

# UPDATE

incorporating

Background Briefing

Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.  
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## ARE YOU SERIOUS, MAURICE?



**A**BC Chairman, Maurice Newman, one of the contentious Howard Government appointments to the ABC Board, has, in an extraordinary attack on senior ABC journalists and staff, provided further evidence of the urgent need to change the method of board appointments. Such a change is proposed in the National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill, currently delayed passage through the Senate by the Coalition and Senator Fielding.

In addressing the ABC's annual leadership conference, the former director of the right wing Centre for Independent Studies accused the ABC of failing to let climate change sceptics have their say. Extraordinary when the ABC board he leads successfully pushed for "The Great Global Warming Swindle" to be shown on ABCTV against the advice of ABC senior science journalists, and extraordinary when one considers the amount of coverage given by the ABC to the views of climate change denier Lord Monckton during his recent visit to Australia.

The Sydney Morning Herald, in an editorial strongly supportive of the ABC, stated:

"By calling on the ABC to "re-energise the spirit of inquiry", make sure "the maverick voice will not be silenced" and avoid "selective scepticism" he suggests that the ABC has failed on these counts. In doing so, Newman reveals himself as unfamiliar with the ABC's coverage of the subject, including its efforts to encompass the views of the minority of scientific opinion questioning the reality or causes of climate change, and of less-credentialed mavericks too.

"He aligns himself, no doubt unconsciously, with Rupert Murdoch, who in the same speech he mentions as attacking the expansion of public broadcasting, and whose newspapers now push climate-change scepticism as part of a political agenda. Newman would be wise not to risk putting himself in the same camp of media chairmen who meddle with the news."

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# From The President



As at March, 2010, there is STILL NO PROGRESS on the National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill. In the November Update we reported that the Bill, which will ensure that appointments to the Board of the ABC and SBS are at arms length from government, are merit-based and are transparent, was introduced on Thursday 29th October. The Bill will also restore the staff-elected director position to the ABC Board. The Liberal-National Coalition, with the assistance of Senator Fielding, will not allow passage of the Bill in its present form, and has proposed amendments reducing to 18 months the elapsed time for former politicians to be eligible for appointment to the Board, and removing the provision to restore the staff-elected director position.

All State Branches of Friends of the ABC have endorsed a letter to Senator Conroy from Victorian FABC strongly opposing these amendments – Friends would not object to former politicians serving on the ABC Board, but only after a period of two years had elapsed since leaving office, and Friends strongly advocates the appointment of a staff-elected director. The same letter suggests a number of amendments to the Bill in its current form which we feel will enhance the independence, transparency and accountability of the process of Board appointments, resulting in board members with the appropriate skills and commitment to public broadcasting.

Full text of the letter to Minister Conroy may be found on our website at [www.fabcnsw.org.au](http://www.fabcnsw.org.au)

## LAUNCH OF ABC OPEN

In the last Federal budget, the ABC received \$15m to establish "regional broadband hubs", in order to develop the digital skills of regional and rural communities, allowing them to use new technology to share ideas and tell stories. Mark Scott has announced that he plans to have 12 ABC Open

producers in the field by mid-year.

Commercial media companies, including News Limited and Fairfax Media, have reacted unfavourably, fearing that their monopoly on rural and regional newspapers is under threat! Brendan Hopkins, APN News and Media chief executive, has objected:

"I genuinely believe that using taxpayer funds to effectively hand over to the ABC to compete with local news providers like ourselves, Fairfax, News Limited and West Australian Newspapers is a travesty. I think Mark Scott and his team are hiding behind the purse strings of the taxpayer. There's got to be accountability!

I don't see why politicians should be extending the purse strings to enable the state broadcaster to compete with us".

Many who live in the parts of rural and regional Australia served by Mr. Hopkins' news media outlets may well endorse the view that a bit more local competition could only be a good thing, given the abysmal standard of local journalism so often exposed in Media Watch, but the major concern of the commercial media industry is the steady loss of advertising revenue to the internet. Rest assured, Mr. Hopkins, ABC Open will not be carrying paid advertisements.

We wish the ABC well in another exciting new venture where once again the ABC is seen to be leading the way. (see ABC Open press release in this Update)

## ABC VENTURES INTO 24 HOUR TV NEWS

The announcement of the 24 hour news channel in late January brought an immediate response from the Murdoch media empire – Sky News CEO Angelos Frangelopoulos claimed that it would be "needless duplication" of services already provided, and in a rather unique interpretation of the ABC Charter, suggested that the ABC should only provide services that

“commercial broadcasters are unable or unwilling to provide”.

Such attacks from Murdoch interests would be utterly laughable were it not for the situation facing the BBC, where the election of a Conservative government could well see the disappearance of the BBC’s substantial funding base through broadcast licences, largely as a result of pressure from Murdoch.

Whilst applauding the ABC’s expansion into an area where its expertise and world-wide network of correspondents and news services is unrivalled, and it will broadcast free of commercial and political influence, Friends of the ABC has asked the obvious question – where is the money coming from? ABC 3, the Kids’ Channel, was a clear case of increased funding from government to run the channel.

Not so 24 Hour News, so we asked the following questions:

- What is the budget for the News Channel?
- Where is the money coming from, and what other services will be cut?
- What additional staff will be required?

We do know that a new studio is being built at Ultimo to house the new channel.

We were politely informed that the ABC does not make public the internal breakdown of its budget between networks and services, but under questioning in Senate Estimates on 8th February, Mark Scott said: “We have been able to take resources from the back end of our television production (whatever that means) and invest them in the new news channel. It will not operate on the budget of some of the big worldwide news channels, but the major cost in delivering a news channel is having reporters on the ground, which we already have. We have found the money for content ..... we have saved in our news production. We moved forward a generation of technology that requires fewer people. So we are actually taking those staffing positions and will be reinvesting that in our content creators for the new channel”.

Scott did indicate that 18 new positions had been advertised, and

further positions will depend on the “final programming mix”. It does seem that the news channel will have fairly modest beginnings and will grow as further resources become available. We await the result with interest, as will the ABC’s commercial rivals. The News Channel will be broadcast only in high definition., requiring a new TV or a set top box.

Friends of the ABC acknowledges the role that Mark Scott has taken in leading the ABC into new technologies, allied with new methods of reaching a much wider audience throughout the world. No wonder that the commercial media organizations are becoming increasingly strident in their criticism of the ABC, and increasingly nervous about their own markets.

The other question raised by the News Channel, and discussed by Roger Raven in this Update, is “Why do we need 24 hours of news anyway?” and the associated challenge of filling 24 hours with meaningful broadcasting without a great deal of repetition.

That is undoubtedly a challenge for the ABC, and we, their audience, must let them know what we think of the results.

