

# UPDATE

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Background Briefing friends of the abc

Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.  
quarterly newsletter

September 2010  
Vol 18, No.3

## HEAR THE MAN BEHIND Q&A and MEDIA WATCH at the FABC DINNER



**P**eter McEvoy, Executive Producer of Public Affairs for ABC TV, will be the guest speaker at the Friends of the ABC Annual Dinner on Friday 17th September. Peter currently directs Q&A and Big Ideas, two programs that he originated and developed for the ABC, but he began his career as a radio reporter, then executive producer of news and current affairs at Triple J.

In his own work as a journalist, Peter McEvoy has been awarded five Walkley Awards for reports on both radio and TV, including the Gold Walkley, the

Human Rights Award (twice) and the George Munster Award for Independent Journalism.

Peter McEvoy's award winning reports have covered a wide range of issues including the breakdown of air safety systems in Australia, the naltrexone heroin treatment trial and the transmission of HIV in a doctor's surgery.

In 2001 he produced "Inside Story", the first documentary to show video from inside Australia's immigration detention centres. The program led eventually to a change in government policy, and the

release of children from detention.

From 2000 to 2006, Peter was the executive producer of Media Watch, and in 2004 received his fifth Walkley Award for Media Watch's investigation of "cash for comment" and improper relations between broadcasters and regulators in a report that forced the resignation of the chair of the Australia Broadcasting Authority.

You can hear this distinguished and highly respected journalist at the FABC dinner, details of which may be found on page 5 of Update. 



*"They replaced Dr Who with this live broadcast but it still meets their sci-fi content quota."*

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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](http://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



As Update goes to print, the fate of the Gillard Government is in the balance.

So is the future of the National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill, which changes the method of appointment of the ABC Board, and restores the position of the staff-elected director. It remains a failure of the Rudd-Gillard Government that, despite both issues being Labor policy prior to the last election, it was unable to implement policy that is very important to the future of the ABC. Similarly, a decision on the Australia Network, the government-funded international television service, currently in the hands of the ABC, was delayed by the election. Sky/Murdoch is lobbying hard to take over the network, asking that it be subject to a tender process.

Friends of the ABC has made a submission to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, asking that the service be retained by the ABC. The new minister, whichever party he/she comes from, will have to make a decision very soon.

I urge all members of Friends of the ABC, and all regional branches, to immediately contact their local Federal Member to express their strong support for passage of the National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill, and for the ABC to retain control of the Australia Network, unless we want to see the Murdoch view of the world, along with his advertising, broadcast into Asia and the Pacific by the Australian Government.

In the short period prior to the election, Friends of the ABC sought details from each of the major parties regarding their policies in relation to the ABC. A summary of these policies is printed in this Update. We are grateful to Glenys Stradijot, Campaign Manager for Victorian Friends of the ABC, for the enormous task of compiling and distributing questionnaires to parties and candidates, then collecting and collating the responses in time to

circulate then before the election. Thank you, Glenys!

### ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL NSW FABC CONFERENCE

We are indebted to the Blue Mountains Branch for hosting the biennial conference of Friends of the ABC at Blackheath on August 14th and 15th. Thirty three representatives from the branches and the NSW Executive gathered to discuss, debate, formulate policy and to be informed. Mark Scott, Managing Director, paid a ringing tribute to ABC staff who have kept the ABC at the forefront of the digital media revolution, and spoke of exciting plans for the future as the ABC leads the way in new forms of communication, all without an increase in recurrent funding. One statistic alone was impressive – 73% of Australians use the ABC in any week. Mark's address will be published in full in the next Update.

John Cleary, night-time presenter on Sundays on ABC radio brought the perspective of staff and presenters to the changes which are taking place within the ABC, making it clear that the resources, particularly in radio, are often stretched paper thin, and the goodwill of staff is vital to keeping the ABC on the air. John brought to us the wit and wisdom of a long career in the ABC, including time as staff-elected director and president of the ABC staff union. Extracts from John's presentation can be found in this Update.

James Ricketson, an independent producer of documentaries, told of his experience (and frustration) of dealing with the ABC over a long period of time in trying to get material screened which elements within the Australia population may find confronting or embarrassing, and showed film that he had shot in Cambodia which reveals exploitation of powerless people by Australian business and religious interests, material which certainly deserves an audience in Australia.

Decisions and resolutions from the conference are published in this

Update. We again thank the Blue Mountains Branch for hosting the 2010 conference.

