

# UPDATE

Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.  
quarterly newsletter

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incorporating **Background Briefing** friends of the abc

## ABC LOSES THREE VERY SPECIAL STAFF



Paul Lockyer

Gary Ticehurst

John Bean

A helicopter accident near Lake Eyre on 17th August took the lives of three highly esteemed and senior ABC staff - Paul Lockyer (reporter), Gary Ticehurst (pilot) and John Bean (cameraman). The tributes which have flowed since have been a wonderful testament to their outstanding professionalism in their field. They were highly respected by all who knew them and worked with them, but in each case their personal qualities engendered a very special relationship with friends and colleagues.

It is a tragedy that their lives were lost doing what they loved – bringing a unique part of natural Australia into the homes of us all, giving us all the opportunity to share and experience the wonders and the drama of an Australia which many of us may never see in reality.

Friends of the ABC expresses its deepest sympathy to the family, friends and colleagues of Paul, Gary and John. We all share the enormous sense of loss which is felt by all who knew them. 

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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

The tragic helicopter accident which took the lives of Paul Lockyer, Gary Ticehurst and John Bean is a reminder of the dangers which are a part of being a correspondent for the ABC, particularly for those who are working in the world's trouble spots. We take for granted that, day by day, we will be kept up to date with what is happening across our nation and throughout the world, but often correspondents work at considerable personal risk and great personal discomfort. Typical was Paul Lockyer's reporting from flood areas early this year, when he was first on the scene on many occasions, thanks to the ABC helicopter pilot Gary Ticehurst, with John Bean behind the camera. As with many ABC broadcasters, they became family, and part of our lives. Paul, Gary and John, thank you for all you have given us over many years – you are sadly missed.

Also a great loss to the ABC was Ian Carroll, who has had such an influence over the past 30 years in many of the ABC's ground-breaking programs – a man of great vision and humanity. Update includes an eloquent tribute from Mark Scott and Johnathan Holmes, which can be read in full on our website at [www.fabcnsw.org.au](http://www.fabcnsw.org.au).

### ABC Television – What's Left?

The pages of Update include much discussion of the bleak future for In-House ABC production. Update has invited Kim Dalton, Director of Television, to contribute, explaining and justifying both past changes and future proposals. Particular focus is on Arts coverage on television – any comparison between the present and ABC TV in its earlier years shows how barren the landscape is. Surely, with the multiplicity of channels now available, there should be far greater coverage of local concerts, opera, ballet, dramas, recitals – all that cultural material that commercial channels totally ignore.

If, as Kim Dalton suggests, the problem is lack of money, then he must seriously consider the allocation of scarce funds to the production of

populist material of doubtful quality which seems to occupy far too much time in the ABC TV schedule. It also emphasizes the constant need to pressure the Federal Government to restore ABC funding to the level of the early 80's.

### Michael Mason to Address AGM

Head of Radio National, Michael Mason, has agreed to attend the NSW FABC Annual General Meeting, where he will outline proposed changes to the Radio National lineup for 2012, as well as respond to comments and questions from our members. Any threat of the erosion of depth and intellectual challenge on RN is always of great concern – we have seen it happen before! Does the announced attracting of a younger audience mean that programs will lose that depth and rigour? Take the opportunity to put your views to Michael Mason by attending the AGM, at Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, 280 Pitt St. Sydney on Saturday 8th October at 1pm. Michael has outlined his vision for Radio National and the rationale for changes in this Update.

### Bias and Balance on the ABC

The need to constantly question and challenge the messages we receive from our media is highlighted by the invaluable MediaWatch and the inscrutable Johnathan Holmes, but the length of the journey we must sometimes take to find and expose the truth is laid out for us in some detail by FABC member, David McIlwain. He outlines the journey that he took in questioning the balance in a documentary shown on the ABC as 'Collision Course'. Produced by the BBC under the title "Death in the Med", the program examines the circumstances surrounding the Israeli attack on the flotilla which attempted to break the Gaza blockade. We must always question the sources of the information we are receiving, even on the ABC.

Nobody at the top of Murdoch's News of The World was asking enough questions about sources of information in the ongoing phone-hacking scandal, least of all Rupert Murdoch. It makes it even more extraordinary that Rupert Murdoch

should have been invited by the ABC Board to deliver the Boyer Lectures in 2009, in which he used such words as 'truth', 'quality', 'integrity' in relation to his own media organizations, obviously with tongue firmly in cheek. There is clearly a need for the proposed inquiry into the print media in Australia, where Murdoch owns over 70%.

### **FABC Dinner and Christmas Party**

Veteran journalist and broadcaster

Mike Carlton proved to be a very popular speaker at the Annual Dinner of Friends of The ABC. He spoke warmly of his early days as a cadet journalist in the 1960's, and the thoroughness of the training given to young journalists and future broadcasters. It is a sad reality that such training and grounding is not part of today's ABC - we reproduce the latter part of his address, in which he seriously questions the quality of much that is broadcast in 2011.

Another 'veteran' of the ABC is

Margaret Throsby, who has perfected the art of interview in her morning segment on Classic FM, but her career spans well over 40 years, including television, 702 radio and Classic FM. Margaret will be a worthy recipient of the Annual Award for Excellence in Broadcasting, presented at the FABC Christmas Party, to be held on a date to be announced. Please make a note in your diaries.

**Mal Hewitt**

President, NSW FABC 

# BROADCASTING EXCELLENCE AWARD for 2011

## CLASSIC FM's MARGARET THROSBY

**A** face and voice familiar Australia-wide, and one of the ABC's most popular and admired broadcasters, Margaret Throsby presents Mornings on ABC Classic FM from 9am to 11am, Monday to Friday. Her highly successful career encompasses both radio and television.

Margaret joined the ABC as an announcer in 1967. Since then she has overcome major barriers to the accepted roles for women in broadcasting. After a dearth, for more than a decade, of major roles for women on air, Margaret broke the sound barrier for a new generation, becoming the first woman to read national radio news. Soon after, in 1978 Margaret was the first woman to present national television news.

She has presented a variety of music and current affairs programs, and won a devoted audience for her high rating morning program The Margaret Throsby Show on ABC's Radio 2BL (702 Sydney).

Accolades for her achievements include:  
Member of the Order of



Australia (for Services to Broadcasting, 1989), Variety Club of Australia's Radio Award, Two Avion Awards for the 'Best in the World' in-flight audio programs (Qantas), Golden Gavel Award presented by the Law Society of NSW for Excellence in Legal Reporting, Children's Week Award Media Award and Rostrum Speaker of the Year.

On ABC Classic FM, Mornings with Margaret Throsby includes a great mix of music and a one hour interview between 10am and 11 am, in which a special guest gives insight into their life and work, along with their own selection of music.