### **TIED vs UNTIED FUNDING**

ABC open and ABC3 are the result of what is known as tied funding, that is funding approved by the government of the day for a specific purpose, which cannot be used for anything else. Whilst we applaud such results of tied funding, Friends of the ABC remains committed to the principle that all funding to the ABC should be free of emphasis or bias of government. We believe that the ABC should be adequately funded so that all its services can be maintained at a level of excellence traditionally associated with the ABC. By these measures the ABC remains under-resourced, and we must continue to argue with passion and energy for increased funding from government.

### **UPDATE and BACKGROUND BRIEFING**

This edition of Update will also be sent to FABC branches and members who have previously received Background Briefing. After an

extraordinary 14 years of editing, writing and producing Background Briefing, Joan Laing is taking her well-earned retirement from the job. Joan has displayed a passion for the ABC and a dedication to the task of communication with the membership that is an object lesson to us all. She has shared willingly with us her wisdom, knowledge and experience, and we have all been the beneficiaries. In addition to her role in the production of Background Briefing, Joan also served as president of Friends of the ABC in South Australia.

Thank you, Joan, for what you have given to us all, for your generosity of time and talents, and for your commitment to the cause.

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



## **ARE YOU SERIOUS, MAURICE?**

*continued from page 1.*

Philip Cooney of Wentworth Falls, in a letter to the “Herald” put it succinctly:

“Maurice Newman should spend more time watching his own TV station. Climate change sceptics such as Ian Plimer, Lord Monckton and Nick Minchin have plenty of opportunity to air their views on the ABC. The fact that they appear to have failed to convince either the ABC staff or audience says more about their views than any lack of balance in reporting.”

The final word goes to Peter Watson of Armidale, also writing to the “Herald”:

“It is well past time for Maurice Newman to familiarise himself with the notion of editorial independence and how it applies to the ABC charter and policies, then declare himself compromised by a clear conflict of interest and remove himself from the public salary.”

*Mal Hewitt - Editor*

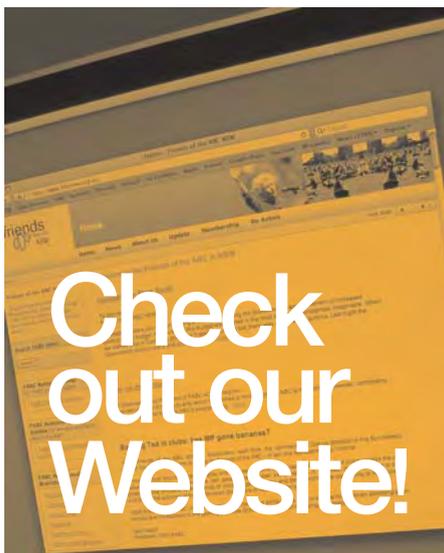


# ABC's role needs to be redefined

Mark Day, Media Columnist for The Australian

The news that the BBC is to scale back its operations and ease its competitive stance against its commercial rivals prompts the immediate question: should the ABC do the same?

It is time we had a full debate about the role of the ABC. It was established in a vastly different media landscape as a taxpayer-funded entity designed to, in part, fill in the market niches not served by the commercial sector.



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Now, thanks to pay-TV and the digital revolution, those niches are hotly contested.

And the digital space will only get more crowded. We face a confluence of many new services on reused analog spectrum and the advent of high-speed broadband capable of delivering an infinite number of internet TV channels. This new era of plenty puts everything into a state of flux.

Communications Minister Stephen Conroy has observed that the commercial free-to-air television model is already broken to the extent that the incumbent networks need his \$250 million licence rebate gift. The radio industry is saying "Me, too".

You could argue that the newspaper model is equally broken by the same technological tsunami, but I don't see any offers of tax breaks or handouts there. Nor should there be, but it illustrates the point that nothing is untouched by the digital revolution.

It is therefore necessary to look at everything on the media landscape, particularly in the context of how old rules and regulations apply in new circumstances.

Is there a justification for taxpayer-funded media, and if so, what is a proper balance? Should we consider selling the ABC? If not, should we limit its capacity to wreak havoc among its commercial rivals? The ABC has long been perceived as a non-threatening media entity, designed to provide niche services where commercial interest was low. But its moves into the online space, including free news websites, the development of 30 regional hubs to develop user-generated online

content and the introduction of a new 24/7 free-to-air TV news channel, are being seen as threatening.

The online expansion is interesting in that it could be argued it is outside the ABC's charter. The charter was written before the internet was contemplated, and refers only to broadcasting. Can the internet, the ultimate one-to-one medium, be defined as broad – that is, to many – casting? When ABC managing director Mark Scott refers to the charter, he replaces the word "broadcasting" with "media", which can have very different meanings.

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**Scott is right when he says the ABC is a much loved brand.**

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The chief of the regional publisher APN News and Media, Brendan Hopkins, said last week that the ABC was competing with it in the bush with the regional hubs -- an initiative made possible only by a \$15m extra grant thrown in by taxpayers. Hopkins says it is a travesty that taxpayer funds are being used to compete with local news providers. "I don't see why politicians should be extending the (taxpayer) purse strings to enable the state broadcaster to compete with us. Clearly there is a role for the state broadcaster but I think it needs to be more clearly defined."

Hopkins is singing from the same song sheet as Brian McCarthy, now chief executive of Fairfax following its merger with Rural Press. He says the ABC is out to steal his audience and has objected to the use of public funds to "build empires."

Similarly, the arrival later this year of a free nonstop news service on the ABC's high-definition channel will have a negative impact on Sky News, the Foxtel/Austar local news channel which is owned by the Seven and Nine networks, together with BSkyB in the UK (38 per cent owned by News Corporation, owner of The Australian). True, advertisers can't buy time on the ABC, but the ABC can tear away eyeballs and therefore bring about lower ad revenues for commercial operators.

The new service will unquestionably offer viewers more choice, which is the main dividend of the digital era. But at what cost?

Scott has by all accounts stirred the ABC's magic pudding of finances and found the loose change needed to run a 24/7 news service. Many observers are cynical about this, predicting that the costs will be massive and will mean, among other things, the loss of the existing News Radio service.

The growing tensions between a taxpayer-funded expansive ABC and a financially constrained commercial sector are also being felt in the looming battle for control of the Australia TV channel. This is funded to the tune of \$75m over five years by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (read: taxpayers of Australia) and it provides a "soft diplomacy" Australian showcase to the Asia-Pacific region.

Sky News says it can do the job better and make the channel available worldwide. All it wants is an opportunity to tender for the job. The ABC says it has a further five-year option available to it and no tender is required.

I have long been a supporter of the ABC, and believe Scott has it in a sweet spot at the moment. But that shouldn't prevent us from questioning Scott's imperial-sounding plans for the future and debating the right mix between commercial media organisations and those that rely on the public teat. Are we prepared to underwrite more and more media services by ever-growing amounts? How valid is a system that gives the ABC a billion to compete with the

commercial networks and then gives the commercials \$250m to survive against growing competition?