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

9th October is the Date for the NSW FABC Annual General Meeting. Details are provided in this Update. Guest speaker will be Quentin Dempster, award winning journalist, author and presenter of Stateline in NSW. Quentin has also had a long and distinguished career with the ABC, is the current staff-elected

director, but without a seat on the board, and has been a wonderful supporter of the activities of Friends of the ABC over many years. He will speak at 1pm at the Sydney Mechanics' Institute, 169 Pitt St. Sydney.

You will also find advance notice of the Friends of the ABC Christmas Party in this Update.

**Mal Hewitt**  
**FABC NSW President** 

## ACTION FROM NSW FRIENDS OF THE ABC STATE CONFERENCE

**The following resolutions were passed by the recent State Conference, and will be acted on by the NSW Executive:**

- 1 "That in the interests of transparency, the ABC publish budgets and expenditure for ABC platforms, networks and programs".  
**CARRIED 11 votes to 1.**
- 2 "We note the ABC's increasing use of a very repetitive commercial style of promotion and presentation, and we call on management to develop a unique, non-commercial and quality image".  
**CARRIED unanimously.**
- 3 "That ABC Management be asked to ensure that presenters maintain high standards of Australian English language usage".  
**CARRIED unanimously.**
- 4 "We urge the incoming government to immediately reintroduce the National Broadcasting Amendment Bill".  
**CARRIED unanimously.**
- 5 "Given the ABC's traditional function as an independent educational institution the 2010 State Conference of the NSW Friends of the ABC requests that under the rubric of civic education, the public broadcaster commences to produce and broadcast innovative specialist programs about Australia's public governance systems and possible reforms to aspects of their operations. The format of such programs could include interviews, panel discussions and lectures by experts and reformers. Included in such programs should be Electoral Systems, Comparative Republicanism, the Australian Constitution, the Westminster System, Federation and alternatives to stimulate decentralization, and the Public Service.  
**CARRIED unanimously.**
- 6 "FABC requests that a delegation from the Friends of the ABC be invited to meet with appropriate ABC personnel to discuss the ABC's policy of "balance" in the commissioning, producing and broadcasting of documentaries".  
**CARRIED unanimously.**

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

The controversy over what programs the ABC may, or may not broadcast about the Israeli/ Gaza ongoing confrontation needs some mature compassionate consideration, rather than submission to external politically motivated restrictions.

The continuing friction between Israel and its neighbours is a matter of international consequence and an ongoing deplorable state of affairs for the common people of both Israel and Gaza, who bear the brunt of suffering, not their political leaders.

It is sad to think that both these peoples acknowledge their common descent from Father Abraham, a human but caring person, as described in both the Old Testament and the Koran and yet display such enmity towards each other.

Reconciliation between these ancient peoples is imperative to world peace: unless their wounds are healed and pride abandoned, the abscess will only fester and grow.

I would like to see the UN headquarters shifted to Jerusalem and for that city to become a "free city", open to all, under UN surveillance. This would help the UN to focus on the problem more keenly and also allow free access for all to the holy places in Jerusalem. The operation of those holy places would need to be controlled by people of great sensitivity and understanding of course, but it is not impossible. That would help take religion out of the equation of conflict.

In the meantime it is apparent that Gaza has no legitimate spokesperson, Hamas being discredited in the eyes of the world, while Israel displays all the arrogance it has applied throughout its long history, reflecting the attitude of its leaders, but not necessarily its common people. Some acceptable person needs to speak up for Gaza.

Meanwhile, the ABC is right to air both (or all) sides of this shocking situation.

Yours truly,

**R W Manuell**  
Member Friends of the ABC 

# John Cleary at the Friends of the ABC Conference



Presenter of Sunday Night on ABC Radio, John Cleary, in a wide ranging and very entertaining presentation to the FABC Conference, spoke with passion on many issues affecting ABC staff in 2010, and brought to bear his vast experience as an ABC producer and presenter, a former staff-elected director, and former president of the ABC staff union.

His address included a number of memorable quotes relating to

broadcasting, communication and the media, which are reproduced below for readers of Update:

**1. Carl Sagan.** (American Scientist and author of the series 'Cosmos'.) "The dumbing down of America is most evident in the slow decay of substantive content in the enormously influential media, the 30 second sound bites (now down to 10 seconds or less), lowest common denominator programming, credulous presentations on pseudo- science and superstition, but especially a celebrations of ignorance."