A list of guests reads like a Who's Who of Australians and visitors from abroad. Some of this amazing gathering from the past 15 years includes Lord Yehudi Menuhin, Oliver Sacks, Patricia Routledge, Dr Tim Flannery, the Hon Paul Keating, Claire Bloom, John le Carre, Victoria de los Angeles, Spike Milligan, Steve Waugh, Rolf Harris, Jane Fonda, Cate Blanchett, and Bruce Beresford.

The Award will be presented at the FABC Christmas Party 

# Deliberate dismantling of our diminished ABC continues



**Quentin Dempster**  
Host of Stateline,  
distinguished ABC  
journalist

## The latest cut hurts, but it's not the deepest in an already de-skilled ABC.

At last the hidden agenda has been exposed. The outsourcing of ABC television production to the commercial sector now covers all drama, documentary, natural history, most feature programming and, increasingly, studio-based light entertainment.

The ABC's explanation that resources from arts and other programming needed to be diverted to support prime-time content is disingenuous. In the digital revolution, prime-time is dead. Audiences can download programs at any time.

The anguish now felt inside the ABC from the latest program cuts would not arise if there was a genuine mixed production model with the ABC retaining the capacity and leverage to make the full genre range of copyright programs itself by developing its own talent and skills base.

But through a long and deliberate board and management policy to dismantle and de-skill internal television production, the ABC is now totally dependent on the commercial television production sector for almost all Australian non-news content.

What's wrong with that? Our creative independence is being crushed out of us along with a conduit for diversity and originality nurtured in a creative training ground. The ABC cannot be truly independent unless it has a capacity to create and produce its own original programming. The public trust in the ABC is based on an expectation that we are independent of commercial influence. We are not.

Many programs, particularly drama, are commissioned with external co-funders on the basis of their commercial "bankability", that is, their prospects for profitable on-sale to pay TV and other commercial operators and spinoffs

after a showing on the ABC. When this commissioning model is applied, there is little room for public purpose, originality, innovation and risk-taking - much less independence from commercial influence. What the public is getting from this model is largely Hallmark TV, Reader's Digest documentary or lightweight, sexed-up and formulaic drama pitched at an AB demographic. Is *Crownies* - the latest so-called "bold" outsourced drama - the best we can do? It reminded me of *Nine's Underbelly*: a bit of shootin' and tootin' and a hell of a lot of rootin'. The taxpayers who fund the ABC deserve much better.

If our drama and other programming

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The destruction of the ABC's creative independence has a long history.

mimics the commercial networks, the ABC's *raison d'être* is destroyed.

There now needs to be an inquiry into the siphoning of taxpayers' funds to the commercial sector to establish the facts about the compromising of the ABC's public purpose. Such an inquiry would establish how the deals are done and how the ABC is betraying the public's trust. Television management has said that through co-funding and co-production arrangements, it can turn one taxpayer dollar into an effective three dollars of content on air. This claim now needs to be tested.

The terms of reference for an inquiry would need to require the ABC to produce and table all outsourcing contracts over the past five years showing the copyright and transmission obligations and the commercial producer's associated business plans. At the moment this detail is commercial-in-confidence. You will not find these details in the ABC's annual report to the Federal Parliament. As taxpayer funds are involved, full transparency should be mandatory. The ABC should be required to show revenue

share, if any, from the commercial exploitation of ABC-commissioned programs. ABC managing director Mark Scott should be asked to explain how his claim that the ABC existed because of "market failure" can be reconciled with a program commissioning model that abandons in-house production.

The destruction of the ABC's creative independence has a long history. When the Hawke and Keating governments slashed funding, the management and board began a regime of co-productions in drama. By the mid-1990s, the ABC no longer produced any drama in-house.

The co-production model then moved to other genres, pursued by heavy lobby pressure on government from the commercial television production sector. The in-house natural history unit was soon gone, followed by documentary.

While ABC supporters maintained their advocacy through the Howard years, the commercial sector intensified its lobby efforts to get an ever bigger slice of ABC programming. The ABC does not publish any detailed data on the share of production funds, so supporters and critics could follow the debate based on established facts. This aspect is the most unsettling. While Australia needs a viable commercial television production sector, its siphon now clamped on to the ABC compromises the ABC's efforts. The Gillard government has a "convergence review" under way. In the digital revolution, Australians can download any content from any domestic and international source. National boundaries are smashed.

Perhaps understandably, the commercial channels want to be relieved of their local content quota obligations legislated by Parliament. If this happens, the need for a broadcaster to support national interest and cultural objectives will be greater than ever before. But the ABC, without public discussion, has allowed its skills base and creative culture to be eroded.

As taxpayer funds are diverted to the commercial sector, the ability of the ABC to deliver on its public mandate is reduced.

It is this trend that must be urgently confronted. ☹

# ABC is betraying its cultural heritage

**Sydney Morning Herald,  
Letter to the Editor, 7 Sep 2011**

**F**or the past 50 years, ABC TV has introduced Australians to an array of extraordinary local artists - from Sir Robert Helpmann to Kate Grenville, from the emerging Western Desert artists to Nick Cave.

The ABC TV arts unit has taken us into our galleries, theatres and museums, sharing the country's evolving cultural life. In the past year alone, the unit produced more than 500 stories. It has championed new artists, engaged practitioners, and built a vast record of the work of those who strive to articulate our place in the world. Where else do we turn to celebrate our great artists? When we mourned Dame Joan Sutherland and Margaret Olley, the ABC helped us pay tribute to their lives and work.

We are deeply disturbed by ABC management's plan to axe ABC TV's only arts magazine program, disband the TV arts unit and divert resources to prime-time, populist content in pursuit of ratings. It will diminish the ABC's irreplaceable role as the nation's cultural memory. It will reflect no glory on what was once considered the single greatest achievement of Australia's intellectual and artistic life: the ABC itself. Without a strong in-house unit to create and to commission arts programming, the national broadcaster will fail its charter responsibilities. And it will fail us, by not reminding us our national character is informed and shaped by the imagination and creativity of artists.

