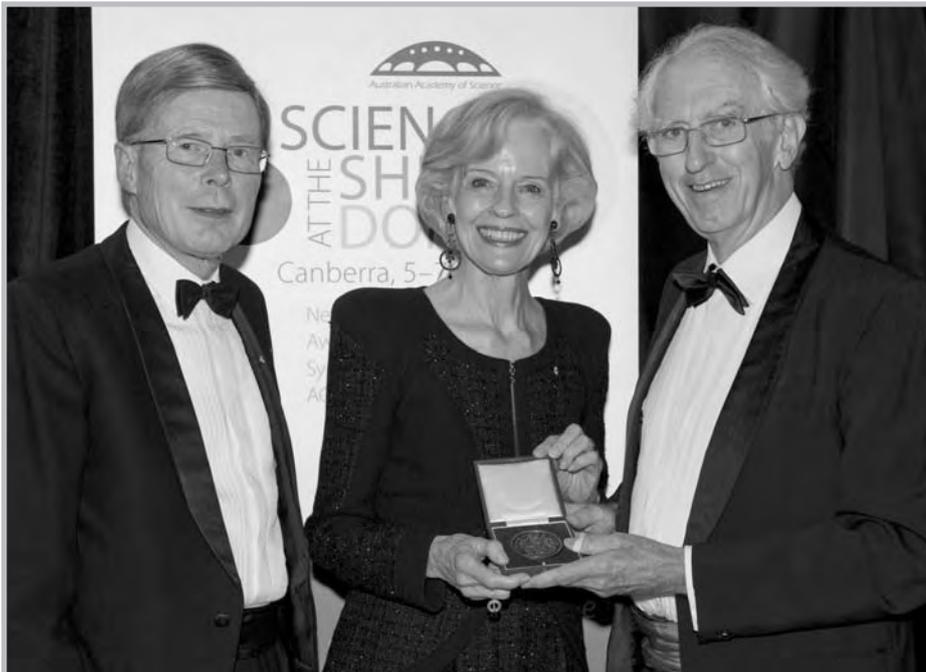
Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.
quarterly newsletter

June 2010
Vol 18, No.2

friends of the abc

RECOGNITION for an ABC SCIENCE BROADCASTING PIONEER

by Robyn Williams



Prof Kurt Lambeck, President, Australian Academy of Science, Governor General Quentin Bryce, Peter Pockley.

There are rarely true 'firsts'. Neil Armstrong was first to set foot on the moon (as far as we can tell!); Mark Oliphant was the first President of our Academy of Science and Suzanne Cory is the first woman to be so elected – even so late as 2010!

Peter Pockley was not exactly the first science broadcaster of any

consequence in Australia, but he has been, in all likelihood, the greatest pioneer. Crosbie Morrison, the natural historian, presented many programs before and after World War Two for what was then The Australian Broadcasting Commission. Julius Sumner Miller was a famous, finger-wagging, starry-eyed performer of

'Why Is It So?' segments on ABC TV in the 60s and 70s, his furious eyebrows being almost as disconcerting as his Yankee accent. But both were unashamedly didactic teachers on air. Peter did something quite different. He established science journalism, the need to cover *all* aspects of scientific research, invariably with a proper infusion of showbiz.

I first met him in March 1972. I had been sent over by Humphrey Fisher, who then ran TV Features at the ABC – including some of its science. Peter was in his fourth floor office at the top of William Street in Sydney, within the pink limits of the King's Cross Red Light District. After hours a flamboyant line of hookers and trannies did business outside the building. There was a car showroom on the ground floor. By contrast Peter

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Update Publication Information

Update is published four times a year by Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc. (FABC), PO Box 1391 NORTH SYDNEY 2059.

Printpost approved PP245059/00002

To become a member phone (02) 9990 0600 or email to fabcmem@fabcnsw.org.au or access our website www.fabcnsw.org.au.

Extracts from newspapers and other publications appearing in Update do not necessarily reflect the views of the members of FABC.

Update is distributed to all members of FABC, as part of the membership fee. Update is also supplied to journalists, politicians and libraries across Australia. It is edited and produced in Sydney but contributions are welcome from NSW country and interstate branches.

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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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From The President



Friends of the ABC warmly congratulates pioneering science broadcaster Peter Pockley on the high honour bestowed on him recently by the Australian Academy of Science – the award of its medal. Robyn Williams, current writer and presenter of The Science Show has written a wonderful tribute to Peter and the vital work that he did in placing the ABC Science Unit at the forefront of science broadcasting throughout the world, and we are reminded of his memorable live broadcast in 1969 of the first landing on the moon. The Governor General, Quentin Bryce, presented Peter with his medal, and spoke of the pivotal role that he played in educating us all about science.

THE CHALLENGE OF BALANCED REPORTING of the ISRAELI/PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Joan Michie, a former editor of "News and Views", the predecessor of Update, has expressed her concern at the inadequacies of the process whereby complaints against the ABC's coverage of a particular issue are investigated by the Independent Complaints Review Panel (see her letter in the March Update.) Joan's original complaint concerned lack of balance in the ABC's coverage of the Gaza conflict in December 2008/January 2009, mainly the failure to adequately cover the Palestinian viewpoint. The full text of the I.C.R.P. report may be found on the FABC website, along with Joan Michie's reply. A perusal of this correspondence does suggest that the process is unsatisfactory in its current form, and rather substantiates Joan's concern.

Andrew Pike, Managing Director of Ronin Films, an Australian company based in Canberra, writes in this edition of Update of the withdrawal by the ABC of a formal offer to acquire and (presumably) broadcast a documentary about the Palestinian situation, "Hope in a Slingshot". Andrew puts a very strong case that

the documentary is pro-peace rather than pro-Palestinian, taking testimony from Israelis and Palestinians expressing their hopes and aspirations for peace in the region. My inquiry to Mark Scott for further information produced the following reply from Michael Millett, ABC Communications Director:

"I am able to confirm that ABC TV was uneasy with the partisan nature of the documentary, and its inability at that time to find something to counterbalance (see Editorial Policy – The ABC is committed to impartiality and must demonstrate this through the presentation of a diversity of perspectives. This requires a diversity of perspectives to be demonstrated across a network or platform by providing content of a similar type and weight in an appropriate time-frame.) ABC TV is now reviewing the initial rejection to see whether it can find something to air as a counter balance."

There is no doubt that the Israeli government has an array of well-trained spokespersons, and unlimited resources, instantly available to put the Israeli government point of view on any matter. I write this late on the night we learned of the Israeli army attack, in international waters, on the relief convoy taking food medical supplies to Gaza. Predictably, there was the well-prepared Israeli Government representative putting their version of events to Kerry O'Brien on the 7.30 Report, but where was the interview with a spokesperson for the other side? It was surely a situation which demanded that we hear both sides, and absurd to imagine that such a representative could not have been found.