**2. General Sir Ian Jacob** (Director General BBC 1952-59) Public Broadcasting is '...a compound of a system of control, an attitude of mind, and an aim, which if successfully achieved results in a service which cannot be given by any other means. The system of control is full independence, or the maximum degree of independence that parliament will accord.

The attitude of mind is an intelligent one capable of attracting to the service the highest quality of character and intellect. The aim is to give the best and the most comprehensive service of broadcasting to the public that is possible. The motive that underlies the whole operation is a vital factor; it must not be vitiated by political or commercial consideration.' – Report of the Committee on Broadcasting 1960, Vol.1, Appendix E. HMSO, 1962.

**3. Bill Moyers** (US Broadcaster and Journalist. Former Press Secretary to US President Lyndon Johnson. Reflecting on 1964 and the founding of PBS in the USA. ) "In only a few years television had become, in the words of the FCC chairman "a vast wasteland," a phrase that quickly entered the lexicon of lost

opportunities. So we sat around in those meetings - and I emphasize the sitting. Unlike the White House geniuses of West Wing and Commander in Chief, we couldn't think fast and brilliantly on our feet; We sat around in meetings and talked about what television could do for democracy.

We talked about how television could be much more of an open marketplace of ideas, available to everyone. We talked about how instead of merely offering predigested views of current events or defining "debate" as the off-setting opinions of two politicians with vested interest in the issue, television could be more of a real battle of ideas, where one person might actually change another's mind. We talked about how television could be more than the boss' stenographer - how it would convey the interests and opinions of more people than the economic and political elites; how it could in fact help those elites understand the questions regular people asked every day - how to get a job, how to pay the doctor, how to put food on the table, how to get the kids through school, how to afford old age - the very questions corporate media scarcely valued. All this talk led to something. It led us to believe that what democracy needed was a truly free and independent broadcasting service - free of both state and commerce."

**4. Summary of Margaret Visser** in 'Beyond Fate' her Massey lectures delivered for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 2002. She suggests that we as a society are engaged in a dangerous game of Trivial Pursuit. The deluge of information from technologies like the internet are being used to reduce knowledge to a series of disconnected facts all of equal or no value. She suggests there is also something more dangerous at work.

Trivialisation is a process of belittlement where distinctions are ironed out. Hence, a football game particularly today's, may get the same amount of coverage as an earthquake. It plays into a consumer culture, in which the primary freedom is to choose, however it is a freedom that is made meaningless by the very insignificance of the choices. A

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Or check out the National Portal (links to all states):  
[www.friendsoftheabc.org.au](http://www.friendsoftheabc.org.au)

multitude of meaningless choices leads to lassitude boredom and depression. A short term casino culture.

**5. Terry Eagleton** is perhaps Britains leading literary critic and cultural theorist, in 'After Theory' he states: 'Today's cultural theory....dislikes the idea of depth, and is embarrassed by fundamentals. It shudders at the notion of the universal, and disapproves of ambitious overviews. By and large it can see such overviews only as oppressive. It believes in the local, the pragmatic, the particular. And in this devotion, ironically it scarcely differs from the conservative scholarship it detests, which likewise believes only in what it can see and handle.

There is however, a much deeper irony. At just the point that we have begun to think small, history has begun to act big. 'Act locally, think globally' has become a familiar leftist slogan; but we live in a world where the political right thinks globally and the post-modern left thinks locally. As the grand narrative of capitalist globalisation, and the destructive reaction which it brings in its wake unfolds across the planet, it catches these intellectuals at a time when many of them have almost ceased to think in political terms at all. Confronted with an implacable political enemy, and a fundamentalist one at that, the West will no doubt be forced more and more, to reflect on the foundations of its own civilization.' – After Theory pp72-3. 



Hank Willems, former president and long time member of Hunter Branch, has contributed the following for fellow members of Friends of the ABC

## To our members, their offspring and their friends

**W**hat makes this an important time for us and for the ABC is that the improvements in support for the ABC over the last few years such as the introduction of the selection of its board members on merit regardless of their political beliefs, the start of a separate channel just for our children and the introduction of a 24 hour news service just to name a few, are likely to be at risk should we have a change of government. Therefore if we believe in the value of our ABC, we must act now.

Why our ABC is so valuable to us individually and to us as a nation can best be appreciated if we look at the basic premises underlying the operation of commercial broadcasters.