*Tim Winton, Nick Cave, Betty Churcher, Geoffrey Rush and 57 other prominent Australians.*

## FULL LIST OF SIGNATORIES

**Bruce Armstrong** – sculptor, painter

**Stephen Armstrong** – producer

**Ron Barassi AM** – Australian Football Legend in the Sport Australia Hall of Fame

**Jonathan Biggins** – theatre director and writer

**Gay Bilson** – writer, chef

**Nancy Black** – theatre director

**Polly Borland** – artist

**Julian Burnside AO QC** – barrister

**Peter Carey** – novelist

**Nick Cave** – musician, writer

**Betty Churcher AO** – former Director of the National Gallery of Australia

**J M Coetzee** – writer

**Stefano de Pieri** – celebrity chef

**Robert Doyle** – Lord Mayor of Melbourne

**Adam Elliot** – animation writer, director, producer

**Tony Ellwood** – Director, Queensland Art Gallery

**Saul Eslake** – economist; Director, Australian Business Arts Foundation and former Chair of the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board

**Helen Garner** – writer

**Richard Gill OAM** – Music Director, Victorian Opera

**Paul Grabowsky** – Artistic Director, Adelaide Festival of Arts

**John Hillcoat** – film director

**Janet Holmes à Court AC, HFAIB** – businesswoman and arts philanthropist

**Chloe Hooper** – writer

**Lindy Hume** – festival Director, Sydney Festival

**Hon Dr Barry Jones AO, FAA, FAHA, FSTE, FASSA** – former Minister and writer

**Michael Kantor** – theatre director and actor

**Lally Katz** – playwright

**Tom Keneally** – writer

**Barrie Kosky** – theatre and opera director

**Nam Le** – writer

**Michael Leunig** – artist

**Elizabeth Ann Macgregor OBE** – Director, Museum of Contemporary Art

**Shane Maloney** – novelist

**David Malouf** – writer

**Dr Richard Mills AM** – composer

**Jonathan Mills AO** – Composer & Director, Edinburgh International Festival

**Harold Mitchell AC** – Executive Director, Aegis Media

**Vera Moeller and Phillip Hunter** – visual artists

**Clover Moore** – Lord Mayor of Sydney

**Simon Mordant** – Chairman, Museum of Contemporary Art and arts philanthropist

**Graeme Murphy AM** – director and choreographer

**Ralph Myers** – Artistic Director, Belvoir

**Robyn Nevin** – actress

**Sir Gustav Nossal AC, CBE, FRS, FAA** – medical scientist

**Hetti Perkins** – Senior Curator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, Art Gallery of NSW

**Hon Mike Rann MP** – Premier of South Australia and Minister for the Arts

**David Ristrom** – President, Friends of the ABC (Vic)

**Peter Robb** – author

**Geoffrey Rush** – actor

**Patricia Sabine** – Design Director, Design Forum Tasmania

**Anna Schwartz** – gallery owner

**Emeritus Prof Margaret Seares AO** – Former Chair, Australia Council for the Arts and former Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, The University of Western Australia

**Stephen Sewell** – writer

**Michael Shrimpton** – former head of ABC TV Arts and Entertainment

**Anne Summers** – author and journalist

**John Wardle** – Principal, John Wardle Architects

**David Williamson** – playwright and screenwriter

**Tamara Winikoff** – Executive Director, National Association for the Visual Arts

**Tim Winton** – writer

**Philip Wolfhagen** – visual artist

**John Wolseley** – artist

# Radio National

## Why we exist



Michael Mason  
Manager  
Radio National

Media organisations and large corporations frequently roll out their vision and mission statements to both staff and public – to manufacture the best widget possible, to be the leading supplier of this product or that – I’m sure you’ve heard them. After a while the missions and visions all begin to sound the same.

At Radio National, it’s not about our vision or mission, but our purpose. And our purpose is simply this: We exist to nurture the intellectual and cultural life of this country, and to be a vital part of the contemporary Australian conversation.

We believe deeply in this purpose. We don’t shy away from it, and we will not change what we do to chase a mass audience. We are passionate about what we do and passionate about doing it well.

We are not under budgetary threat. Nor are we trying to fix a network that is fundamentally flawed. But the cultural and intellectual conversation in this country continues to change, and Radio National must evolve to stay relevant. We need to maintain and nurture the level of influence we have on thought and intellectual discussion in this country. While there is no question we have influence, our audience numbers are falling when you take population into account, and when our influence wanes, the ability to fulfil our purpose suffers.

Although audience numbers are not declining at an alarming rate, we need to arrest the trend. We want to bring in more people to the RN cohort - like

mindful people looking for thought, analysis and discussion about events and ideas throughout Australia and the world. Without looking to our future, without revitalising the network, we will simply lose the value we bring to Australian society.

Basically, we want to extend our conversation; we want more people in the room.

I was appointed Head of Radio National at the end of 2010 to take a detailed look at the network, to examine past innovations and successes, and make decisions about how we could grow and develop, without losing the things that make us unique.

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**We know that to do this right, we need to maintain and enhance our strengths, not diminish them.**

To figure out how to achieve this, the Radio National Executive and I held a series of staff workshops about our future direction. What became clear that while everyone was willing to discuss the audience profile, targets and figures, any strategy for the network’s future had to maintain our purpose at its heart.

Our strategy, therefore, is simple: To secure a safe and pivotal future for the network, we must identify and engage with the next generation of RN listeners: those people aged 40 and over, who want to be part of smart, contemporary conversation. We want to be very clear here: this is not about changing our audience profile, but deepening it.

We say 40+ for a reason. It’s not because we are obsessed by demographics but because we know there is a tipping point in life, which is not always, but frequently, age-related, where people start looking for deeper intellectual engagement and cultural meaning than what’s offered by the traditional radio mix of bland FM morning zoos, golden oldies, shock jocks and endless sport.

We don’t want twentysomethings in baseball caps. We want those thinking adults who are looking for ideas and discussion about the world in which they live. We want people who want to hear different ways of thinking and seeing the world; those people who are interested in the rich array of thought-provoking, richly produced programming we offer.

If we want to attract new audiences, we need to “open up” Radio National. And so, we have recently developed a draft schedule for 2012 that we believe will revitalise RN’s sound and programming mix. The schedule allows RN to be more mobile and agile when listeners are, which is why we’re proposing to extend Breakfast by half an hour and introduce a live Drive program. These two programming changes will attract an audience who are on the move, looking for analysis and discussion of current events. In the proposed schedule, fewer repeats slots will open up the schedule to a wider array of specialist genres. Our weekend arts and features programs will now be hosted to create a flexibility and responsiveness around our specialist programming.

The introduction of a new schedule will mean that some listening patterns will change, which some of our listeners may find disrupting at first. But we believe that the changes we are proposing will give our audience, new and existing, a fresher, more open sound without losing any of the things that we do best.

We are not interested in any changes that jeopardise Radio National’s unique place in Australia’s media landscape. Renewal does not mean letting go of what makes the network unique and vital, and the time is right for us to move forward with renewed vigour and excitement about the future.

We know that to do this right, we need to maintain and enhance

our strengths, not diminish them. We're building a stronger focus on specialisation, thought and analysis. We're deepening our commitment to arts broadcasting and feature production. And we're not letting go of the extraordinary intelligence and passion that our staff bring to program making.

The suggested schedule has been developed largely around the ideas and thinking from Radio National staff. In the main, our program makers are enthusiastic about the need for renewal, and are looking forward to the year ahead. The next few weeks offer all Radio National staff a chance to provide feedback about the proposed schedule changes, and I'm looking

forward to their comments and suggestions.