It was Joan Michie's complaint regarding coverage of the Gaza conflict that too often we only heard the Israeli point of view. Roger Raven, reporting elsewhere in this Update, refers to the 2006 study of the BBC's Middle-Eastern coverage – "it had a pro-Israeli bias, partly because it was naturally easier to get interviews and moving pictures

from the dominant side; indeed the BBC later did a secret deal with Israel for access in return for BBC compliance with Israeli censorship." We would like to think that our national broadcaster took a more balanced approach than the BBC, but I think that the jury is still out on that!

ANOTHER BLUE MOUNTAINS FABC FORUM

I urge all FABC members to cancel any previous commitments on Sunday 27th June, and make your way to Wentworth Falls School of Arts, where the incredibly energetic Blue Mountains Branch is holding another of their wonderful winter forums on the topic "The ABC's Role in Australia's Governance." These annual events in the mountains attract some fascinating speakers, and the 2010 Forum is no exception – Pru Goward, Robert Manne and Kerry Chikarovski will discuss the topic, and

answer questions from the audience. Always entertaining and informative, you are treated to a sumptuous afternoon tea as well. Further details may be found in the advertisement in this edition of Update.

MARK SCOTT REPLIES

The ABC Managing Director has written a wide-ranging reply to many of the questions and criticisms on recent ABC decisions and directions which have been expressed in Update and the opinion pages of the daily press. Mark makes the strong point that the ABC is not a niche broadcaster – quite clearly its charter is to serve the whole population of Australia, in all its social and geographic diversity. Whilst agreeing to differ with the Managing Director on a number of issues (including the axing of The Religion Report!), NSW Friends of the ABC acknowledges that the ABC has a passionate and powerful advocate in Mark Scott,

whether talking to government, the broader community, media rivals or the international community, and we appreciate that he has taken the time to contribute to the debate in Update.

As the Federal Government lurches towards another election, it is clear that the National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill is going nowhere, although this is more the fault of the Opposition and Senator Fielding than Mr. Rudd's Labor Government. Should the government retain power and control the Senate (even with the help of the Greens), we will have the long-awaited change to the method of appointing the ABC Board, and the restoration of the staff-elected director. Should Mr. Rudd lose, there is little hope of this reform ever taking place. Consider that as you consider which party will receive your vote.

Mal Hewitt
FABC NSW President 

FRIENDS OF THE ABC – BLUE MOUNTAINS

SPEAKERS' FORUM

FOLLOWED BY AFTERNOON TEA

The ABC's Role in Australia's Governance



2PM SUNDAY JUNE 27
AT THE SCHOOL OF ARTS,
WENTWORTH FALLS

Speakers:

Pru Goward – Liberal MP for Goulburn

Robert Manne – Professor of Political Science, La Trobe University

Kerry Chikarovski – Director, Infrastructure and Planning Australia Pty Ltd

Compere: Neil Inall OAM

Tickets (\$15.00 each) are available for purchase at Megalong Books (Leura), The Turning Page (Springwood) and Glee Books (Blackheath)

Or contact: Bob Macadam 4754 1620
Warren Nicholls 4739 3185

Audience participation and discussion will be encouraged

Letter to the Editor

Re. ABC Chairman – letting the global warming sceptics have their say.

I have been following both the science and the politics of global warming for over 30 years. The problem is that, like most of the Australian population, the majority of ABC journalists are not experts on the science. The so-called sceptics who challenge the peer-reviewed science are therefore not properly questioned when giving interviews. Much of the information provided by the skeptics is, when examined in detail, found to be either contradictory, based in misinformation or a manipulation of the peer-reviewed data.

How can it be possible that anybody can believe that the sceptics are not getting airplay? When the sceptics speak out, it is front page. When their data is put to the test and found to be incorrect, it is on page 7 or not mentioned. This is not a tirade against the ABC not getting it right on an issue. It is about the principles by which the ABC is governed.

Obviously, not everyone can be a scientific expert. I find it hard to forgive the Chairman of the Board, not because he does not understand the debate better than the average Australian or journalist, but because he did not do his homework before speaking out. What he is really saying is: ignore the facts, ignore the true debate, and dumb down the ABC. That I cannot forgive, and Mr. Newman is not worthy to continue in his position as Chairman. He is guilty of playing hard politics when he is supposed to be exemplary in his neutrality.

Gus Sharpe
Murrumbateman, NSW 

RECOGNITION for an ABC SCIENCE BROADCASTING PIONEER

continued from page 1.

Pockley was the embodiment of Oxonian elegance, dark-eyed (as the newspapers duly noted) and wearing kit that nicely registered his history half-way between the quad and the smoother parts of the BBC. He had been trained at the Beeb on his way home from a job teaching chemistry at a posh school in England.

I wrongly inferred a privileged upbringing – Geelong Grammar, Melbourne U. and Balliol. He was a scholarship lad and had earned his every step along the way. Unlike so many of the languid toffs I had known at the BBC, this was not a fellow who assumed any divine rights. But Peter did, and always has, made it his business to keep in contact with the higher echelons of the professions and government. Perhaps that is why he is always so immediately suspicious of interlopers and spivs.

The ABC Science Unit I discovered in 1972, which he had established in 1964, was packed with brains. The Executive Producer was John Challis, with his PhD from the Vatican and a charmingly adroit way of cutting through sloppy thinking. Robin Hughes was there (Margaret Throsby's sister-in-law), the youngest producer ever hired by BBC Third Programme and who would go on to run Film Australia and the Film and Television School. Max Bourke had just left the Unit to join CSIRO, and was soon to become adviser to the first Minister for Science, Bill Morrison – and then CEO of The Australia Council. Michael Daley was there, a New Zealander of robust flair and formidable drinking habits (he'd make Christopher Hitchens look ascetic!) whose journalism set standards internationally.

Peter knew that great radio and TV

departments, like leading science outfits, are founded on top minds and creativity. In Bill Gates's words: you hire the best you can find and let them do what they want. This is always tricky with Head Office. Mutterings about "smartarses" and "who do they think they are?" came from the more sporty or rural traditions of Broadcast House. Peter Pockley was gone soon after I settled in. This was the early 1970s.



Peter Pockley receives the Australian Academy of Science's Medal from the Governor General.

He went to The University of NSW, then found a spot at UTS to set up a fore-runner of what is now the resoundingly successful Australian Science Media Centre in Adelaide – run by the very person, Susannah Elliott, he appointed back then to help him – then started to write for what became the Australasian Science Magazine, as well as doing many reports for ABC Radio.