**1** The principal purpose of commercial broadcasters is to make money for their share holders. Mind you, that is your money and mine.

**2** The way they do this is by broadcasting advertisements for their

clients or sponsors.

**3** In order to get an audience, the broadcasters have to transmit programmes which they hope will appeal to prospective clients for the offerings of their sponsors.

**4** Once they have gained the attention of their audience they cut their programme to bombard their audience with advertisements. Whilst this may induce a person or two to avail themselves of the product or service offered, it wastes every other viewer's or listener's time.

A sad fact of commercial life is that the worse a product or service is, the more advertising it needs to profit its producers. You probably noticed that commercial TV broad casters translate this as the louder we must scream.

One of the ploys to keep you watching or listening is to insert the ads just before a highlight in the programme. Have you watched Master chef? *continued over*



## Dinner with Peter McEvoy

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER  
of PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
for ABC TV

**Date** 17th September

**Time** Doors open 6.30, sit down 7pm

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

**Cost** \$58 per person including two drinks

Bookings must be made by telephone to Joy 9502 2335 or Paul 9888 3797 or Ivy 9481 0381 (if not answered, please leave a message)

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

And the winner is----. Yes, the sponsor!

What does this do to the majority of viewers who do not respond to the advertisements? It wastes their time! I do not know the exact percentage of time broadcasters are allowed to spend on ads but at peak hours it appears close to 20%.

We all know time is money. Should we productively spend the time of the advertisements even at the basic wage the money this represents is about \$2.70 per hour of watching. Alternately we would be much better off spending this amount of time on some exercise to keep us fit.

On a nation-wide basis, should the ten million people or so who watch commercial TV for say ten hours per week be able to use their wasted time productively, even at the basic wage this would amount to 14 billion dollars annually. Should they make this time available for exercise, two hours a week of exercise for each of them would result in an increase of fitness for our population that would keep our hospitals from bursting at their seams and thus equally save billions.

Well there you have it, billions of reasons to watch your ABC instead, but that is not all, no ads is no fast food ads for our kids and less obesity.

When it comes to keeping us informed of what goes on in Australia

and the world around us, the ABC has its own reporters world wide and does not have to wholly rely on AAP and Reuters an the like, assuring us of a balanced view of what goes on.

As far as ad free media are concerned are you aware that SBS could be kept free of ads for no more than a few dollars per year from each tax payer? This would also be worth going for. Whether we waste time watching ads on commercials or SBS has the same consequences.

It is almost ten years ago that we got together to define what we collectively stand for as friends of the ABC which makes it high time for us to recall what that was. This is it:

These notes are an outline of a basis for a Newcastle Branch of the Friends of the A B C as I see it.

### 1. Definition of the purpose of the Friends.

1.1 Find and state the charter under which the ABC was established.

1.2 Once we know this charter, establish how and when this charter has been violated by subsequent governments. We need this well researched, regularly updated and in print.

1.3 The task of the Friends will be to act to restore the A B C to a position where it can fulfil whatever function it was established to fulfil and where it will be adequately financed to do so. (This cannot be done without 1.1 and 1.2 first.)

### 2. How do we do this?

2.1 By exerting political pressure.

2.2 By membership drives.

2.3 By publication of letters to editors, articles in the press, leaflet distribution etc.

2.4 By press and TV advertisements.

2.5 By arranging meetings and rallies, developing people power.

### 3. What are the resources we have to do this?

3.1 Our skills such as; organisational skills, educational skills, skills in psychology, political skills, skills in publicity. Many of us are retired lecturers, good training for a bit of large scale brainwashing!

3.2 A little bit of money, improve by 2.2.

### 4. How do we apply our resources most efficiently to our aims?

4.1 Analyse our targets such as find the weak spots in our politicians, (they make this one very easy lately.) Things have not changed much, have they?

4.2 In all we do we should ask ourselves if it is the most effective way to do things for instance is the person we target the one who can make a difference or should we target the person at the top and merely inform his underlings that we did so?

That was that, it shows that there is plenty to do for us and we need every one of us on the job. (have fun)

### Use-by dates and all that rot

Where people in all age groups benefit from access to the ABC, the elderly have only some years left to enjoy this while the young will have most of their life time. What this means is that we should encourage membership and participation by people of the younger generation who will benefit the most. This poses the question,

#### HOW DO WE DO THAT?

I don't know the best answer but it is quite possible that we can collectively work out the best way. This raises the same question.