When is enough enough? Direct grants to run the ABC and SBS, plus the free-to-air networks' \$250m licence reduction, add up to \$1.4 billion this year. What are we prepared to bear next year, or the years after that when mobile TV services will bloom and internet TV

will allow infinite content. Will the ABC demand to compete in these spaces?

Scott is right when he says the ABC is a much loved brand.

Politically, it is probably impossible to flog it off, but the government has in the recent past got out of businesses such as banking, telecommunications and airlines. Does it really need to be in media? 

## All eyes on ABC as BBC announces cuts

**Geoff Elliott**

The Australian, February 27, 2010

Critics of the taxpayer-funded ABC have seized on reports that its British counterpart is to cut back on services, with the BBC reportedly set to acknowledge it has become too powerful and is threatening the survival of traditional commercial media companies.

The BBC will close two radio stations, shut down half its website and cut spending heavily on imported American programs in an overhaul of services to be announced next month.

The news comes after growing political pressure on the BBC over its size, and ahead of national elections expected in May in which Conservative leader David Cameron, a critic of the BBC's reach, is the frontrunner.

The news was immediately felt in Australia, where ABC managing director Mark Scott has been a vocal supporter of the BBC and the need for public broadcasters to expand into new media.

Brendan Hopkins, chief executive of newspaper group APN News & Media, said the BBC's plans - reported in The Times newspaper - should be the start of a political debate in Australia over the role of public broadcasting.

"Do we want unfettered growth of the national broadcaster using taxpayer funds?" Mr Hopkins said. "We are not properly defining where

the ABC is going. The last thing we want is for the ABC running around, running up the costs for new services no one has defined, and then find the only way to run these new services is to open it up to collect revenue," he said, referring to commercial media companies' fears that if the ABC's cost base went too high, Canberra could allow advertising in competition with commercial media.

A spokesman for the ABC said there was no comparison between the ABC's and BBC's plans.

"Because it draws its funds from a licence-fee system, the BBC has a budget almost six times as big as the ABC's without any of the geographic and other challenges we face," the spokesman said.

"As a consequence of the fee system, the BBC has felt an imperative to compete with commercial rivals in almost every area of broadcasting and because of its size, has dominated most markets.

"If you look at the specific areas the BBC is withdrawing from, they are areas where the ABC is not involved in, does not receive specific funding for, or is the sole free provider."

But Mr Hopkins said the debate was entirely relevant in the Australian context, given Mr Scott's ambitious expansion plans, which include a new 24-hour news channel. 

# ABC Open Launches in Canberra

**ABC connects communities through the virtual town square.**

The ABC's status as the nation's virtual town square enters a new phase today with the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, launching ABC Open at an event in Parliament House.

This innovative project is aimed at developing the digital skills of regional and rural communities, allowing them to tap into the potential of new technology to share their ideas and tell their own stories. Through the ABC Open project, communities will be able to create and share material in forums most relevant to them. Material will feature on the ABC's new Local websites at [abc.net.au/local](http://abc.net.au/local) and across other ABC websites. ABC Open content could also be made available across other broadcast platforms including mobile, radio and TV.

The ABC's Managing Director Mark



Scott said ABC Open represents another step forward in the national broadcaster's commitment to serving as the nation's 21st Century "town square".

'The town square concept is all about utilising the ABC's resources and talent, plus the new technology that allows us to move into new platforms and new devices, to connect communities. Interactivity and connectivity are essential in this new digital space. ABC

Open enables our audience to do this – highlighting Australian voices and Australian stories.'

ABC Open utilises funding made available by the Federal Government in the last Budget to support the roll-out of the National Broadband Network. The ABC was allocated \$15.3 million over three years under the Regional Hubs Initiative to build the project, purchase equipment and recruit specially-trained staff.

The emphasis in recruitment will be on creating valuable employment opportunities outside the major capital cities. Through the project, more than 50 editors and producers will be engaged and based in Local Radio offices across the country. Their role is to help communities design and post their own content, developing media-rich local stories that encourage the further exchange of ideas and opinions.

'ABC Open will help bridge the digital gulf experienced by many Australians outside the main population centres,' Mr Scott said. 'The aim is to equip them with the digital skills necessary to exploit the full potential of the new digital environment.'

As part of the staged development, the ABC is currently appointing Editors and will now begin recruiting the first 12 ABC Open producers. 

## ? Will the ABC's 24 Hour news service damage its other programs?

Darce Cassidy

Those well known friends of the ABC, the Murdoch and Fairfax media interests, have become very worried that the ABC's 24 hour news service will take funding away from the ABC's "core broadcasting services".

With great concern for the ABC, long term Murdoch executive Malcolm Colless wrote recently that the ABC will "have to rely on savings in other areas to support the channel"

However this claim is inconsistent with what the ABC 's Managing

Director told a Senate Estimates hearing, and with a statement from the ABC's Director of Communications, Michael Millett. In response to a query from Friends of the ABC Mr Millett wrote:

*The ABC has consistently stated that the funding for the News Channel will come from savings obtained through a production review and other technology and efficiency improvements. It has also stressed that there is no intention to steal resources from the ABC's flagship news programs or other areas like Radio National.*

Questioned by Greens Senator Scott Ludlum at a Senate Estimates hearing on 8 February ABC Managing Director Mark Scott confirmed that savings had been made through the use of automated technology in the News and Current Affairs Division, and added that the ABC "are not taking resources away from anywhere else in the ABC to deliver that channel."

While those answers may reassure us that the new channel won't take funding away from other parts of the ABC a legitimate question remains.

What is the right balance between breadth and depth? With local, national and international audiences to serve, and with content having to be massaged to fit diverse media forms, including radio, television and the web, will the ABC's ability to pursue research intensive investigative journalism be compromised? 

# An Independent ABC at last?

## A Paradigm Shift?



**Meredith Edwards**  
Emeritus Professor  
ANZSOG Institute  
for Governance  
University of  
Canberra.

Governments for decades have been stacking the ABC Board with their “mates”. Remember the controversy over the Howard Government’s appointment of Albrechtsen, Windschuttle and Brunton to the Board which Senator Faulkner at the time called the “unholy trinity”? And our Prime Minister before he came to power admitted that previous Labor governments couldn’t pretend to be “like Mother Theresa” on their appointments.

Now all this is set to change. The Rudd Government intends to dramatically reform the ABC (and SBS) Board appointment processes. For this, the Rudd Government deserves to be congratulated.