It was during this latter period that Peter gave some of the newer faces on the science scene a hard time, not least those astonishingly well-endowed spruikers at CSIRO whose background in the cigarette industry perplexed many of us. He was utterly unrelenting, and, ultimately, successful in seeing them off.

He has now also built up a formidable archive of recorded biographical interviews with leading researchers for the National Library, providing a record of achievement for all Australians to consult.

On presenting Peter Pockley with the Academy's medal the Governor General, Quentin Bryce, spoke of his

record in setting up a special Science Unit in the ABC and for doing those thrillingly evocative broadcasts in 1969 as Armstrong and Aldrin walked on the moon.

Why have a specialist unit? Because there are so many topics which elude the mainline news and current affairs programs – there is more to science than dinosaur finds, cancer ‘breakthroughs’ and space disasters. Non specialists also tend to over-emphasise the information fix and ‘debate’ elements. The more you are familiar with scientific ideas the more you know how to dispense with the techno-chat and the false dichotomies. There are few leading scientists who really think HIV isn’t connected to AIDS or who question the main findings on climate change. Science Units are also able to mount intriguing specials on topics you never dreamt might be worth your time: one of the first Peter had me helping to edit was a feature by him recorded in PNG; another was on the biology of coral reefs.

Peter also insisted we go beyond the standard confines of our home highbrow network and even of regular programs. In May 1972 one of my first tasks was to build up research and then help with broadcasts around Apollo 16 (then, later, the last Apollo mission, No. 17, in December) when we went to air at all times of day and night on ABC metro stations breaking into regular shows with live updates, exchanging excited chat with DJs and chat shows as if it were the most natural thing in the world. We even mounted the ABC’s first phone-ins. Peter’s remit: have mike, will travel; in science there are no limits, in radio or TV – or, especially, culturally.

That set of definitions, way back then, have been the basis for ABC Science ever since. This was not a boffiny enclave handing out privileged info de haute en bas. It was a testing ground and melting pot for all manner of enterprising broadcasters from Matt Peacock and Ramona Koval to Richard Aedy and Kirsten Garrett. It enabled hundreds of those outside the ABC to present shows, from the legendary Dr Earle Hackett (who became chairman of the ABC, no less), to Peter Mason, Frank Talbot, Mac Burnet, Gus Nossal, Fiona Stanley and Derek Denton.

It set up links to sister organisations all over the world which we still enjoy today. This is something Peter Pockley pioneered, when it really mattered, nearly fifty years ago.

He may be someone who will never write a single page memo when

twenty pages will do; nor take issue with one villain when they may all be vanquished. But his record and commitment to science has been unswerving. Hence, one of the Australian Academy of Science’s highest honours, its medal – is so thoroughly deserved.

Peter Pockley's description of the first moon landing

ABC Science Show, 8th May 2010

Peter Pockley was founding head of ABC Science in the 1960s and early 1970s. In fact he pulled the strings to create The Science Show and ABC Radio National's Science Unit. In July 1969 Peter was commentator and radio host bringing description of the first lunar landing to Australian radio listeners. The Australian Academy of Science awarded Peter the Academy Medal in 2010 which acknowledges an outstanding contribution to science by means other than the conduct of scientific research.

Robyn Williams: So do you think the Moon landings were also faked? Peter Pockley doesn't. And, as the Governor General said at the start of this program, it was Peter's broadcasts at the time, 40 years ago, that made the landing so compelling. He won the Medal of the Australian Academy of Science this week, congratulations again. And also heartfelt thanks for Frank Meany for our recordings of the Academy celebrations in Canberra on Thursday. Production for this Science Show by Charlie McCune and David Fisher. And this is how Peter Pockley described the Moon landings way back then:

Peter Pockley: There's some movement now occurring, some movement of Armstrong.

NASA transmission, Houston: Okay Neil, we can see you coming down the ladder now.

Peter Pockley: He's moving down the ladder. His face onto the ladder.

Neil Armstrong: Okay. I just checked getting back up to that first step. It didn't collapse too far. But it's

adequate to get back up. It's a pretty good little jump.

Peter Pockley: He's checking his step, checking his balance on the step, moving down slowly and steadily. Martin Royal has joined us for this description of the space walk.

Neil Armstrong: I'm at the foot of the ladder. The LM foot beds are only depressed in the surface about one or two inches, although the surface appears to be very, very fine-grained as you get close to it. It's almost like a powder. It's very fine.

Martin Royal: We can certainly see one of the lunar boots moving downwards, just how far down it's not quite apparent. How many steps are there, Peter?

Peter Pockley: I think there are nine steps, I think he takes 11 movements altogether before actually stepping on the lunar soil. There's the boot again, waving out in space as he feels around awkwardly. One hand on the ladder...

Neil Armstrong: It's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.

Peter Pockley: One small step for man, Armstrong says.

Neil Armstrong: The surface is fine and powdery, I can kick it up loosely with my toe.

Martin Royal: He's got a foot on the powder.

Peter Pockley: Neil Armstrong...

Neil Armstrong: ...adheres in fine layers, like powdered charcoal, to the sole and sides of my boot.

Peter Pockley: Neil Armstrong has set foot on the Moon.



ABC TV CANCELS PLANS TO BROADCAST DOCUMENTARY ON THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

The ABC has withdrawn a formal offer it made to Ronin Films to acquire a documentary called HOPE IN A SLINGSHOT, by Australian filmmaker, Inka Stafrace. The offer was accepted by Ronin, but was later cancelled by the ABC on the grounds that the documentary was, in the words of the Head of Television, Kim Dalton, “an opinion program” about a “contentious” subject and that it conflicted with the ABC’s policy of “impartiality”, as required by Clause 6.6.3 of the ABC’s Editorial Policy. Dalton stated that the ABC was unable to find another program that balanced the views expressed in the film.

This cancellation is of concern for several reasons. The film is an exploration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and makes a pro-peace statement, strongly and refreshingly expressed. It is personally narrated by the filmmaker and she shares her experiences within the conflict zone. The film was independently produced and self-funded, although small amounts of marketing money were donated by both the Jewish and Palestinian communities in Australia.

The film focuses on the details, particularly the human costs, of the occupation of Palestine by Israel. It is not a case against Israel, the Israeli people or the Jewish community. The bulk of the film expresses the thoughts of human rights activists (both Israeli and Palestinian) who live in the region as they discuss the realities of the situation in the West Bank.



Left: Inka Stafrace, Director and Producer.
Right: Andrew Pike, Director of Ronin Films.