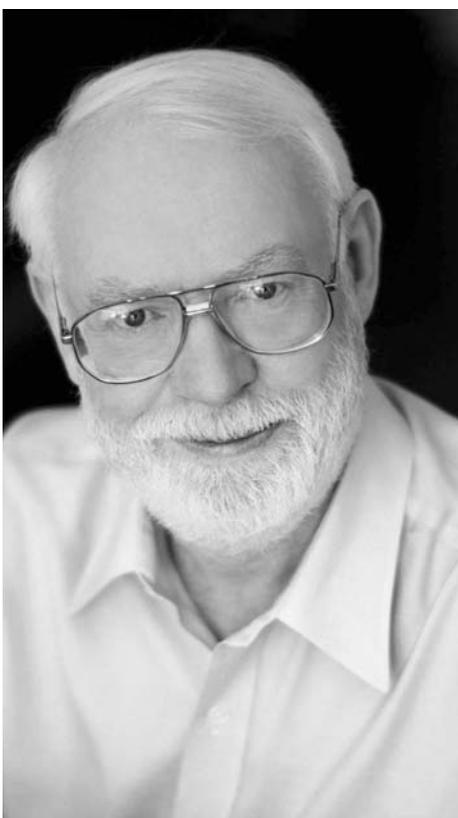
#### HOW DO WE DO THAT?

This time the answer is simple: Come to our AGM, have your say and do your bit of stirring!

**Remember:** The younger you are, the more important it is to you to have a healthy ABC.

Hank Willems

(Committee member aged 83)



## David Stratton in Armidale

At the invitation of Friends of the ABC and the Arts Department of the University of New England, renowned film critic David Stratton will be in Armidale on 6th November to show a film and give a talk.

The event will take place at the Arts Theatre, UNE, at 6.30pm  
On **Saturday 6th November 2010**



# BranchNews

## Illawarra

### Behind the Scenes at Four Corners

On Sunday, July 25, about 40 members from the Illawarra branch of the Friends met for lunch at Port Kembla Golf Club. After a particularly delicious meal we were addressed by our guest of honour, Sue Spencer, who, since 2001 has been the executive producer of Four Corners, which is ABC TV's longest running current affairs programs and due to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary next year. She told us how she began work as a researcher with the national broadcaster in 1985 and has worked both on Lateline and Australian Story. She also commented on the much higher proportion of female staff now employed by the Corporation than when she first began working there. Sue then gave a very detailed account of how each Four Corners program is organized and how it goes to air.

It is rare for a program to fit into a forty-five minute slot and to be able to tell stories within this space of time requires much time, thought and preparation. The program draws on the work of six producers, 3 researchers, 3 editors and 3 standard camera crews, while each researcher may be working on 3 different stories at the same time. Most stories take six to eight weeks of work before going to air, usually requiring two weeks each of research, filming and editing before going to air. Four Corners is a reporter-led program, but producers who work with the reporters, together with a camera crew and sound recordist, are responsible for the visual image which accompanies the program. Producers themselves may develop camera skills and there is increasing use of video-journalists who shoot their own stories. This makes it easier for a reporter to obtain intimate access, so the person interviewed does not have to confront a large camera crew. It is also easier on the budget, since sending four people overseas can



Sue Spencer Exec Producer of 4 Corners answers questions from the floor.

be prohibitively expensive.

In putting an individual program together, the editor first looks at the rushes and then writes a script, editing the footage. A two stage process follows, with a viewing of the rough cut of the following week's program which is important for determining its structure. If necessary, a legal team may be present at this first viewing. The reporter, editor and producer are then involved in a second viewing of the fine cut which decides the final post-production finishing touches. It was most interesting to learn how complex the whole process of preparing a single Four Corners Program actually is since most of us have absolutely no idea of just how much work goes on behind the scenes. It requires considerable staff dedication. Reporters and cameramen have to undertake a special hostile environment course and one of Sue's jobs is to see that staff are covered by the necessary insurance. It may also be necessary to provide special trauma counseling for reporters and cameramen who have attended particularly distressing or gruesome situations. We can be very grateful to those who go to such trouble to bring

us this absorbing and valuable weekly TV program.

The question and answer session at the end of Sue's talk showed how interesting and engaging the audience found it.