Currently before the Parliament is the National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill 2009 which formalizes a merit-based and independent appointment process based on the UK system of public sector board appointments. In fact, the basis for this policy goes back to Labor’s Better ABC Board policy announced in 2003. The Bill: places responsibility for assessing candidates in the hands of an “independent Nomination Panel at arms length from the government”; specifies that vacancies are to be widely advertised; uses a set of core criteria (with additional criteria added if the Minister so decides) and mandates a report from the Panel to the Minister, including a short list of at least three recommended candidates. The

amending legislation specifies the functions of the Panel and that it “would act independently from the Government and would not be subject to its direction” (section 24C). The relevant Department(s) is required to publish the processes by which such appointments were made in its Annual Report.

Importantly, if the Minister wishes to appoint a person not recommended by the Panel, after notifying the Prime Minister of this, the Minister, once the appointment is made, must table a statement of reasons to Parliament for that decision. In the case of the Chair of the Board, on receiving the short list from the Panel, the PM will be required to consult the Leader of the Opposition before making a recommendation to the Governor-General, and similarly, if choosing an individual not on the Panel’s recommended short list, provide reasons in a statement to Parliament. There is no question that the process set out in the Bill is a paradigm shift from the position up until now – on paper at least. Cronyism should be significantly reduced. The power of ministers will be significantly constrained. But even the best drafted legislation carries risks that the government’s intentions are not carried through. Here the UK implementation experience can alert us to potential pitfalls.

### What could go wrong?

Minister Conroy has articulated the aims of the legislation: to foster independence, transparency, accountability and public confidence. There can be tensions between these objectives, in particular between ministerial accountability for appointments and an independent process.

### The extent of ministerial involvement?

There has been a continual and often heated debate in the UK about the degree to which ministers should be involved – a tension between those that argue for a system completely independent of ministers as the only way to ensure appointment on the basis of merit and public confidence in the system, and those that argue that ministers must be involved in the process in line with the principle of representative democracy. Until recently in the UK, ministers could be kept informed about the progress of an appointment round if he/she wished, but could not be actively involved between the planning stage and the submission of a short list of suitable candidates.

Janet Gaymer CBE, current Commissioner for Public Appointments for England and Wales, is on record as saying that some Ministers had unrecorded involvement in the middle of an appointment process which could be interpreted as political interference. Under a recently revised Commissioner’s Code, ministers can now be more involved in the process in England and Wales (not in Scotland) but the Code of Practice specifies in some detail how that process is to be open and transparent and capable of public scrutiny. And more recently Parliament has become involved, with its parliamentary select committees being able to hold pre-appointment hearings to scrutinise candidates for key public board positions before they are appointed (such as the Chair of the BBC Trust).

Although the proposed Australian legislation spells out in some detail the functions of the Nomination Panel through the planning, advertising, assessing and recommending stages of the appointment process, it pays scant attention to the specific role of Ministers between the setting of the selection criteria and receiving the short list of recommended candidates from the Nomination Panel. Unless this is rectified in a separate Code of Practice, real difficulties can be expected and public confidence undermined.

## Enough Independence?

How independent will the selection and workings of the Australian Panel be in practice? The Panel will be appointed by the Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Nomination Panel in the original ALP Policy consisted of the Secretary of relevant department and head of relevant division, the APSC Merit Commissioner and an independent eminent person. But the Legislation does not specify how that process is to take place or the criteria for selection of Panel members: will the appointees be eminent people who will be expected to “not rock the boat” or people appointed because of their institutional affiliations? This needs clarification. Independence would also be threatened if the relevant Minister is briefed orally before the possible short list is formally lodged with him or her and this is part of the process is not made transparent.

Enhancing public confidence? One of the aims of Labor’s policy is to restore public trust in the ABC so the crucial question here is: to what extent can we expect the proposed reforms to enhance faith in the system? In the UK, an independent study conducted for the Office of the Commissioner of Public Sector Appointments (OCPA) on the perception of Ministerial appointments processes, found in 2005 (ten years after setting up the OCPA), poor public understanding of board appointment processes with only one in five UK citizens having confidence in the public appointments system. Obviously any reforms will require a civic education component, transparency and independent monitoring processes to shift attitudes of distrust away from politicians.

### Sufficient monitoring and auditing?

The UK evidence is that, despite detailed legislation and oversight by

the OCPA, more than a decade later serious breaches of the Code of Practice still occur, including a number of appointments made with the virtual absence of an audit trail. So, there is the issue of what process is to be involved to ensure transparency of processes and monitoring of what works and what needs refining. While the department(s) will be required to provide a statement in relation to each process for each director or Chair (and SBS) appointment processes in its Annual Report, it would seem sensible to have an overall audit from beyond the department, for example from the APSC or the ANAO or if not Parliament itself. This will be all the more important if the Government decides to extend what will be significantly improved appointment processes beyond the ABC and SBS Boards to all boards in the public sector. ☯

# In gunning for the ABC, commercial media are aiming at the wrong target.

Darce Cassidy



In recent weeks both the Murdoch and the Fairfax/Rural Press media interests have made strident attacks on the ABC.

In January the chief executive of Sky News, Angelos Frangopoulos issued a media release claiming that ABC’s new 24-hour TV news would be a “needless duplication” of services already provided. He was referring to the fact that the ABC service would be in competition with his company, and would offer viewers a choice. Sky News is part owned by the Murdoch family.

He went on to argue that the ABC Charter restricted the ABC to providing “services that commercial broadcasters are unable or unwilling to provide”. This is a highly creative reading of the ABC Act. The Act not only positively requires the ABC to provide news services, but

also stipulates that the ABC is to provide “innovative and comprehensive programs” (emphasis added). The use of the word “comprehensive” makes it crystal clear that the ABC is not intended to provide a service restricted to the scraps thrown away by the commercial media.

Also entering the fray from the Murdoch stable was veteran Murdoch executive Malcolm Colless, who wrote in The Australian in January that the ABC’s planned 24 hour TV news was “a taxpayer-funded declaration of war on commercial media outlets”.

The Murdoch media were soon joined by the Fairfax/Rural Press group, whose chief executive Brian McCarthy took a slightly different tack, saying that the ABC’s Open Project could undermine the “excellent service”

provided to rural communities by his company, and force the closure of some of his newspapers.

However it seems that Mr McCarthy was worried that his newspapers would be threatened by amateur journalists and storytellers from local communities.

ABC Open, [www.abc.net.au/open/default.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/open/default.htm), will provide the services of multimedia producers to help members of regional communities to tell their own stories. Distinguished journalist Margaret Simons, who has an excellent knowledge of regional media, commented in her blog, The Content Makers, that McCarthy’s outburst was “mostly tosh”:

*For starters .....There will be a heavy emphasis on training citizens in the use of digital media. All this is appropriate for the role of a public broadcaster. If it works*

well it will be community led and not the kind of thing that Fairfax Media has ever done or even look like doing in rural Australia or anywhere else.

Secondly, the ABC Open sites will not take advertising. The Rural Press part of Fairfax Media will retain its monopoly or at best duopoly...in many, many regional towns.