Radio National is a great innovator – just look at its track record in podcasting. We're excited about continuing to change and grow, expand our influence, and be the place for smart, thinking conversation and debate in this country. 

Until quite late in the 20th century, it was fashionable to deride the ABC as a sheltered workshop, hidebound by public service rules and red tape, the home of engineers in grey cardigans, and workaday journalists content to bring up the rear. You seldom hear such things said today, and that is due in no small measure to the life's work of Ian Carroll.

From his ground-breaking leadership of Nationwide, Lateline and the national 7.30 Report in the 80s and 90s, to his shepherding of the ABC into the multi-channel, digital world of the 21st century, Ian Carroll always managed to place himself where the next new thing was happening at the national broadcaster. His energy, omnivorous curiosity, and optimism never flagged. And in an organisation where respect doesn't necessarily come with the job, few senior executives have inspired more loyalty, trust, and affection.

Ian Carroll returned to the ABC in 1989 after a time in commercial television. With his chosen presenter, the red-haired, green-penned Kerry O'Brien, Carroll launched into yet another bold experiment: a late night national program that would make use of the newly-affordable global satellite network to discuss the issue of the day with the best brains across the world. Lateline's audience was never huge, but its influence was profound. "Ian's restless intellect, boundless curiosity and enthusiasm for the big ideas," says Kerry O'Brien, "brought new depth to late night television."

At the same time, Carroll revolutionised the television coverage of elections, with the help of wonkish systems expert Anthony Green. The ABC's election specials,

replete with vivid graphics generated by computer, led the way that Nine and others were forced to follow.

Through the nineties, Ian headed 4 Corners, a new national version of The 7.30 Report, and then modernised the manning and equipping of television news. By the end of the decade, he had immersed himself in the new digital age – and was urging the ABC to do so too.



IAN CARROLL 1946 – 2011

In 2001, he took him at his word. He was put in charge of its first two digital TV channels: ABC for Kids and Fly. But only a tiny fraction of homes at that time could access the services and the ABC had received no additional funding to support them. In 2003, budget constraints saw the services axed. Once again, Ian had been ahead of the times. Only seven years later, the ABC would have three new digital television channels on air – including one targeting children – part of a widespread national adoption of free-to-air multichannel services.

Then, for three years, Carroll helped to run the ABC's overseas television service, ABC Asia-Pacific. In 2005, he was appointed CEO of a rebranded Australia Network.

In 2007, Ian landed his dream job: Director of ABC Innovation,

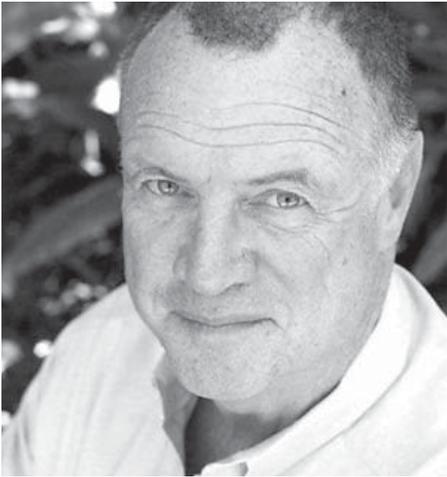
responsible for all the ABC's online operations. It drew on all of his experience – and indeed on his ability to lead in fields where he had no experience at all. He got the sometimes siloed and isolationist ABC content divisions working together around a shared online strategy. Three achievements for audiences stand out: the development of iView, Australia's online catch-up television service; embracing mobile technology with quality apps for the iPhone and iPad; and the overhaul of the entire ABC website.

Ian Carroll was finally where he'd wanted to be for more than a decade – at the ABC's Senior Executive table. His passionate advocacy of investment in new programming initiatives was tempered by a deep understanding of corporate history and culture. When he was on extended sick leave last year, ABC executives made pilgrimages to his home to seek his advice.

Earlier this month, when his advancing cancer finally forced him to step down, hundreds of colleagues attended a farewell celebration of Ian Carroll's remarkable career. He sat on a stool and spoke for 30 minutes about the lessons he had learned from his successes, and his disappointments; honest, self-deprecating, funny, wise. The man who had produced so much for viewers, over decades, sat finally in the spotlight himself. No one who was there will ever forget it.

Ian Carroll is survived by his brothers Andrew and Peter, his wife Geraldine Doogue, their son Sam, his first wife Jill and their two children Michael and Genevieve, and by his stepdaughter, ABC reporter Eliza Blue.

Jonathan Holmes and Mark Scott 



# Mike Carlton on the ABC in 2011

Guest speaker at the recent Annual Dinner of Friends of the ABC was veteran journalist, writer and political satirist Mike Carlton. In the first part of his highly entertaining talk he spoke in detail of the thoroughness and depth of his training as a cadet journalist with the ABC in the 60s and early 70s, and of the colourful characters who were part of the ABC in those days. He then reflected upon the ABC of today:

And even though I ventured eventually into commercial radio and television – and, indeed newspapers – I always thought of myself as a creature of the ABC. The place taught me not all I know – far from it – but it laid an unshakeable foundation on bedrock, upon which to build a career in journalism and the media. I retain a great affection and respect for the place, as almost anyone who has ever worked seems to do.

So it pains me to say to you tonight that I believe that – in many aspects – the standards and practices of the ABC have ebbed from their high watermark. I think the outsourcing of so much program-making over the years has been little short of tragic. I look back on the sixties and seventies and even the eighties, when the television studios at Gore Hill teemed with activity, a creative ferment. There was always a drama in production... writers, producers, actors, directors thronged the corridors. In another studio: Playschool. In a third, rehearsals for a light entertainment or a quiz show. And the editing suites would hum to the production of the ABC's own documentary programs, nature shows, or a concert by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. But now, almost all of it gone. All that in-house creativity...and

the boldness to experiment...outsourced to commercial production houses of often very-uneven quality. For every class act like, say, an Andrew Denton or the recent Rake series with Richard Roxburgh, there seems to me to be an increasing amount of cookie-cutter rubbish which you might just as easily find on Channel Ten. Or the rest. Made not because it's any good, but because it can be on-sold to the Kiwis or the Canadians, or even the Japanese or whoever.

As Quentin Dempster put it in a piece written for the Herald only a few weeks ago: "Through a long and deliberate board and management policy to dismantle and de-skill internal television production, the ABC is now totally dependent on the commercial television production sector for almost all Australian non-news content."

"What's wrong with that?" he asked. And he supplied the answer: "Our creative independence is being crushed out of us along with a conduit for diversity and originality nurtured in a creative training ground. The ABC cannot be truly independent unless it has a capacity to create and produce its own original programming. The public trust in the ABC is based on an expectation that we are independent of commercial influence. We are not."