The ABC’s policy, as stated by Kim Dalton, suggests that a pro-war film would need to be presented to balance this pro-peace film, but such a policy would logically require a pro-government film to be shown every time any film about revolutionaries is aired. The call for balance defies logic

and contradicts the ABC’s own routine programming decisions.

Israeli military objectives routinely dominate our mainstream mass media coverage of the conflict. Yet, in the words of the filmmaker, Inka Stafrace, “If any article or news grab of violence in the region fails to mention the occupation, it is fundamentally un-balanced”. The Palestinians have only limited independent media access to the West, unlike the powerful influence of the Israeli government’s press office. The very showing of HOPE IN A SLINGSHOT would provide an opportunity to contribute to the “balancing” of dominant media reports on the conflict in this country.

The film has received many expressions of support. Dr Jake Lynch, Director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney, and a member of the Advisory Board of the Sydney Peace Foundation, makes the following comment: HOPE IN A SLINGSHOT is “extremely impressive. ... A signal contribution to peaceful media representation of this conflict”.

The Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) have prepared a study guide for HOPE IN A SLINGSHOT, intended for use in secondary schools. This guide provides further opportunity for the issues raised by the film to be discussed and analysed.

Clearly the ABC is afraid of some form of political repercussion if it were to show HOPE IN A SLINGSHOT. The cancellation of the broadcast

highlights the need to have a national television network which is truly independent in terms of its editorial content. Whether the ABC's fear of backlash is a threat coming from government or from the community, our national broadcaster should not be subject to intimidation of this nature.

Senior management should be able to stand by the decisions of qualified and experienced ABC staff who are making informed assessments of programs offered to them. It also seems that it would be good business practice for senior management to honour agreements made by their staff in the course of the professional conduct of their work.

Interestingly, while the free expression of political opinion (such as anti-war arguments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) seem to be inhibited in ABC television, the same constraints do not seem to apply to radio: a pro-peace programme recently aired on ABC's Radio National.

Finally, it should be noted that "balance" is an inherently problematic concept. "Balance" implies that there are only two sides to any story, yet in the case of the complicated Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there are infinitely more viewpoints than just two.

What we need from our national broadcaster are programs that fearlessly challenge and provoke debate. The ABC's policy of maintaining "balance" on "contentious" issues runs the risk of halting dialogue and censoring innovative points of view rather than stimulating them, as it so clearly has done with HOPE IN A SLINGSHOT. The Australian public should have access to the film. Our understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict calls for the film to be shown.

Dr Andrew Pike, OAM

Director, Ronin Films

24 May 2010

Note: DVDs of HOPE IN A SLINGSHOT are available from Ronin Films
(www.roninfilms.com.au)



HAS THE ABC'S SUCCESS PUT IT IN DANGER?



Darce Cassidy

Back in 1998 Australian media academic Jock Given wrote in his book *The Death of Broadcasting – Media's Digital Future:*

No one talks much of the death of Australian commercial broadcasting at the moment ... If there is a discourse of death it is the ABC's, hammered by funding cuts and limited additional funds for the transition to digital broadcasting.

How things have changed in twelve years. Both the BBC and the ABC have made the new digital media work for them, not against them. Now the complaint is that the public broadcasters, particularly the ABC and the BBC, are too successful. There is now a concerted campaign, spearheaded internationally by the Murdoch press, and backed up in Australia by the Fairfax/Rural Press group, to cut public broadcasting back.

This could be a dangerous time for the ABC and the BBC. Both have worked well to integrate the old technologies of radio and television with the new digital technologies. They have been so successful with this that the commercial sector is starting to blame public broadcasting for its own failures. However the problems of commercial broadcasters are mostly due to the breakdown of the mass advertising model.

Have the two Marks (Mark Scott of the ABC and Mark Thompson of the BBC) been too expansionist? In challenging the dominance of the commercial media, have they stuck their necks out too far?

Certainly Mark Thompson has recently become more cautious, and has scaled back some of the BBC's expansion plans. Mark Scott, on the other hand, is pushing ahead, particularly with his efforts to secure the contract for the international news channel for the ABC.

The self-interest of the commercial broadcasters in attempting to diminish the BBC and the ABC is obvious. It is hard to believe Greg Baxter, corporate affairs spokesman for News Ltd in Australia when he says "I can't remember us ever arguing about [ABC] funding." Sir Keith Murdoch (Rupert's father) ran a successful campaign to persuade the Menzies government to cut the ABC budget by 16% and fought long and hard to prevent the ABC running a news service that might compete with his newspapers.

Has the ABC
(and most of the
rest of the media)
been putting less
resources into
investigative
journalism?

While the motives of the commercial media are clear, and their sincerity suspect, a legitimate question remains -is Mark Scott in danger of stretching the ABC's limited resources too far?

continued overleaf...

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The ABC not only has new digital TV channels, and new digital radio networks (so far simply simulcasting the AM and FM services) but it is also expanding its services to regional radio audiences. Much of this has come without additional funding.

In the news and current affairs area how much effort is going into the fundamentals (finding things out) and how much effort is going into “re-purposing” – re-working the same information for a different medium (radio, television, internet), but without adding substantially to the content?

Has the ABC (and most of the rest of the media) been putting less resources into investigative journalism? Has the breadth of the ABC’s output has been growing, while its depth has been shrinking? It is hard to find firm evidence, but it seems to me that there is less real investigative journalism.

Two recent programs lead me to think that the ABC is starting to take this criticism on board.

The first is Kerry O’Brien’s well researched and tightly argued interviews with Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbot. I’ve not seen him do better. It was a model of how the ABC should hold politicians up to scrutiny in an election year.

The second is the collaboration between the ABC and the Age on the Securancy bribery scandal covered by Four Corners. Many other media outlets gave this story cursory treatment. Both government and opposition seemed happy to brush things under the carpet. However the ABC and the Age, by pooling resources, produced some very effective investigative journalism. The trick will be to maintain the standard set recently by Kerry O’Brien and Four Corners.

However the ABC faces other challenges than the need to pursue stories in depth. Breadth also remains a necessity. 

Lessons from the



Roger Raven, Former President, WA FABC, has just returned from the UK, and provides the following comments on the recent BBC experience, relating it to our own public broadcaster.



Since the BBC was the model for the ABC, this article is about BBC developments in the context of implications for Our ABC. Indeed,

the BBC and Our ABC seem to share many challenges, funding, bias, populism, role, management issues, independence, and atomisation of the media and of the audience being some. But as with the ABC, its mission remains to inform, educate and entertain.

One of the BBC’s strengths was observed by Donald McDonald (previous ABC Chair) to be that

“ ... [the BBC], by our standards, is rich beyond the dreams of avarice. To serve a population 3 times ours, the BBC has nearly eleven times our funding. It can afford to take Mr Murdoch and all comers head on. We can’t, and nobody wants us to.”