Thirdly, Rural Press-Fairfax Media looks a bit silly trying to take the high moral ground here. They have had rural Australia on a platter for many years. What is the result? Extremely patchy. There are some good local papers, but

many that are laughably poor, lazy and complacent.

Attacks on the ABC by the commercial media are not new. The Murdoch dynasty has been at the forefront from shortly after the ABC began in 1932, and reached its peak in 1940 when, Sir Keith Murdoch (Rupert's father) succeeded in having the ABC's budget reduced because of competition to his newspaper interests. Finally in 1946 the ABC managed to outsmart Murdoch when the government amended the ABC Act to provide that the ABC should run its own news

service, independent of the commercial media.

While it is not unusual for the commercial media to attack the ABC, there is a reason why attacks on public broadcasting are growing at this time. As I explain in "Why the Commercial Media are Worried", on page 10, the symbiotic relationship between mass media and mass marketing is breaking down.

In blaming the ABC, or the BBC, for their troubles, the commercial media are missing the fundamental changes going on around them. 

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Mr. Scott,

You are making it painful for me to maintain my loyalty to the ABC.

I feel like the proverbial frog which is being boiled slowly.

The "promos" broadcast between programmes—both on the Radio and TV—are increasing in number, increasing in length, are increasing in volume and obviously increasing in cost.

The ABC is becoming more and more like a Commercial broadcaster.

WHY ?

Is it because you came from the commercial media ?

The ABC is not (supposed to be) commercial.

Why did you change the name of ABC Enterprises to ABC Commercial?

The ABC was not and is not (set up as) a commercial corporation.

Mr. Scott you have a new job as Managing Director of a NON COMMERCIAL A.B.C.

A new MD should mean some changes/improvements and moving with the times which you are doing with a great measure of success and is appreciated. But it does not require a complete reversal of the mandate, a dilution of the Charter of the organisation to the degree that it is becoming unrecognisable as "Our ABC".

The money, production time and staff time spent on all those repetitive promo / advertisements could—and in

my opinion should—be spent on programmes.

In spite of the boredom of the repetitive promos I am never sure what the programme is for the evening ahead after the News & 7.30 Report. If a list is displayed and if it stays on screen with enough time for a reasonably literate adult to read, then I no longer see it. Where has it gone ?

Meanwhile there is so much loud confusing 'guff' it succeeds in making us turn off. Sometimes a promo for an upcoming programme is repeated so often there is no longer any need to take note of the time to watch it as it persuades the audience that they have seen it already.

It seems that because so much time, talent, money is spent producing the "promos" it is felt by the producers that to justify that time and cost, they must be broadcast ad nauseam.

Even on all ABC Radio Stations the programmes are shorter because of the "promos" which blab on and on for minutes instead of getting on with it—the programme.

A lot more reading gets done in this and many households lately.

Please reduce the number, and time/cost of all those unnecessary "promos/advertisements.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Smorty

Sir,

Over the years, the ABC has been accused of both right and left wing bias,

such comments accepted by the staff at the ABC as evidence of getting the balance right. However, I would like to bring up one instance where, I believe, considerable bias was shown.

It was the occasion of the three week Israeli/Gaza conflict in December/January 2008/2009. The "7:30 Report" gave substantial coverage to the matter, especially in relation to the Israeli viewpoint, interviewing Martin Indyk on, at least, three occasions. Expectations of a viewpoint from the Palestinian side were not met. I complained to three different committees/panels, and my complaints were not accepted.

I enclose the summary of the final report, i.e. the Independent Complaints Review Panel (which was sent to me as a Media Release). I found the I.C.R.P. report incorrect in some respects, so, subsequently, forwarded my reply stating the errors I had found, I requested that this statement of mine be printed on the ABC website, as had been done with the I.C.R.P. report. This request was refused.

I was the editor of the "News and Views" the predecessor to "Update" for much of the period 1976-1996. The interests of the ABC have always been close to my heart. I am bringing this matter of bias to the attention of the "Friends" because, like democracy, eternal vigilance is necessary to preserve any institution, and is required as much for the ABC, as for any other public body

Joan Michie

The full text of the I.C.R.P. Report, and Joan Michie's reply, may be found on the FABC website at [www.fabcnsw.org.au](http://www.fabcnsw.org.au) 

# Why the commercial media are worried

While the commercial media have almost always been hostile to public broadcasters like the ABC, the increasingly rabid attacks by both the Fairfax and Murdoch media are a result of recent developments. Of course the global financial crisis may be part of this, it is not the major factor.

Advertising support for mass media is in rapid decline. While talk of the death of advertising is premature, the cosy relationship between mass advertising and mass media is being challenged.

In his book *The Chaos Scenario* U.S. writer and broadcaster Bob Garfield argues:

*For the past four centuries, mass media were funded or at least subsidized by mass marketing, which piggybacked on what we now call "content" to issue messages of its own.*

*Like the eternal co-dependence of flowers and bees, this was an extremely convenient symbiotic relationship for those involved. Or if you prefer a more spiritual analogy, imagine the media yin coupled snugly with the advertising yang, a transcendent oneness yielding cheap and free content for all. Well, that's over – or damn near. In the digital age, that time-honored symbiosis is coming apart. It's happening slowly enough that most consumers haven't really noticed. But it's happening quickly enough that media and marketing are in big trouble – trouble that I believe will send*

*the world spinning into a postapocalyptic post-advertising age.*

Garfield later goes on to demonstrate the steady decline in television viewing compared to Internet usage in the U.S.

*According to Nielsen, in the new millennium, the U.S. TV audience eroded an average of 2% a year – even though, in the same period, the population increased by 30 million. According to Swivel, in 2000 Americans devoted an average of 793 hours to broadcast TV and 104 to the Internet, a ratio of just under 8:1. By 2008, with broadband penetration in the U.S. tripling, the TV/Internet ratio had gone to 675-200, or 3.4:1.*

It is a similar story in Australia as Bob Peters writes for the Screen Australia website.

Viewing free-to-air television still accounted for the greatest usage of discretionary time by Australian children in 2007: 87 minutes per day or 30 per cent. However, this was 26 per cent less than in 1995, with children redirecting a considerable amount of time to watching subscription television and spending increased time viewing video (DVD and VHS). This shift in behavior highlights the challenges that television is likely to face in the future as the availability of alternatives continues to expand.

Another U.S. writer, Chris Anderson, takes the argument further. It is not simply the fact that there are other alternatives like DVD's or the Internet.