I think that's true. But I am more concerned by the decline in news and current affairs. There, I believe, standards have slipped to an alarming degree. To the point where an ABC Television 7pm news bulletin these days is very little – if at all – different to the commercial competition that went out an hour earlier.

We get Tweedledee, Tweedledum and Tweedledumber. Road accidents. News stories which are not news at all, but warmed-over products of the giant public relations and marketing industry which now has journalism in a stranglehold. An

endless supply of weather stories from the United States about minor floods in Alaska, or cars snow bound on a freeway somewhere in Connecticut: of no interest whatsoever to an Australian audience, but thrown into a bulletin because they are readily available to cover over the holes, like Spakfilla.

And, most awful of all, often scripted with the utmost banality and cliché: Heavily armed police. Grave fears are held. Sifting through the rubble. A close-knit community. Rugged bushland. Neighbours were shocked. Locals have expressed concern. All police leave has been cancelled. The heartbreak task of cleaning up. Tension mounted. The road toll escalated. Emotional scenes. Tributes are pouring in. It took fire brigades more than two hours to extinguish the blaze. Blah blah blah.

I know I will sound like a disgruntled old fart saying this, but if I or my colleagues had written that rubbish forty years ago, we would have been out of a job in 12 months. Now it's common currency. On and on it goes, at tedium, ad nauseum and nobody in any authority at the ABC seems to have the wit or the knowledge to put a stop to it. If I want that crap, I can get it by the truckload from Seven, Nine and Ten. The ABC should be better. Once upon a time it was. Now it's not.

“

**John Howard**, as we all know, stacked the board with blatantly political appointees – Judith Sloan, Ron Brunton, Janet Albrechtsen and Keith Windschuttle – ostensibly to rid the place of political correctness, as he used to sneer.

And so, too, the practice of broadcasting – the actual delivery of the words and scripts themselves. It is often abominably bad. And this is a sin which spreads not just across radio and television news, but into current affairs. Even to such flagship programs as AM, or Four Corners.

Scripts delivered in what Clive James memorably described as “ the plonking manner.” Dah de dah de dah dah... “police say they expect to make more arrests in coming weeks...doctors say the new treatment is a medical breakthrough...there have been angry clashes in parliament...Mike Carlton, ABC News, Canberra.

Where does this junk come from? My wife, Morag Ramsay, has spent most of this year putting together the commemorative exhibition for 50 Years of Four Corners. Looking back, it is a revelation to see how good those earlier broadcasters were: Michael Charlton, Jim Downes, Peter Ross, Bob Sanders, John Penlington, Mike Willesee, Caroline Jones ...the list goes on. Their voices were mellow and modulated...but above all they spoke TO their audience, not AT it. In short: they communicated. Today, with some notable exceptions, I fear it's an art that's almost dead.

I could go on here, too, about the urgent need for a programming revolution in TV news and current affairs. News 24 has, I think, been a total flop. Almost nobody watches it. It has sucked valuable resources out of other news and current affairs programs...but still does not have enough to do the job properly. Best to scrap it altogether – although that would involve an enormous loss of face, from the Managing Director on down.

And then there is the mess between 7 and 8pm. First news, then 7.30. A programing format invented in 1967 and now, 34 years later, almost unchanged. So often a report on 7.30 is merely a repeat of what we saw 15 minutes ago on the 7pm news, with a few added bells and whistles. When Kerry O'Brien quit last year, the ABC had the opportunity to do something radically different in that time slot. They even called in some high-priced consultants to sort it out, for heaven's sake.

But in the end, bugger all happened. News stayed the same. The 7.30 slot got a garish and hideously expensive new set, with red and blue lighting that looks like there's a fire engine parked outside. The two new presenters, Leigh Sales and Chris Uhlmann, are very good journalists, no doubt. But they struggle with an old-fashioned format way past its use by date. A priceless opportunity for transforming change was squandered. The audience figures show it: Give or take on different nights, roughly 250 to



*"Stamps? Sorry. We needed the space for more ambient Dolphin Calls CDs. You can only buy them now at your nearest ABC Shop."*

300-thousand viewers switch off when the news finished at 7.30. Not good. If it were commercial television, heads would roll.

But let me finish on an up note. The good news is that some things have not changed. I do believe the ABC remains, as committed as ever, to those three pillars of accuracy, balance and fairness. The best of its news and current affairs people are as unswerving now in their belief in the canons of public broadcasting...as unswerving as we were fifty years ago. And in the face of even more attack than ever.

For the conservative assault on the ABC grows ever more hostile. John Howard, as we all know, stacked the board with blatantly political appointees – Judith Sloan, Ron Brunton, Janet Albrechtsen and Keith Windschuttle – ostensibly to rid the place of political correctness, as he used to sneer. But in fact to bring the ABC to heel by imposing a political correctness of his own ideological biases.

And the onslaught from News Ltd, most

particularly The Australian newspaper, is ferocious and unending. Based largely on the notion that, if there's any broadcasting to be done, it should be for the profit of Rupert Murdoch.

I don't think the Tories will ever win this argument. Every opinion poll ever done shows that the Australian people value the ABC, and hold it in very much higher regard than they have for Mr Murdoch's organs and emissions.

But that won't stop the conservatives from trying. And we can be sure, if we ever come to that unhappy day that Tony Abbott becomes Prime Minister, that the undermining of the ABC would reach a new intensity.

For all its faults, its flaws, its imperfections... the ABC remains one of our great institutions, one of our finest achievements as a people. It is possible to imagine the ABC being better than it is. But it is impossible to imagine our country without it. And for those reasons – and many more – it must be cherished, nurtured, and defended. ☺

# The Australian's Art Attack on the ABC



Darce Cassidy

In a piece headed "Latest casualty kicks the arts off our ABC", Amanda Meade, writing in The Australian, claims that the ABC "will not have any programs directly covering the arts, despite arts coverage being a key plank of the ABC Charter." Meade bases this claim on the fact that Art Nation on ABC television and Artworks on Radio National are to be deleted from the schedule.

Like much of what The Australian writes about the ABC these days, this is nonsense.

However there are genuine reasons for concerns about coverage of the arts on ABC television, and to a lesser degree on radio.