In 2008-09, the BBC earned roughly £4,606 million (\$8,080 million at May ’10 exchange rates), 75% of which was from the annually increasing licence fee. For the ABC in 2008-09, the total appropriation was \$1,082 million.

However, the BBC, too, has its problems. Though there was little doubt that the BBC would be able to have its Charter extended to 2016,

some big changes occurred.

BBC Governors were replaced by a BBC Trust to which is subordinated an Executive Board. It decided to close some programmes and deliberately withdraw from some areas of legitimate public broadcasting. Powerful British political forces, such as the Tories backed by Murdoch and others, seek to build on those successes to further degrade the BBC.

Indeed, the BBC managing director criticised the ABC managing director’s view that a public broadcaster should not be expected to prop up failing corporate models – which shows the BBC does know the ABC exists.

Both assure all and sundry that they are focussed on delivering better value for money, on news and children’s programmes, about harnessing technology to creativity, talent to new ideas, workplace flexibility, etc. Certainly they are typically leaders in the new media technologies.

Both are committed in effect to flogging-out and to a lesser degree flogging-off, even though doing so consistently means higher cost and lower quality.

Both are well aware of the need to keep public support, and frequently quote from favourable ratings surveys. It is also a protection against their frequent reviews. Typically being to serve political or populist pressures of the day, each review is carried out as though their many predecessors had never been.

Both tend to be defensive regarding accusations of bias, not so much on the merits, but because powerful groups use even the most threadbare accusation of bias for political attacks designed not to end bias but to ensure bias in their favour. In 2004, the BBC faced the 2004 Hutton Report, of which David Marr wrote:

“A great cloud hangs over public broadcasting in Britain since Lord Hutton's trial and sentencing of the BBC. Yet for the journalist at the centre of the fuss, Andrew Gilligan, it's been a great week, as more evidence emerged that his story [accusing the Blair government of knowing the pre-Iraq-invasion “intelligence” was dodgy] was essentially correct.”

In the same year, and for the same political reasons, the then Minister for Communications Senator Alston launched his 68 (some were dropped, others added) complaints, of which David Marr said:

“I've had to read a stack of ABA reports in the three years I've been presenting Media Watch but this is probably the silliest so far. It's a not a bad result for Richard Alston. Sure, two thirds of his dossier has now been rejected a third time, but after all these months of investigation by God knows how many lawyers and officials, he's managed to score 24 hits on the ABC. But ... Not for the first time in our experience, the ABA has shown it doesn't really know how journalism works.”

While the BBC now claims to want to be the best media source in the world, the 2006 study into the impartiality of the BBC's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict found that it had a pro-Israeli bias, partly because it was naturally easier to get interviews and moving pictures from the dominant side; indeed, the BBC later did a secret deal with Israel for

access in return for BBC compliance with Israeli censorship, rather like many Australian media organisations do with the police. Indeed, the BBC has so far spent £200,000 to suppress the apparently similar Balen report of 2004. A 2006 report by Media Tenor examined the TV coverage of the pre-Iraq-invasion period of 2003 by some of the world's leading broadcasters. The most biased was the BBC, which gave just 2% of its coverage to opposition views - views that represented the majority of the British people.

Both are doing better than those media supported fully or in part by advertising. Here, the Minister recently saw the need to make a gift of more than \$200 million in licence fee rebates over three years for the commercial TV networks. Naturally there was no such untied funding for the ABC.

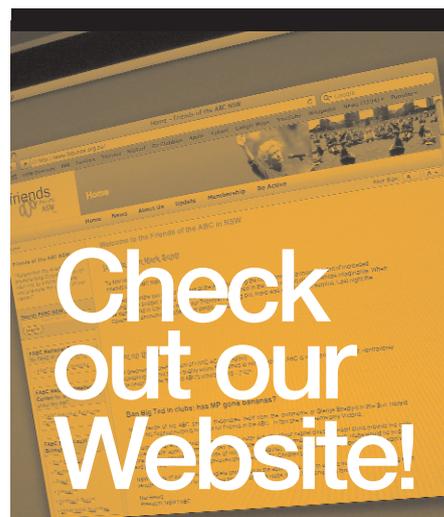
In some respects the BBC seems to have been less successful in handling these challenges than the ABC; to reply to the snippet from Donald McDonald, the BBC might be able to take on the likes of Rupert, but it (meaning its most senior management) doesn't want to. Instead of a politically driven dismemberment, the ABC's Board structure has been substantially depoliticised. Unlike Tony Blair, Senator Conroy is at least officially and for the moment defending our public broadcaster against self-interested attack. Successive ABC MDs advertising of their willingness to prostitute the ABC have – for now – been reasonably successful, without abnormal damage to the ABC.

No doubt we can expect the ABC to pursue a BBC3 (apparently a youth oriented realism TV channel with an idealistic tinge, to keep hold of those who lacking a TARDIS to escape Childrens' BBC TV).

Much of the ABC's good journalism is due to what former ABC Board Member, IPA supporter, and Murdoch columnist Janet Albrechtsen would call “staff-capture”. We have the staff rather than the most senior management to thank for what is usually good, and occasionally truly excellent,

journalism at Our ABC. Recall (the current Chairman) Newman's and (current managing director) Scott's tantrums and vindictiveness over the Chaser issue, and Newman's championing of the global warming skeptics – Newman was reportedly (and rightly) censured by several staff. There is very little good science on the side of the global warming skeptics, but much political power.

So there remains a need for organisations like VLV in Britain and the Friends here to campaign for our ideal of an excellent and independent public broadcaster. That, for FABCs, is a more complex and less glamorous task than when we were dealing with ideological zealots. “Getting more members”, for instance, is a useless exercise unless doing so increases FABC assertiveness. The article above is intended to take us a little further that way.



- Want information on the latest issues?
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Go to:

www.fabcnsw.org.au

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www.friendsoftheabc.org.au

NEWS FOR PARROTS

Darce Cassidy



Good evening. Here is the news for parrots. No parrots were involved in an accident on the M1 today, when a lorry carrying high-octane fuel was in a collision with a bollard – that is a BOLLARD and not a PARROT.

A spokesman for parrots said he was glad no parrots were involved. The Minister of Technology (photo of minister with parrot on his shoulder) today met the three Russian leaders (cut to photograph of Brezhnev, Podgomy and Kosygin all in a group and each with a parrot on his shoulder) to discuss a \$4 million airline deal(cut back to narrator) None of them went in the cage, or swung on the little wooden trapeze, or ate any of the nice millet seed yum, yum. That's the end of the news.