It is not simply the fact that the Internet can act like a giant TiVo machine that can enable viewers to strip out advertisements. It is much more fundamental than that. The point is that these technologies can serve niche audiences much better than broadcasting can. In his book *The Long Tail* Anderson writes:

*The great thing about broadcast is that it can bring one show to millions of people with unmatched efficiency. But it can't do the opposite—bring a million shows to one person each. Yet that is exactly what the Internet does so well. The economics of the broadcast era required hit shows—big buckets—to catch huge audiences. The economics of the broadband era are reversed. Serving the same stream to millions of people at the same time is hugely expensive and wasteful for a distribution network optimized for point-to-point communications.*

*...This shattering of the mainstream into a zillion different cultural shards is something that upsets traditional media and entertainment no end. After decades of executives refining their skill in creating, picking, and promoting hits, those hits are suddenly not enough. The audience is shifting to something else, a muddy and indistinct proliferation of . . . Well, we don't have a good term for such non-hits. They're certainly not "misses," because most weren't aimed at world domination in the first place. They're "everything else."*

*.... That mass of niches has always existed, but as the cost of reaching it falls—consumers finding niche products, and niche products finding consumers—it's suddenly becoming a cultural and economic force to be reckoned with.*

This clearly has implications for the ABC, but it is a point the ABC already understands and has made effective use of, especially in Radio National.

This is not to say that advertising is dead, or that advertising can not adapt itself to niche audiences, but rather that the symbiotic relationship between mass media and mass marketing is likely to break down.

The ABC, on the other hand, is used to dealing with specialist audiences, and is well equipped to face the challenges of the new media environment.

Darce Cassidy 



Somerville

*"There's a new series on telly....Rupert Murdoch is the captain of an intergalactic starship whose mission is searching for a planet with a uniform pay online-news system."*

# Are you happy with Your ABC?



**Jan Kent**

Friends of the ABC Illawarra

**W**e know the ABC means different things to different people. What does it mean to you, to your children or to your grandchildren?

Some people love local radio, others love Classic FM or Radio National. Others mix and match. We are being promised an extension of News Radio – as that is what more people supposedly want but of course it will take resources from other areas. Do you podcast? Podcasting allows you to listen when and where you want.

As for TV we now have ABC1 and ABC2 and on 5 December 2009 ABC3 – although not everyone has changed over to digital yet. And what about iView? This offers quality high resolution full screen video for high speed internet users. High speed is 1.1Mbps or above and requires a Pentium 4 computer or its equivalent with 2Gb or above memory.

Of course not all of us have the technology needed to utilize all these new ways of accessing the ABC. We need to realize that they will revolutionize our ABC viewing and listening. There need never be a “bad” program night when we have the capability to choose our own programs. In fact there will not just be one program available on any night but we will all be able to tailor our own programs.

Obviously this will have the potential for many advantages but we need to ensure that the choices we have are

from quality content. What is the point of “a wide choice - of equally bad services”? (Roger Raven, Update August 2009).

Mark Scott, in his A.N.Smith Memorial Lecture on Journalism on 14th October 2009 says of the web: ‘...it shifted power to audiences, the power to choose what they would see and read, from where and when.’

Of course this is having an impact on the revenue of proprietors such as Rupert and James Murdoch, who are responding by attacking free-to-air broadcasting. Turning against public broadcasters and attacking their content, funding and very right to exist. Quoting Mark Scott again: “...I suspect too much attention is being given to finding a pay model rather than addressing the content questions in terms of quality and distinctiveness that will really drive audience commitment.”

Be assured we are in the middle of a media war and it is more important than ever for us not to be complacent about “our ABC”. We must ensure we have input into what our ABC will become. Remember younger people have much more media choice than we did and do not believe in media brand loyalty. Many create their own stories. While the needs of the young must be catered for let’s not lose sight of what those of us over 50 want too.

So what can you do? Have you ever thought of giving feedback to the ABC? What are the programs you absolutely feel you can’t do without? Which ones

do you loathe – if any? If we want a voice in the future of the ABC then it is time for the silent majority to make their wishes known.

We want to get you thinking about your ABC. The most important thing you can do is to contact the ABC and to let management know what you think. Form letters from Friends of the ABC do not carry weight. The weight of individuals is what will count. If you value a quality, independent public broadcaster then the time to act is now.

Do you think both radio and TV have too many promos? Are you one of those detecting more and more spin, trivialization and sensationalism in ABC “news” presentations? What about the proliferation of cheaper talkback shows in favour of more serious journalism? What do you think of the quality of programs on offer? As programs are outsourced and staff down sized do you see the ABC’s output as becoming higher in quantity and lower in quality? Do we want the ABC to become a Murdoch clone? Remember all free-to-air services are under threat. Please let the ABC know what it is you value about their services and what you don’t.

The ABC National Feedback phone number is: 139 994. Head office in Sydney’s address is: ABC Ultimo Centre, GPO Box 9994, Sydney, NSW 2001. State Director: Mike McCluskey

Or go online and e-mail your feedback. 

# Branch News

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## Northern Rivers

Members of the Northern Rivers branch have been following the debates in Federal Parliament regarding the composition and method of appointing members to the ABC Board. The following exchange of letters took place in the Tweed Daily News.

The first was posted on February 4.

*The Federal Parliament is currently debating a bill that has ramifications for the composition of the ABC Board. The government is seeking to re-establish the position of a staff representative on the board and to ban former politicians from taking a place on the board.*

*The bill is designed to make the appointment process more transparent and to avoid the political cronyism that has been apparent in the past. It seems that the Coalition parties are planning to vote against both these provisions. They argue that the board will be denied the expertise of former politicians. On the other hand they feel that the expertise of people like Quentin Dempster (the elected staff representative) will provide a conflict of interest. The Coalition seems to be cautious of employees having any input into an organisation's management.*

*The Friends of the ABC have argued for many years that we need a new system of appointment to the board and believe that staff representatives bring valuable expertise to the workings of the board. We trust that Green and Independent senators will support the government in this measure.*

*Neville Jennings  
President, Northern Rivers Friends of the ABC*

A local resident replied on 12/2 agreeing with the need for independence of the Board but making allegations of bias against the ABC in general. The following was our response.

*Jon Jenkins (TDN 12/2) is entitled to his view on the alleged bias of the ABC.*

*There is a danger in making sweeping accusations about a diverse organisation such as our national broadcaster. Does he really suggest that there is left wing bias in "Songs of Praise" on Sunday mornings or in the flood warnings on local ABC radio? Is he worried about the leanings of B1 and B2 on ABC Kids or Margaret Throsby's choice of music on Classic FM? Would anyone suggest that Michael Duffy on Radio National is leaning to the left?*

*The ABC is a broad church and Jon has apparently been offended by the tenor of one or two sermons. Former politicians tend to be wedded to their preconceptions. That is why they may not have the balance required for a position on the ABC Board. It is a pity that other media organisations do not have the same focus on balanced reporting that is evident within our ABC.*

*Neville Jennings  
President, Northern Rivers Friends of the ABC*

The Northern Rivers branch will hold its next meeting in late April. Watch local newspapers and email messages for details.