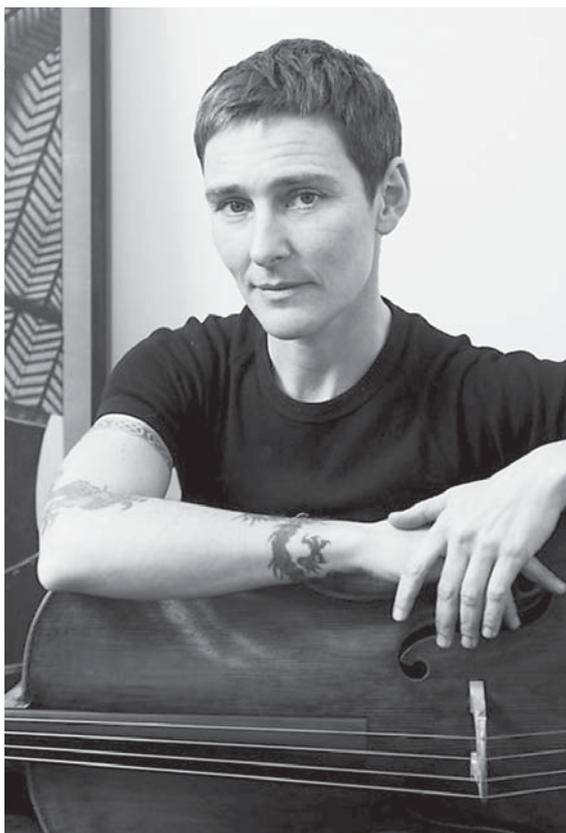
The Melbourne Age came closer to the mark on September 6th when Karl Quinn wrote that if proposed changes to the Radio National schedule go ahead arts coverage on Radio National, excluding music, will be reduced to 18 hours and 55 minutes a week. He calculates that his would be a reduction of 16.5% compared to the current schedule. I've done my own calculations, and came to a slightly different figure, but in the same ballpark. However I can't understand why he excluded music from the arts when he compiled his figures.

While Radio National looks set to reduce its arts coverage, it is clear that the station is not ignoring the arts. Programs to be retained include Poetica, Lingua Franca,

the daily book reading, Movie Time, By Design, Away and Airplay. A five-day a week books program has been retained and will also include some other arts material.

Neither Meade nor Quinn have mentioned ABC Classic FM, or the ABC's monthly arts magazine, Limelight. The cover story in the August edition features Margaret Throsby's interviews with ten great musicians: Bryn Terfel, Isaac Stern, Lorin Maazel, Phillip Glass, Pinchas Zukerman, Zubin Mehta, Yehudi Menuhin, Neville Marriner, Renee Fleming, and Barbara Cook.

As far as critics who claim an interest in the arts are concerned, ABC Classic FM seems to be invisible and inaudible. 



## FABC Armidale

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Presenter of ABC's Classic FM  
Breakfast Program

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Phone Barbara on 02 6771 1828

Emma joined the ABC in 2003 after some travelling exploits which included cycling across the Taklamakan Desert in China. This was part of her year-long cycling quest from London to Hong Kong via Turkey, Pakistan and Iran to raise money for charity.

She spent 12 years as a professional player of the viola and during her travels Emma spent time teaching the

viola to Vietnamese refugees detained in Hong Kong. Once in Australia she taught music and has since become an accomplished cellist.

From her love of music to her experiences travelling some of the world's most exotic places you can be assured of an entertaining evening with one of the ABC's most engaging personalities.

# As a mirror to our culture, ABC is not sitting on its arts

Mark Scott

ABC historian Ken Inglis recalls wartime prime minister John Curtin's opinion of a light entertainment program that imagined listeners were at a party. "If that is the sort of party that is going to be held after the war, it is a good argument for keeping the war going," Curtin complained.

Satisfying everyone is impossible and always has been. There has been a lot of debate in recent days about the ABC's commitment to the arts, prompted by the end of one television program, Art Nation, and a new draft schedule for Radio National. The former prompted an open letter to the ABC board, penned by a group of esteemed arts figures protesting about the "destruction of ABC TV arts".

I am glad to see the passionate interest in ABC programming and feel obliged to respond. The loss of a 30-minute Sunday afternoon arts magazine program with an audience in significant decline should not be conflated with the end of arts programming.

In making its decision, ABC TV asked an important question: couldn't the ABC, given its place at the centre of Australian cultural life, do better for the arts? We believe it can and it will. And we can do it by increasing the ways arts stories are told, and telling them in greater depth than the magazine format permits. And we will see to it that the heavy lifting for the arts is done right across the ABC - not just on television.

We want the ABC to live up to its charter role "to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia" in the most relevant way possible. Audience tastes and viewing habits are evolving constantly. There is no plan to chase ratings with more populist fare. The ABC will continue to serve niche audiences - we're comfortable with the fact that cultural pursuits won't often draw MasterChef-type figures.

ABC TV's decision to end the Sunday afternoon slot and shift arts stories into prime time should be seen for what it

is: a chance for the ABC to connect this content with as wide an audience as possible. We think it deserves no less.

We know from Arts Council research that Australians have a high level of interest and engagement with the arts. It's evident in the books we buy - and hopefully read - in attendances at our galleries and museums, in the vibrancy of our musical life. It's our responsibility to do all we can to see that interest in the arts is reflected in the audiences ABC TV is reaching with its arts programming. We can do better.

The same applies to our other platforms. Artworks may be disappearing from Radio National but the new schedule delivers more arts coverage, more music programming and new specialist programs with fewer repeats.

Only last month, the ABC announced a new digital radio channel, triple j Unearthed, which will be the only 100 per cent Australian music station and the only one capable of drawing solely from unsigned and uncovered artists, including those from regional areas. Only the ABC can take that risk, continuing to promote new Australian music through triple j in a way that has utterly changed Australian cultural life.

The open letter says: "For the past 50 years, ABC TV has introduced Australians to an array of extraordinary local artists - from Sir Robert Helpmann to Kate Grenville, from the emerging Western Desert artists to Nick Cave . . . Where else do we turn to celebrate our great artists?"

The answer, emphatically, remains the ABC - on television, radio, online and beyond, as our content flows increasingly through the rivers of social networks. Over the remainder of this year and 2012, ABC1 and ABC2 will, for example, feature documentaries on musicians Rowland Howard and Ben Lee, filmmaker Paul Cox and choreographer Tanja Liedtke.

I note that Nick Cave is one of the letter's signatories. Triple j is presenting Straight to You: triple j's Tribute to Nick Cave - a concert tour paying tribute

to one of Australia's most loved and respected songwriters in November. ABC TV and triple j will record the Sydney show, to air on ABC2 next year, with a CD and DVD to follow.

It speaks volumes for the community support for the ABC that almost every content decision attracts debate.

But our programmers and schedulers need the freedom to innovate and challenge; to search for better ways to engage the audience. Australia's artists and arts audiences are not standing still, nor are we. To do so would be to consign the public broadcaster's coverage of the arts to the worst of all fates - irrelevance.

Mark Scott is managing director of the ABC. 

## At home with Julia inappropriate

The new ABC program "At home with Julia" is very disappointing. This is not good humoured political satire at all. It is not comedy either. This is not a subject that lends itself to even an attempt to entertain. It demeans the status of the Prime Minister's office and the Prime Minister herself. It also makes a fool of Tim.