Monty Pythons Flying Circus Episode 20.

As the ABC introduces additional radio and TV channels and additional Internet services, without a corresponding increase in budget there is a danger that quality will be diluted, breadth will be preferred to depth.

It is not just a matter of the Internet making so many channels available, but new digital radio and digital television channels look like they will add further to the fragmentation of audiences.

The dilemma for public broadcasters like the ABC is whether to be a specialist broadcaster, a generalist broadcaster, or try to be both.

British anthropologist Professor

Georgina Born, the author of *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC*, in conversation with Gerald Tooth on Radio National's Media Report, explained the critical role of public service broadcasters in the development of public opinion in the U.K:

... really, until the advent of national radio in the '20s and growing into the 'thirties, there is no such thing as a national public, and no such thing as a national culture to speak of. There were various sorts of bands of elite publics [or sub-cultures], and there was of course a growing labour movement and working class identity. But the creation of this pan-class, truly national body of opinion, depended on broadcasting's arrival. It's a very powerful argument, and I think its intimate links with the growth of mass democracy and universal suffrage are crucial.

While the BBC, and the ABC, have played a key role in establishing a universal public sphere that is necessary for effective democracy, their representation of the national culture has often been, in Georgina Born's words "flattening, monolithic and homogeneous". National broadcasters need to be "responsive to new groups in society, to the diversity, the heterogeneity, to multiculturalism, to indigenous peoples' voices and so on"

However Professor Born was critical of some Australian academics who she said had over emphasised the need to represent diversity to the point that

fragmentation of audiences was in danger of threatening the need for unification.

We need a universal public system because it mirrors our political system, the Federal political system. We need a space in which all those micro publics can talk to the majority, and the majority can be expected to listen. And only mass channels provide that kind of universal space, not that for example the newspaper market is more and more segmented as well.

Put simply, while specialist services for sub-cultures – parrots, stamp collectors or cricket fanatics- are important, so is a national forum in which we can all take part.

Ken Inglis, in the second volume of his history of the ABC, made a similar point:

All in all it is likely that viewers and listeners in the digital age will become even more reliant on public broadcasters for electronic representation of their nation's character, and the human condition. ...There is plenty of life yet in the adage about the ABC and its equivalents elsewhere, that they address their audiences as citizens, not consumers.

That is why it is important that Mark Scott pursues his aim for the ABC to be a town square where not only are all welcome, but also where all are comfortable. 

Narrator: And while that's going on, here is the news for gibbons. No gibbons were involved today in an accident on the M1...

ABC gets into bed with Fairfax ... and news is the winner

Margaret Simons writes:

Crikey 25 May 2010

Australian Wheat Board, Four Corners, Securency International, The Age



Once, journalists guarded their stories fiercely, and the idea of competing with another media outlet, let alone doing a joint operation, would have

been anathema. Things have changed.

Yesterday, last night and this morning we are seeing the results of an investigative story conducted as a joint operation between The Age and the ABC's Four Corners. It is a ripping yarn about an arm of the Reserve Bank, the polymer note manufacturer Securency International.

The scandal was described with some justice on last night's Four Corners as potentially Australia's most serious case of corruption since the Australian Wheat Board affair.

So how does such a story come to be researched as a joint venture by Fairfax and the ABC? And in a time of stressed newsrooms and editorial budgets, are we likely to see more of this?

Perhaps. In this case, the joint venture is the result of a particular set of personal relationships, brokered and facilitated by key executives in both media organisations, who clearly have the worth of the journalism as a central motivation.

The lead reporter on the case is Nick McKenzie, formerly of the ABC and now working for The Age, but retaining all his ABC contacts. McKenzie has taken unpaid leave from The Age to fill in at Four Corners on a couple of occasions in recent years.

The joint project was brokered by McKenzie, but made possible through the co-operation of Age senior deputy editor Mark Baker, and like-minded people at the ABC.

McKenzie and Age reporter Richard Baker have been chipping away at Securency for more than a year, and

while they have had some impact, as McKenzie himself said to me yesterday, "it was nothing compared to the media fest that began yesterday morning, when the ABC began to use its cross media resources to promote the in depth Four Corners investigation".

The Securency story is also part of a shift at the ABC. I have been among those who have previously accused the national broadcaster of not breaking enough stories. One of the replies coming from within the organisation has been that the Auntie does break stories, but that it hasn't been good enough at acknowledging that across the organisation, and using its resources to cross promote and follow up.

So is this the way of the future? McKenzie thinks it might be. The internet has altered the news cycle, he says, meaning that gaining audience and impact is more important than keeping a scoop to yourself.

"The speed of the news cycle means that an exclusive is only exclusive for about three seconds now," he says.

With ABC budgets tight, and newspapers effectively fighting for their lives, joint ventures can be one way of getting important journalism done, and out there.

But the arrangements depend on similar editorial cultures, relationships of trust between individual reporters



"I work for '4 Corners'. It comes with the job."

This is part of the larger story of an organisation often at war with itself, with almost as many factions as there are microphones. In recent months, there has been a concerted effort to break down those walls and act strategically to maximise the effect of breaking news.

So it was that yesterday morning ABC listeners woke to news bulletins that effectively previewed the Four Corners scoop. Opening Fairfax newspapers, they then read even more on the story. Four Corners screened, and then today Fairfax newspapers have followed up.

As a result a story previously confined to one media organisation is now a top story throughout the nation.

across organisations, and the good will and public spiritedness of media executives.

This time, it all came together. Now even News Limited, which previously ran dead on the issue, is on to the story. It can no longer be ignored, and will not go away until questions are answered and allegations investigated.

News organisations are becoming more porous, it seems. And getting the news out there can be a matter of collaboration -- with colleagues and with the audience -- as much as competition.

Interesting times.



MARK SCOTT RESPONDS to the ABC's Critics.

The Managing Director of the ABC has provided Update with the following article, which is based on his recent address to the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association in South Africa.

There's been vigorous debate recently about the role of the ABC – particularly around our latest innovations such as ABC3, ABC Open and ABC News 24.

I see this debate as an acknowledgement of how important the ABC is to Australia's cultural and civic life. Inevitably of course, some of our critics have either misunderstood or misrepresented our motives.

However I'm in no doubt that the ABC is, in all its new activities, acting just as the public broadcaster should - in the interests of the public.

Friends of the ABC are likely to be far more familiar with the ABC Act and the Charter than most. The Act places certain obligations upon us, and they are particularly relevant to the digital age.

Among them is a demand that we be innovative, and that we ensure we're providing maximum benefit to the Australian people.