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## Cowper

We held our Christmas 'Get Together' at the end of November. The committee had decided to approach our ABC local manager to speak at the above, after contact and then many, many phone calls we finally gave up on him. It was decided at the last minute that we would do a Power Point presentation on the ABC's 2009 Annual Report, with a committee member to speak on one of five subjects. These were: ABC Services, Television, News, A Greener Future for the ABC and ABC In The Community.

At our meeting early February we discussed our proposed program for 2010. We hope to have a major public speaking event in Coffs Harbour with

interesting academic and popular speakers talking on the theme "Where are the Public Intellectuals?" We also want to try getting more participation by our members into all things ABC. We will be having a social day and the theme will be "Its Easy". It will be an introduction to computers and how to interact with them, also we hope our very own new blog site will be up and running soon. We also thought we might see if we could visit the ABC's studio in Coffs Harbour???

The committee discussed the new 24 hour Digital News channel, nice to see Mark Scott getting up the nose of News Ltd/Foxtel. We also discussed again the renewing of the license by DFAT for Australian Television that broadcasts into S.E. Asia and the Pacific. We were extremely concerned of the possibility of it falling into the hands of News Ltd/Foxtel. News Ltd papers have a big problem separating their editorial policy from their news. There is only one news organization who has the trust of the people to do the right thing when it reports the news....YOUR ABC.

*Martin Miller  
Vice President, FABC Cowper.*

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## Hunter

Hunter members were pleased with the Rudd Government's 2009 ABC budgetary allocation and whilst it didn't fulfil all our wishes it was a good effort and hopefully a pointer of better things to come. We congratulate Mal Hewitt and his negotiating team and the regional branches for their efforts in striving for a better deal for our national broadcaster, particularly in the light of serious global economic difficulties.

We also acknowledge ABC Managing Director Mark Scott and Communications Minister Conroy in achieving a pretty fair result in redressing disturbing under funding and look forward with confidence to a more secure future for the ABC. They achieved more than we had ever hoped to receive from the previous government. Our request to consider holding a Q & A program session in Newcastle was received enthusiastically, but impeded by advised tight financial constraints



At Cowper's Christmas 'Get Together' - Above: Moya Connors and her presentation on ABC Services.  
Below: Joyce Gardner our secretary doing her presentation on Television.



affecting its likelihood in the short term.

Our committee has been busy recruiting new members and investigating future social events, fundraisers and future supporting speakers.

Vice President Henry Wellsmore and I enjoyed a productive "getting acquainted" meeting with local radio station 2NC manager, Phil Ashley-Brown, who brought us up to speed with future ABC digital developments. We also covered a range of topics of mutual interest and decided to make these meetings a regular event. On quite another tack, the committee is disappointed, with the lack of progress in developing a unified peak body, representing all states including Victoria and having a democratically appointed national spokesperson. We are well aware of difficulties in this regard but the committee is hoping for a breakthrough in overcoming niggling divisive interstate differences for the sake of greater unity and national impact.

Our committee is also keen to see the restoration of a Staff-Appointed Director to the ABC Board in line with the Rudd Government's pre election commitment. We feel that past director, Quentin Dempster, did a superb job before the Howard Government abolished his position but recognise that other eminently qualified personnel are equally suitable for the task and will be relieved when the matter is finalised.

Attendance at our last AGM was disappointing with the same few members turning up left to carry the load, provoking demoralising and negative thoughts of disbanding the Hunter Branch altogether. We realise everyone is busier these days but look forward to more active membership participation in the year ahead and have a few plans in the pipeline, to be publicised in future UPDATE editions and local Hunter bulletins.

Branch members enjoyed a very pleasant and successful rail trip and guided tour of the ABC Ultimo studios in December, experiencing the pleasure of making new friends and discussing items of common interest during the journey and at the studio restaurant.

Finally, somewhat belatedly but no less sincerely, we wish all FABC members a happy 2010 bolstered by their efforts in ensuring the continuation of the ABC's quality entertainment and independent news broadcasting services.

*Peter Brandscheid, President Hunter FABC Branch*

## Central Coast

At the AGM some dedicated members were in attendance and there was some change of responsibilities with a new enthusiasm to seek new members and to expand the range of guest speakers.

A decision at the committee meeting was taken for all present to write to the Greens senators, the Independent senators and the National Party senators to seek their support for the government's National Broadcasting Amendment Bill which has been introduced into the House of Representatives. The threat by opposition senators to reject two aspects of this bill would ensure its defeat without the support of 7 non-Labor senators.

It was argued that the bill enshrines a merit-based appointment system that involves advice being given to the Minister by an independent panel, and that this approach to appointments to the ABC and SBS boards has been looked forward to for many years and the opportunity should not be lost.

We are looking forward to our first function for 2010, a visit by ABC News presenter Jeremy Fernandez on Friday March 19 at 2pm in the St James Anglican Church Hall, Wyong. Details are on our page within the FABC website. Enquiries 4333 8107 or 4353 3625.

*John Hale* 

# Thoughts on a 24-Hour ABC TV News service

**Roger Raven**

Former President, WA FABC

Issues regarding the 24/7 News Service are both specific (cost-both financial and skills- quality, and compatibility with the ABC's main output, for instance) and general (platform, keeping a reputation for innovation, improving ratings, and currying favour with the Minister and/or other groups).

Note that we are talking about a 24-hour TV News service.

## Specifically:

- ABC2 and ABC3 already involve substantial demands on the ABC's limited and distorted resources. ABC2, ABC3, and the News Channel will all be dominated by repeats, re-runs, and duplicated and archive programming. While Mr Scott can fairly refer to the "technology dividend" (content produced more cheaply when used for multiple purposes), it seems a half-truth because while it improves the ABC's productivity, someone or something needs to be cut to financially balance the employment of eight extra staff.
- While the benefits are clear, they appear set up more as part of the drive for growth so popular with CEOs, especially as by TV standards they are run on a shoestring.
- Such channels will further stretch the ABC's support resources (the backroom people – researchers, archivers, librarians, translators &c do matter).

- In respect of both news production and delivery platform, any radio or online 24/7 service is more a further development of the existing situation than anything new. NewsRadio, for instance is 24-hour.

## Generally:

- A. Our ABC has been, with Foxtel, one of Australia's few true digital pioneers. It seems that in a lot of technical areas, much of the private sectors skills needs have been met by poaching staff from the ABC.
- B. It should not be completely forgotten that, as with ABC3, the increasing conversion of the ABC structure and ethos to a quasi-commercial model (such as contracting-out virtually all production) eases any move to flog it off.
- C. Having a televised 24-hour service can be criticised.

Television is a much more expensive medium than radio, but its need for "song and dance" (movement, just movement) typically makes it a poor medium for presenting information. As with YouTube, Facebook, etc., the medium tends to trivialise the message.