*Dorothy Jones*

## Hunter

We have just returned from the Blackheath, Blue Mountains, bi annual State Conference held 14-15 August with some great input from ABC head, Mark Scott, and well known ABC personality, John Cleary. In addition there was some robust debate between all delegates concerning the future direction of the Friends in striving to keep the ABC up to the mark in accordance with its charter. It was a bit of an effort with the looming elections keeping us all well occupied with other matters elsewhere but well worth it I feel. Full marks to Conference Convenor, Mal Hewitt, fellow delegates and observers, the Blue Mountains branch under the capable presidency of Tony Tayler and venue organiser Warren Nichols, who ran a smooth operation. For the future of the ABC we are all hoping that the current government is returned to stave off further undermining of the service by an unsympathetic Liberal Government salivating at the prospect of further funding cuts and the possible introduction of paid advertisements. Our Hunter annual general meeting is due on 25 September and a local newsletter detailing further information will be emailed and posted to all Hunter members shortly.

*Peter Brandscheid*  
*President Hunter Branch*

## Northern Rivers

The Northern Rivers branch of the Friends of the ABC has been promoting a Public Audit of the ABC to determine how well appreciate the wide range of services provided by the national broadcaster.

Preliminary results from the audit based on a survey of 15 branch members indicate that:

- 100% of respondents support the

proposal to provide more funding for regional programming

- 94% believe that the ABC provides informative programs on Science, Philosophy and Religion
- 87% believe that the ABC's flagship news and current affairs programs are maintaining high standards of journalism
- 80% believe that the ABC plays a significant role in promoting the Arts
- 80% believe that the ABC plays an important informative and entertainment role in the community.

Members of other FABC branches are now invited to contribute to the Public Audit by visiting the branch website at: <http://home.iprimus.com.au/webforation/friendsabcnr>

The next branch meeting and brief AGM will take place at 7 pm on Tuesday 14 September at the Lismore

Workers Club. The president will give a report on the recent state conference.

*Neville Jennings*

## Central Coast

Members from our Branch attended the Uniting Church Community Networking Forum on Monday 9 August. This forum allowed the audience to hear and question candidates from the major parties for the electorates of Dobell and Robertson. Friends of the ABC are able to have a table at these forums which are held 3 or 4 times a year and it is an opportunity for us to "fly the flag" and perhaps attract new members.

Members voted to purchase a copy of Ronin Films "Hope in a Slingshot" so we could see for ourselves why, although the ABC acquired the documentary, it later decided not to

put the program to air. (See June 2010 issue of "Update page 6.) Individual members are being given the opportunity to view the video with discussion following at our October Meeting.

At our June Meeting there was some criticism of the longevity of some of the pre-program video clips used on ABC television. In the reply from Mr Dalton's office, we are assured that "station identifiers" are not intended to frustrate or annoy viewers.

We have two functions coming up! ABC Weatherman, Graham Creed, will be our Saturday afternoon guest speaker in late September while Jonathan Holmes will join us for a luncheon in November after his return from long service leave. Details of both functions, when finalised, will be on the Central Coast Web page at [www.fabcnsw.org.au](http://www.fabcnsw.org.au)

Enquiries: John Hale tel: 4333 8107. ☺

# Scott to fire next shot in battle over Australia Network

## Margaret Simons Crikey August 5 2010

ABC Managing Director Mark Scott has been uncharacteristically quiet lately, but at lunchtime today he will be getting to his feet to deliver another salvo in the battle to retain the Federal Government contract for international broadcasting for the ABC.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is currently considering -- or would be if there wasn't an election on -- whether the contract for the Australia Network should be put out to tender. Everyone knows that Sky News is interested. This is part of the back story to the launch of ABC24, the new 24 hour news television channel, and of course the constant sniping at the public broadcaster from News Limited titles.

Scott, speaking at the Asialink public luncheon in Sydney, opens his speech by talking about the power of media messages in bringing down the Berlin wall. "Nothing can speak to so many or shape public perception on such a scale as the media."

And that is why, he argues, no government with an international broadcasting presence has outsourced it. Scott argues about broadcasting as an instrument of "soft power" and "soft diplomacy".

It's an interesting, and some would say brave, in the Yes Minister sense of the word, conjunction of ideas. East European totalitarianism on the one hand, and government funded broadcasting as an instrument of diplomacy on the other.

But Scott is arguing that it is exactly the editorial independence of the ABC that is the best advert, as it were, for Australia and its democratic values. Soft power relies on persuading people to one's view, on fostering understanding and admiration for one's national values, he says.