Every move the ABC makes is checked against these founding documents, to ensure that we are meeting the responsibilities they impose both in letter and in spirit. We do not expand for expansion's sake.

And I'm proud to see how well the ABC is living up to the Charter and the Act, and that we see these obligations as opportunities to build an ABC that's going to remain absolutely integral to Australian life in the future.

I was invited to speak about this at

the recent Commonwealth Broadcasting Association Conference.

As I indicated in that speech, the lightning speed with which new technology is being developed and adopted, the flow-on effects of changing consumer behaviour and expectations and disruptions to the business models for delivery news, information and entertainment are presenting the ABC with big challenges.

Change that would once have occurred within the span of a generation is now experienced in the space of a few years.

The argument seems to be because Pay offers specialist content, the ABC should not. The logical conclusion to this would be the ABC's exclusion from television altogether.

This environment makes us seriously consider what we are delivering and how we deliver it. As public broadcasters reliant on the trust and financial support of the public, we look at what services we are uniquely positioned to provide, what our place in the marketplace is and how we ourselves must change in response to changes that are all around us.

From time to time in Australia there is debate about the ABC's need to be fair, balanced and impartial. Well, when considering the role of the ABC in Australian life, I am firmly a conservative. At the same time,

looking to the future for the public broadcaster, I am a liberal, a progressive.

Being both conservative and progressive means there's equal opportunity for criticism from both sides. If it seems like a contradiction, it's one that will enable the ABC to prosper and survive. As Tancredi said in The Leopard "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change."

Let me explain why I am a conservative on some matters involving the ABC. The Charter and Act that came with the transformation of the ABC into a Corporation in 1983 set out a number of principles that govern our operations.

Considering these were enacted a year before the birth of the inventor of Facebook, those principles remain remarkably robust and relevant to this digital era.

Let me highlight three key principles derived from that enabling legislation that are driving strategy for the future of the ABC.

The first principle is that the ABC is not a niche broadcaster. The Charter asks that we provide content of wide appeal and content that is specialist in nature.

Consequently, we look to engage not only with small communities of interest but to also bring the nation together around content that will generate critical mass.

So ratings do matter to us, but they are not the only thing that matters. In the heart of prime time, we deliver programs on science and religion, arts programs, specialist documentaries, serious news and analysis that would never get a run on commercial free-to-air television.

We have a radio network, Radio National, which devotes most of its airtime to specialist content.

The ABC's strength then, as now, came from the diversity of content - both specialist and of wide appeal.

Some of our TV programs can attract 25 percent of the free-to-air audience. Others struggle for a quarter of that. Our Local Radio network can generate four times the audience of some of our specialist radio networks.

But together, side-by-side, these constitute a strong and credible ABC experience that both meets audience needs and has significant impact on Australian thinking, imagination and culture.

By being a broadcaster for all Australians and part of the experience of all Australians, a connection with the Australian people has been created and it has continued across generations. This connection has been key to our ongoing financial support from Canberra.

It means that on content such as news and current affairs, like our popular authentically local radio network, the ABC has become a place where Australians come together to listen to one another, to assess and discuss the great issues of the day.

A shared space for the nation. A commons in an increasingly fragmented world.

Whether popular or specialist, what the ABC delivers is trusted, distinctive and of quality. And Australians turn to the ABC confident that they will find content that embodies these values, that has passed the test of quality and distinctiveness.

The second principle from the ABC Charter that guides us is that the ABC should, when making content decisions, take account of what is being offered by commercial and community broadcasters. As you can see, there's a direct link to the first principle about widely appealing and specialist content.

There are now new and extreme pressures on commercial media, and because there are, it's been suggested that certain markets today should be serviced exclusively by commercial broadcasters with neither contribution nor competition from the public broadcaster. Australian civic and

cultural life would be poorer for this.

James Murdoch in last year's MacTaggart lecture gave us News Corporation's Head Office view on this. Attacking the BBC, Mr Murdoch said public sector broadcasters should vacate key areas of service to let the market be satisfied by private sector corporations.

Naturally, there have been echoes and minor variations on that line from

In looking for answers, it's important to hold tight to what is working, what has delivered and continues to deliver.

some of News Corporations branch offices and investments in Australia - particularly the pay-TV sector.

They argued against the ABC offering a children's channel because Pay offers channels for children. They argued against an ABC news channel because Pay offers news channels.

The argument seems to be because Pay offers specialist content, the ABC should not. The logical conclusion to this would be the ABC's exclusion from television altogether. Leaving it to the market to provide.

This is a wilful misreading of the ABC's Charter obligation to take account of what is being offered in the market.

Taking account of the commercial sector does not mean the ABC must avoid any activity a commercial player is providing.

And it never has. The ABC has delivered quality news on television for more than 50 years. Every free-to-air television network has offered news. None of these free-to-air networks suggested that news be limited to commercial providers, that the ABC not deliver nightly news simply because they could deliver it. The consensus was that the best result for the public would, in fact, come from both.

In looking at new services, we need always to consider the distinctiveness of what we provide, how we can meet

audience needs, and whether it represents a good investment of taxpayers' money.

With the possible exception of financial journalism, investment in quality news - international, investigative, detailed analytical reporting - has always been subsidised.

Through classified advertising, or benevolent proprietors, or funding through public broadcasting - valued services the market cannot support directly on its own, have nevertheless been provided.

The cross-subsidy of quality Murdoch publications like The Times of London and The Australian has been well-documented.

In an Australian context, the demise of most of the long-time media barons and family ownership structures around media organisations has inevitably led commercial broadcasters to first reduce the priority given to, and then reduce investment in, serious news and current affairs.

The evidence is strongest in radio and in regional areas, but also in the major television networks.

If the product doesn't deliver profits, commercial investors must first slash costs, then investment, then simply walk away. They carry no overarching commitment to journalism as a public good, as something inherently necessary in a society with responsible government and accountable public and private institutions. Their brief is to maximise the return to shareholders. That is their responsibility and our systems of corporate governance and accountability would not have it any other way.

But now, after years of commercial market cuts to investment in news and current affairs, we're in a good position to appreciate the wisdom of a continuing public investment in the ABC's news service.

Our strategy is built upon a third principle as well which, like the Charter, derives from the ABC Act. And that principle is the Board's duty to ensure the ABC provides the maximum benefit to the Australian people on the public investment in the ABC.

continued overleaf...

... continued from previous page.

Our new news channel, ABC News 24, will do just that.

The biggest cost in creating a news channel is in the reporting teams on the ground. We have that – nearly 1000 journalists working locally, nationally and internationally.

I suspect we have more people working in our international bureaux than all other Australian media outlets combined.

Teams in 60 local radio stations around the country. A News radio station. Big capital city news rooms. Vast experience.