Consider Scott's claim in announcing the 24-hour news channel that "we have witnessed the ABC's capacity to cover breaking news with the crisis in Haiti".

Cover? Cover? Haiti's post-earthquake suffering is another

example of the mainstream media focus on natural disaster. It is all too often voyeurism (or more precisely, perhaps, schadenfreud – pleasure derived from the sufferings of others) rather than something that will bring any tangible benefits to the sufferers.

As is clear from a flick through the material being published, the media didn't and won't cover the social or political history of Haiti with any depth. Even if they wanted to, not only would it intrude on the space allocated to voyeurism, but also it may inhibit viewer's enjoyment of the spectacle, or worse, embarrass the U.S. Real people suffering death and injury are as much a part of the Western entertainment culture as video games, 2012, or Terminator. No doubt the reason for proposing the HD channel for the News service is for maximum reality TV in such situations.

## D. Expansion and innovation

It has been suggested that this service is ultimately intended to involve the "user generated content and .... community web sites and portals .... To create virtual town squares for communities" (also funded in the last budget).

In 2008, the BBC Trust scrapped a similar plan by Britain's public broadcaster to spend £68 million creating an online network of more than 60 local news websites, partly because of the negative effect the commercial media expected to suffer.

So although the BBC was as entitled to do that as the ABC would be, complaints from the private sector caused the British Government to intervene to protect them (just as the Two-Airline Agreement was established to protect Ansett from Qantas). Presumably Minister Conroy is aware of the precedent, but is more determined to see that the ABC gets that option here. No doubt he sees useful political returns.

Foxtel chief executive Kim Williams has said that companies like his should be able to compete for public funding and the ABC should not be

allowed to "inadvertently crowd out market-driven creativity and innovation". I'd suggest that the ABC was set up to be creative and innovative. After all, it was set up partly to break the monopoly on the news maintained by private newspaper proprietors of the day.

So, the ABC is fully entitled to compete with the profit-seeking sector.

### E. Distortions Deserve Prior Attention

ABC3 was of course intended to assist the government's desire to increase the adoption of digital TV receivers. Successive ABC MDs have flagged their willingness to prostitute the ABC.

FABCs, like the ABC Board, have for a long time been tolerant of tied funding. It is a position FABCs should perhaps reconsider,

notwithstanding the tensions it would cause with the ABC. Untied general-purpose funding appears to comprise only about 10% of the last Budget increase.

I'd submit that the cumulative effect of most extra funding being tied is that the ABC's structure is now seriously distorted into an untied-funded portion that supplies the truly necessary and popular services, and the tied-funded portion for those bits of the ABC that return a political dividend to the government of the day.

This is all about further distortions. In "The ABC of seduction: how Mr Darcy depends on damsels", Paul Sheehan wrote in the SMH:

"He also knows the Napoleonic Prime Minister wants an Asian news channel to compete with the BBC. That is why, in announcing the news channel, he said its start-up and operation would be funded from within the ABC's existing budget."

That implies further distortion, increasingly explicit political orientation, and the obviously necessary bias of Australia TV and Radio Australia. Indeed, in calling for

the ABC's overseas services to be part of "soft diplomacy", Mr Scott certainly breached the spirit and probably the letter of the ABC Charter.

Consider a later statement by Mark Scott (News to get ABC's HD slot, Ari Sharp SMH, February 9, 2010):

"Questioned by the Greens leader, Bob Brown, he said he could not recall China pressuring the ABC not to screen the documentary on the controversial Uighur leader Rebiya Kadeer, 10 Conditions of Love. The ABC bought the rights to the documentary last year but has not screened it."

That is a suspiciously weak denial. After all, by buying the rights, the ABC prevented broadcast by any

other broadcaster – something the Chinese Embassy would welcome.

While there is sometimes some overlap the result is not much improved.

True, the last Budget

"will provide the ABC with \$136.4 million in new funding over the next triennium to support the ABC's plans for an advertising-free, digital children's television channel and a significantly increased annual output of new Australian drama".

But though welcome, the drama funding is not enough even to meet Labor's election commitment "to require ABC television meet the Australian drama production standards met by the commercial networks", since 120 hours per year of broadcast TV drama is required, but the funding will at best provide 90, none of which is yet visible. At the moment, the ABC seems to be running BBC cops-and-robbers shows, or featherweight talk shows.

Newman's and Scott's tantrums and vindictiveness over the Chaser issue were not evidence of good or enlightened leadership. Indeed, it is difficult to have confidence in the integrity of either. However the focus on exploiting new technologies by both they and Balding/McDonald was and is crucial. The issue is the extent to which doing so should be allowed to distort the structure of the rest of

the ABC (which, after all, is most of it).

### F. Balance and Focus

What of news balance and focus? We receive remarkably little news from the Pacific, especially from New Zealand. Few Australians would know of the insurrection in Thailand's South, where over 4,000 people have been killed. Note, too that the "virtual communities" discussed above also focus on the "song and dance" mentality of "cross-media coverage" – there will be much more entertainment than information.

ABC TV News is now, to use a colourful phrase Philip Adams originally used of commercial TV, "chokers with the pornographies of violence, a place where social values are demeaned and destroyed. Increasingly, a streak of sadism runs through a great deal of programming." 7pm News is focussed on violent crime, with extensive clips of media-worthy (biased, shrill, and emotional) relatives. Note the number of cops-and-robbers shows.

A key issue should be ensuring that RN has a well-rounded set of specialist units, to keep up standards of excellence at both RN and Newscaff.

RN's entire network annual promotional budget is negligible, precisely because the over-50s to whom it appeals will stay for as long as the quality is there. Podcasting/vodcasting is directed more to a new, younger audience. Re-signing The Chaser on ABC TV for just one year cost the ABC \$6 million after a bidding war with the commercial stations - a third of RN's entire budget, and nearly a third of the expected annual cost of ABC3.

So I'd submit that this is perhaps one area in which the ABC's supporters are entitled to draw a line in the sand, to demand that quality come first, so the money should go to better uses, RN being one. Indeed, it would seem to be a move that will need to be made eventually, remembering that we are not here to support "any" ABC, but our ideal of the ABC as an excellent independent public broadcaster. 

...we are not here to support "any" ABC, but our ideal of the ABC...

## 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  
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## Membership Form *Please fill out the form below and return it with your payment to:*

*The Treasurer, Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.  
PO Box 1391, North Sydney NSW 2059.*

**Use only if joining** or if your membership has expired.

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please Print)

Partner  
First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Suburb \_\_\_\_\_ P/Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (Home) \_\_\_\_\_ (Work) \_\_\_\_\_ Mob \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to join  I would like to renew  Membership No. \_\_\_\_\_

Age Group  30 or under  31-50  51+

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

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

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