Perhaps most interesting are his quotes from yet to be published Lowy Institute research that found in a study of ten different government funded international broadcasting services most had similar public policy obligations to the ABC, regardless of

the ideological character of the government.

The importance of the media is, he says, the reason why public broadcasting has survived the wave of privatisation of public assets over the last few decades.

Commercial media organizations, he argues, can quite properly align their editorial agenda to their commercial agenda. He cites Fox News (but eschews the obvious examples closer to home). But only a public broadcaster can deliver continued credibility, on which soft power relies.

Expect return fire from Sky News and News Limited very soon. I can imagine the line. That free enterprise is also a democratic value. And prepare for a quite different use of the East European totalitarianism parable.

The politicians probably aren't thinking about this until after the election, but both sides of the Australia Network battle will want to try and make sure that the climate favors them, once the larger election battle is fought and won. ☺

# The ABC should not ape its commercial adversaries

**Errol Simper**

**The Australian August 9, 2010**

It's faintly surprising Tony Abbott has not been asked about his attitude to the ABC and public broadcasting.

This is despite the numerous interviews he has done during this election campaign.

Not that we're frantically urging any such debate. Arguments, inquiries, reviews, discussions and opinions revolving round the ABC tend to get labyrinthine, arcane, contradictory and tedious. They're tedious, not because the role of the ABC isn't interesting, but because the arguments always seem to have been had many times before and little that's substantive or new ever really threatens to emerge.

But as you may have read in Caroline Overington's Diary column the other day the topic has been tentatively raised, not least by the indefatigable campaign manager for the Victorian branch of The Friends of the ABC organisation, Glenys Stradijot. So, perhaps we should briefly try to sketch a relevant background to a potential Abbott-ABC interface.

It's no secret John Howard had strong reservations about the political impartiality of the ABC. Nor is it a secret that Abbott is perceived as something of a Howard protege. Just to complete the backdrop, we recalled here (July 19) that Howard's minister for communications, Helen Coonan, pledged "exciting changes" for the ABC back in March 2006. Five days after a synopsis of her remarks (in an interview with the now defunct Bulletin magazine) appeared in The Sydney Morning Herald, and with many of the proverbial horses decidedly frightened, Howard appeared on ABC TV's Lateline and informed Tony Jones: "I do believe very much in the ABC as an Australian institution. I believe in a public media to balance the commercial media."

In terms of quietening the horses it was very timely. We heard little more from Coonan and it'd seem to follow

that should Abbott share Howard's view then the national broadcaster, and those protective of its general health and existence, may not have a tremendous deal to worry about.

In truth, you could argue strongly that Abbott is pretty much an ABC creation. ABC current affairs programs such as The 7.30 Report and Lateline have regularly afforded Abbott a platform from which to build a profile. As a former journalist, Abbott is plenty media-wise enough to be aware commercial free-to-air TV would not have given him airtime to discuss many of the topics he has discussed down the years with the likes of Kerry O'Brien and Jones. Commercial TV is driven ruthlessly by ratings, whether it be drama, news, current affairs or cooking. Canberra politics can be interesting. Equally it tends to throw up obscure machinations that clearly don't interest, say, Today Tonight (the Seven Network, 6.30pm) or A Current Affair (Nine, 6.30pm). Should the ABC be commercialised (however unlikely, given the likely Senate configuration) in any way it, too, would start to grade its transmission time in terms of ratings and revenue potential. Televisual venues suitable for discussing items unlikely to rate well would rapidly disappear. Thus logic says that Abbott, prime minister, would leave well alone.

None of the above means, of course, that a potential Coalition administration might not consider asking the ABC to rein in some of its activities. Commercial media has lobbied British administrations to curtail BBC expansionism, where expansion has been perceived as trespassing on domains already well serviced by commercial outlets. Commercial media lobbyists might well be tempted to tell an Abbott government that tax-funded broadcasting should prioritise rounding out the schedules by filling in the copious cracks left by commercial broadcasters' obsession with audience size. You may recall that when a similar

argument was mounted against the BBC last year the Beeb responded with a pledge to use any spare cash to shift more of its material upmarket, as opposed to continued expansion.

Whether the ABC is similarly inclined towards going upmarket is a moot point.