It purports to be able to show the public how Tim and Julia behave to each other, how Tim is awkwardly trying to get used to living in the Lodge, behave to the staff and to shopkeepers in the area. What would the script writers know about this anyway? This is a pretentious exercise. The program seems to say "these people don't belong there". It sends the wrong messages. This program falls far short of high ABC quality. As a member of the Friends of the ABC I request that it be discontinued.

Klaas Woldring,  
Pearl Beach, 2256 

# Branch News

## The Hunter

The Hunter Friends of the ABC committee organised a visit to the 1233 radio station on the corner of Wood Street and Parry Street. It had been seven years since the Friends had their last visit to, and tour of, the Newcastle ABC radio station. Members who were at the previous visit would remember what a great time it was, which culminated in a live group cheer over the radio. This year's visit has been scheduled for Saturday 24 September, starting at 9:00 AM. The host for the morning will be the station manager Phil Ashley-Brown. The Hunter FABC Annual General Meeting was scheduled to start at Devonshire House on King Street at the conclusion of the visit to the radio station.

*Lisa Thomas, Hunter FABC Secretary*

## Northern Rivers

On Sunday 17 July the Northern Rivers branch hosted a rally to address claims made by the Weekend Australian and its feature writer Chris Kenny on May 28-29.

Speakers at the rally included Hans Lovejoy (editor of the Byron Echo), Jenny Dowell (Mayor of Lismore), Ian Cohen (recently retired Greens MLC) and Neville Jennings (representing the Northern Rivers branch). Speakers specifically rebutted claims made in the Weekend Australian about the ABC being controlled by an inner-city elite for a like-minded audience. Speakers also addressed the spurious claims that the national broadcaster no longer aspires to be "Your ABC"

and suggestions that the ABC should be privatized. Branch members were encouraged to respond vigorously to any future attacks from NEWS LTD publications.

Members expressed concern about proposed cut-backs to ABC TV and Radio National programs. Of particular concern is the loss of the national broadcaster's in-house production capacity.

An annual general meeting was held on the same day resulting in the following election of officers.

**President:** Neville Jennings

**Vice President:** Jill Keogh

**Treasurer:** Ed Bennett

**Byron sub-branch convenor:**  
Jill Keogh

**Committee members:** Sue Sawkins, Steve Sawkins, Denise Bennett, Roger and Shae Seccombe, Doug Myler, Therese Crollick, Tony Betts.

Retiring Vice President Doug Myler was thanked for his long service to the branch.

Future branch activities will focus on a defence of specialized Radio National programs and core ABC TV programs such as Art Nation, New Inventors and The Collectors. Tony Betts has spoken to Bob Carr at the Byron Writers' Festival about a possible return visit to address the Northern Rivers FABC branch.

## Blue Mountains

The first half of the year for FABC-Blue Mountains members (we resume normal transmission in late February

after the Christmas/New Year break), has been characterised by plenty of internal activity and not a little external activity too.

On the latter front, David Stratton drew the largest audience to any of our meetings thus far this year with a wide ranging talk about his life generally starting with his experiences as a boy in England with a Grandmother who took him to the movies at least once a week. His permanent residence in Australia was almost accidental, following a reluctant release from the family business to enable him to visit Australia for a holiday. It was his appointment to run the Sydney Film Festival not long after that put paid to any permanent return to the land of his birth, for which we are the grateful beneficiaries. His reminiscences of the early days of "The Movie Show" at SBS prior to his move with Margaret Pomeranz to the ABC for "At the Movies" had some resonance for our activities.

In particular his comment that the early days at a much smaller SBS were probably the most fun, since if there was ever a problem, all David had to do to fix it was to stroll down the corridor and into the Managing Director's office. As the organisation grew, this became no longer possible, ultimately leading to the departure of the duo when the connection was lost.

Moving to more internal matters, we have an issue for some of our members that our normal monthly meeting place (Wentworth Falls) is a little distant for some, so we have experimented with a meeting at Springwood (in the lower mountains, about 40KM distant from Wentworth Falls in the upper mountains). We were sufficiently encouraged to repeat this experiment, possibly at another venue.

A branch survey was conducted to determine what our members' interests are and in particular, what motivates people to become a part of the FABC family, and to stay. The results were very interesting and will inform our future activities. If any branch is interested in conducting a similar survey, we would be happy to provide the questionnaire with you.

We also had a meeting with Mark Scott to address some issues of particular relevance to our members. In brief these were to improve local transmission and production facilities



From left to right: Neville Jennings, Jenny Dowell, Ian Cohen and Hans Lovejoy.



Julian Morrow with FABC Illawarra Committee members

and to offer a position (and help) on some of the foreshadowed RN changes. While it is too early to judge the outcome, the meeting was promising and a mutually rewarding one for our branch and I believe for the ABC too, since a lot of ideas and opinions were communicated both ways, and we have some positive (and no negative) outcomes already.

Tony Tayler - President

## Illawarra

### Lunch with Julian Morrow

On Sunday August 14, around 100 members of the Illawarra Branch of the Friends met for lunch at The Links at Shell Cove to hear a talk by Julian Morrow from *The Chaser*. This proved a highly enjoyable and entertaining occasion and it was particularly pleasing to see a number of young people among the audience. Before introducing Julian, our president, Chris Cartledge, spoke of the problems arising from continued outsourcing of ABC programs, pointing to the risk that this could eventually lead to increasing difficulty in distinguishing the national broadcaster's programs from those of commercial stations, and urging members of the Friends to challenge both politicians and the ABC management over this. In his talk, however, Julian presented a rather different point of view, saying that although he believed passionately in the importance and need for public broadcasting, he himself had never been employed by the ABC and it was his ambition this would always continue to be the case.

He described the importance of programs like *The D Generation* and *Frontline* when he was growing up and explained how the Chaser team had

come together at university through a common interest in student debating. This led to them starting a newspaper called *The Chaser* which attracted the interest of Andrew Denton who then invited them to work in television. Julian emphasized Andrew's importance as a mentor throughout his talk, saying that he and the rest of the team would have worked in an abattoir if Andrew had suggested it! The contract the group signed was with Andrew, not with the ABC, although he insists the ABC is the right place for the show to appear. He claims, however, that Andrew's training has been essential to the success of a program which has now run for ten years. For some time the team has been courted by commercial channels, but has refused all their offers, believing their freedom would be severely curtailed if the show appeared anywhere other than the ABC.

Julian considers it vital the ABC produce its own news and current affairs programs, commenting on what a fine job it does with only limited funds. He believes, however, that independent production companies are essential to guarantee full independence at the ABC by making the kind of shows commercial broadcasters, would consider far too controversial. He then listed as examples a number of ABC programs made by outside companies: *Summer Heights High*, *The Chaser's War on Everything*, *Kath and Kim*. Although he acknowledges the ABC is adventurous in what it will screen, he also believes that if certain types of program were made in house, too many restrictions would be placed on both producer and cast. He is sure, for example, that the APEC stunt, in which a car carrying an Osama bin Laden impersonator joined the motorcade of foreign heads of state, could have been made only through an independent company.