And, by implementing new technology and work processes, we have made significant savings in our television production model – and are therefore able to redirect this operational money to fund the channel.

So for no additional call on taxpayers, we will deliver this important new service free-of-charge, available to every Australian home.

Those who said it was scandalous that the ABC would create a digital children's TVchannel with additional public funds then said it was scandalous that the ABC would create a news channel without additional public funds. Critics like these are difficult to please.

But for the Board, the ABC's News channel is a clear example of how, by leveraging off current spending and expertise built up over decades and through hard work and internal reinvestment, the ABC will deliver maximum benefit to the Australian public.

By adherence to these guiding principles, enshrined in our Charter and our Act, we continue to serve the Australian public well and ensure the ABC remains an important, credible and connected part of the Australian media landscape.

These are demanding times. There are countless new pressures on media organisations every day.

Understandably, those in the media

who have been long accustomed to the good years of sustained economic and sectoral growth are finding the lean years particularly difficult. Yet, the answers to these challenges will be equally difficult.

James Murdoch's proposal – that when commercial media are in trouble, public media should be shut out – comes dressed as a solution, an easy answer. Yet it's an answer that is in the interests only of his shareholders, rather than the interests of our owners, the Australian people. As Adam Smith would say, in this case the private corporation's shareholder interests are "in some respects different from, and even opposite to, that of the public."

In looking for answers, it's important to hold tight to what is working, what has delivered and continues to deliver. To what has been valued in the past and may have an even more important role in the future.

It is why I am happy to debate the role of the ABC. It's why so many Australians will fight hard to defend it, protect it and secure its future. 

BranchNews

Illawarra

ABC's Role as Emergency Broadcaster

In mid May 2010 about forty members of the Illawarra Branch of the Friends met for morning tea and an address by Peter Riley, Breakfast Show presenter and Team Leader of ABC Radio Illawarra 97.3FM.

Peter has had a key roll in the ABC Radio's Emergency Broadcasting service. Increasingly, the ABC is being called upon during public emergencies such as flood and bushfire to provide a vital communication link between the State Emergency Service and police and the people living in the affected area.

This role was demonstrated very recently (26 May 2010) when 130 homes were evacuated during violent weather on the South Coast of NSW at Bulli. There was the potential for a dam left over from a disused coal mine bursting and flooding the houses downstream. During the afternoon and into the early evening ABC Illawarra broadcast warning and details of the two evacuations centres



Dr Dorothy Jones thanks the ABC's Peter Riley.

setup. They were then on standby for a repeat of the weather forecast for the following weekend and into the future until the dam is dismantled.

Peter gave a Power Point presentation outlining the ABC's role and links with other emergency service providers. He played a role in the cyclone emergency in Karatha W.A. in March 2007 and the devastating floods in Ingham North Queensland earlier this year.

Peter Riley is also a journalist and took photographs of the devastation in the areas he had worked on emergency broadcasting. He included many of these photos in his presentation which showed graphically not only the affects of the emergency on locals but the conditions under which the emergency broadcasts are sometime made.

Chris Cartledge

Northern Rivers

The launch of a Public Audit of the ABC was the main topic of conversation at the April 28 meeting of the Northern Rivers branch. This audit is an initiative of the Northern Rivers branch. It aims to examine the extent to which members of the public access and appreciate the full range of services provided by the national broadcaster.

The audit asks respondents to comment on the ABC's proposed 24 hour news and current affairs channel, the quality of programs for children and adolescents and the standards of journalism in the ABC's news and current affairs programs. Respondents have a chance to comment on the importance of Triple J, Classic FM, Local ABC and Radio National as well ABC Online. In the trial audit there has been a strong response to the notion of increasing funds for regional programming.

The Public Audit can now be accessed by members of the public and members of other Friends of the ABC branches by going to the Northern Rivers branch website (<http://home.iprimus.com.au/webformation/friendsabcnr>). Potential respondents are asked to download a word file and return responses either by email attachment or post. Results of the audit will be posted on the

branch website and reported at the regional conference in August.

At the last branch meeting it was decided that the branch will be represented at the regional conference by Neville Jennings (President) and Jill Keogh (Byron Bay Sub-branch Convenor).

The Northern Rivers branch supports local film-makers and writers. Once again we are official supporters of the Byron Bay Writers Festival to be held from 6 to 8 August. ABC North Coast plays a significant role in promoting the festival. Branch members have been offered free passes to see the locally-made film "Lou" which was shot in the Tweed Valley with Mount Warning as a backdrop. The film will have its premiere at Byron Bay and Murwillumbah on June 17.

Details of the next branch activity will be announced in Northern Rivers newspapers.

Neville Jennings

Central Coast

Central Coast Branch had plans for a visit by ABC News/7.30 Reporter Tracy Bowden for June. However Tracy reminded us that as ABC reporters may be called away without notice to cover stories from around the world, it was quite possible that she would not be available at the last minute. With tickets to be sold and catering organised, the committee decided to postpone this event to another occasion.

In March we were pleased to welcome Jeremy Fernandez to speak



Dorothy Saddler and Charlie Proctor with Jeremy Fernandez.

to our group at an afternoon tea function at Wyong, a change of venue from previous functions. More than 60 attended, the majority of whom were not members. We have not yet heard from FABNSW if any new members joined on that day.

Jeremy who was accompanied by his wife, Danielle, an ABC News Radio employee, entertained the audience after a brief address, by answering their many questions.

He is a passionate supporter of the ABC and its Managing Director and feels it a real privilege to be working for them. Since late 2009 he has done so in Sydney, filling in for Juanita Phillips from time to time and also for Felicity Davey. As well he writes script for some of Juanita's news stories.

Jeremy's career has been forged through the internet and his own persistence. "Don't get into this game because you want to read the news, study what you are interested in, don't listen to people who say you can't do it, get work experience in those fields in which you have interest, don't be intimidated by others," were some of the words of advice he gave to a Year 12 Wyong High student.

News readers and other ABC presenters read religiously the audience Contact Reports to find praise or criticism from viewers and listeners. To the question, "Where do kids get their news from if not the 7.00pm ABC News?", he added, "Often from their mobile phones," and added that during the recent Haiti earthquake there were 300 000 hits on ABC News content from mobile phone users.

He acknowledged that the sharing of News between TV Channels occurs frequently and although the ABC shows footage from other sources it always undertakes the often time consuming authentication of the facts presented.

Central Coast FABC hopes to hold its next function in July.

Regular meetings and/or coffee afternoons are held on the second Saturday of each month from 2.00pm at the Central Coast Leagues Club Gosford.

John Hale 

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National Web Portal links to all State 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.

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

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