There's a disturbing tendency for ABC1, for example, to all but mimic channels Ten, Nine and Seven. There are long, banal promotions and ABC Shop purchasing opportunities between programs, announcements which are indistinguishable from the pap shoved at us by commercial networks. It's as though the ABC somehow views commercial TV and radio as a desirable role model. There's a letter in the latest edition of the (Victorian) Friends of the ABC newsletter, News And Views, which may sum up what the scribe is trying to say. This is one Rose Allaway, writing about the Melbourne radio station, ABC774: "I can't stand it [774] for long due to the trivial nature of much of its content and its frequent and annoying commercials: for itself, other ABC services, personalities and programs we have already been informed about, community notices, the ABC shop and its products, etc. It all adds up to noise.

Richard Stubbs's ads assume the listening public is stupid, so he repeats his statements several times, using slightly different wording. Many of the ads are broadcast at increased volume and with jarring music, for example the Red Symons and football ads. They are abrasive, annoying and inappropriate for ABC radio, or what once used to be ABC radio. Why does the ABC bombard listeners with this commercial style when it is not a commercial organisation but fully funded by the taxpayer?"

It's a reasonable question. Most of those people known to the scribe who habitually watch or listen to the ABC do so principally because the ABC isn't commercial. They see the corporation as a sensible, potentially intelligent refuge from the incessant sales pitch that dominates, all but strangulates, commercial broadcasting. They don't watch or listen to the ABC to applaud the slickness of its promotions and semi-commercials.

The corporation should accentuate its differences from commercial media and make a supreme virtue of them. It's those differences that make the ABC worth having. 

# Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc. will be held this year at Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, Level 1, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney (Between Park and Bathurst Streets) on Saturday, 9 October, 2010, commencing at 1.00 pm.

Our guest speaker will be **Quentin Dempster**, prominent ABC presenter and current host of Stateline.

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.

The constitution provides that Committee positions including President, other office bearers and Committee members become automatically vacant and "shall be elected at each annual general meeting". In most cases the incumbent position holders are likely to stand for re-election, along with any others who nominate. Should you wish to nominate for the committee or for one of the abovementioned positions, please indicate below as soon as possible.

Afternoon refreshments will be provided and in order to assist catering, we ask that you complete the RSVP form shown below.

We look forward to your attendance on 9 October.



Please detach and return to:

**PO BOX 1391, NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059**

Or email to James Buchanan [jamesbuc@bigpond.net.au](mailto:jamesbuc@bigpond.net.au)

Tick box  I wish to attend the AGM

I also wish to nominate for the position of:

\_\_\_\_\_ (optional)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_



Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc

## CHRISTMAS PARTY INVITATION

26TH NOVEMBER 2009 – 6pm

Dear Friend,

It is my pleasure to extend to you an invitation to join us at our annual Christmas Party at the Dot Strong Terrace, ABC Centre, 700 Harris Street, Ultimo.

Each year we present our Excellence in Broadcasting award. At this stage a recipient has yet to be chosen, and I will send out an advice by email nearer the date.

To cover catering, the all-inclusive cost per person will be \$25. Non-members are welcome.

Please complete the coupon below, and return it with your cheque or payment details to the Treasurer, James Buchanan at the address shown. Any problems phone James on 9371 5621.

Receipts are not issued, but there will be a list of paid up attendees at the door.

RSVP by Friday 19th November, 2010.

Best wishes,

**Mal Hewitt**  
President



Please PRINT your details and send to:

**The Treasurer, Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.**

**PO Box 1391, North Sydney, NSW 2059**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Suburb \_\_\_\_\_ Post Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (H) \_\_\_\_\_

(B) \_\_\_\_\_

(M) \_\_\_\_\_

No. of people attending \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$25-00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I am paying by (please tick):

cheque in favour of FABC (NSW) Inc.

Money order  Visa card  Master card

Card no. \_ \_ \_ . \_ \_ . \_ \_ \_

Expiry Date \_ \_ / \_ \_ Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## State and Regional Branches

**National Web Portal**  
links to all State Branches.

**Go to:**  
[www.friendsoftheabc.org.au](http://www.friendsoftheabc.org.au)

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**FABC RESOURCE CENTRE**  
Darce Cassidy  
[www.friendsoftheabc.org](http://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.

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)

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	1yr.	3yrs.
<input type="checkbox"/> Family/Household	\$20	\$55
<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$25	\$70
<input type="checkbox"/> Pensioner	\$15	\$40
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate (covers 3 people)	\$15	\$40
<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to make a donation	\$60	-
	\$	
	<b>Total \$</b>	_____

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 \_\_\_\_\_