Nevertheless, Julian emphasized the immense importance of the ABC and its work, insisting on the importance of Public Broadcasting for producing a diverse vision of Australia, and he believes there should always be some shows on the ABC that people hate! True friends of the ABC need to keep insisting on quality broadcasting. Another point Julian made was the great treasure the ABC has in its archives. He wants to see the broadcaster find ways of liberating

and using this immensely valuable material.

The talk was very well received, stimulating many questions from the audience. People lingered on talking and seemed reluctant to leave. The whole gathering proved very successful and we were all pleased to hear that a new season of *The Chaser* will commence on October 5.

Dorothy Jones

## ACT and Region

ACT and Region Friends will be lunching at 'A Bite to Eat', Shop 8, Eggleston Crescent, Chifley, Canberra (the courtyard area) at 12.30pm on Saturday 19th November for our end of year function.

Please email Margaret O'Connor on [margoforet@hotmail.com](mailto:margoforet@hotmail.com) to confirm your booking. Out of towners who support the ABC and who are visiting Canberra for the weekend would also be most welcome to attend. ☺

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

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# A perception of bias – the ABC and the Flotilla



David Macilwain  
July 24, 2011

Following Israel's lethal attack on the Freedom Flotilla last year, there was a widespread perception that Israel had committed multiple offences against international law in its determination to maintain its strangle hold on Gaza. The fleet of ships carrying humanitarian aid and 600 unarmed civilians was in international waters when intercepted, and nine people were shot dead and many injured by Israeli commandos as they seized control of the Mavi Marmara. Despite being entirely responsible for the attack and casualties, Israel's chief concern was how this might affect their international image, already suffering since their assault on Gaza the previous year, and the ongoing siege that the Flotilla intended to break.

Thanks to Israel's jamming of broadcasts from the fleet, and seizure of cameras and laptops from people on it, they already had control of part of 'the narrative', and while Turkey and the UN launched enquiries to try to establish the truth of what happened, Israel set about promoting its desired narrative – one which absolved it from responsibility and established a legal justification for the attack. Whether it sought the cooperation of international media in this mission, or whether they were already sympathetic and so accepted Israel's initial justifications we cannot say, but the BBC apparently decided to assist them by commissioning a Panorama 'investigation'. In a move that confirms this impression, long time reporter Jane Corbin was given unprecedented access to Israel military personnel, and went on to produce the documentary "Death in the Med".

When the BBC screened the documentary in mid-August it provoked some 1500 complaints, as well as an open letter from 30 'significant people', for its seriously unbalanced presentation. Despite this reaction, the ABC obtained the film and screened it without comment as 'Collision Course' in early September, and so began my personal fight for truth and balance in the ABC's presentation of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

My initial complaint through the website urgently requested some 'editorial' comment on the programme's contentious presentation, but it took a second complaint before I received a reply from Audience and Consumer Affairs. Their totally unsatisfactory response, which included the words 'scrupulously balanced', allowed me to expand my criticism into the context of the blockade on Gaza and why I found it unacceptable that what to me was clearly Israeli propaganda had been screened by the ABC, and given its implicit stamp of approval. As the reply to this letter was no better, I decided to take the complaint up with the Independent Complaints Review Panel. I submitted my correspondence to them, as well as a lengthy explanation and expansion of the background, an understanding of which to me is a vital part of the complaint. While the Panel points out that this background was not the subject of their investigation, I have little doubt that it was helpful in establishing the validity of my viewpoint. In particular, I had recommended that the ABC provide a link to a film by Anthony Lawson (1) which effectively deconstructs Jane Corbin's film, and I was later pleased to discover that the Panel had viewed it.

Once the ICRP had decided there was a case to answer, there wasn't much for me to do except wait, and periodically complain to the ABC on related issues. To my perception, there is a general bias toward the Israeli 'viewpoint' in the ABC (as well as in the rest of the media of course) - it comes naturally enough that it is not perceived by them as being unbalanced. This goes with a simplistic appraisal of balance as something achieved simply by presenting 'both sides' in a conflict, even when one side is children throwing stones, and the other side is a fighter jet firing guided missiles. Such was the case in the coverage of Israel's attack on Gaza in 2009; not only was one of the world's most lethal armies using every weapon imaginable against a captive and basically unarmed civilian population, but it controlled the media machine to such a degree that most Western nations saw nothing of the massacre and destruction meted out on Gazans, even though they knew all

about 'the rockets'. During this criminal war we often heard the viewpoint of Israel through spokesman Mark Regev – a fellow Australian, while then acting PM Julia Gillard famously defended Israel's 'right to self-defence'. While film from Gaza was available on Arabic networks, the ABC was apparently content to go with the flow and allow Israel's propaganda to influence public opinion. As evidence of the continuing success of this campaign, we need only look at the recent climate surrounding Marrickville's support for BDS, and although the Murdoch press and political leaders were here the key supporters of the Israel Lobby, the ABC gave tacit support by being mostly silent.

And so I waited, and wondered! The various enquiries into the Flotilla attack released their conclusions, which were uniformly damning, though Israel's own Turkel commission found otherwise, even though revealing the excesses of the attack. Perhaps against my better judgement I submitted more 'information' to the Panel, but I received no hint of how my complaint was progressing, other than that 'a lot of material' had been received from the BBC. It was only when I received the ICRP's final report that I began to understand what was going on there, and it was an awful lot more than I ever imagined.

I had a note from the ICRP that their report had been submitted to the ABC at the beginning of June, but I still had no idea what its conclusions were. I had been getting impatient to hear for a while, as the time of the second Flotilla to Gaza approached. But by June Israel had extended its blockade to include Greece and the flotilla was impounded. I was told I must wait for the ABC to get in touch with me, and had almost given up when a large envelope arrived in the mail, containing the ICRP report – all 37 pages – and a letter from Mark Scott, detailing the breaches of Editorial Policies and the statement that would be published on the website. I needed to lie down! Which wasn't a problem as it was bedtime, but then I couldn't sleep for thinking what to do next.

And this actually takes us to where we are now. The findings of the ICRP go beyond those of the BBC Trust committee, not surprisingly in some ways as like

Israel's self-investigations; the BBC trust was too compromised to be much use. It is nevertheless great credit to the ICRP and Michael Foster QC that they stood up to the challenges to their findings that came from both the ABC and the BBC when they submitted a Preliminary report in January. The details of their arguments are interesting to read if one has time, and I am humbled that my own arguments have been considered so seriously – though they are of course arguments

shared by many others. Most significant of their conclusions was the finding that the ABC had 'taken an editorial stance' in favour of the Israeli perspective as presented by Corbin – that the Flotilla was simply a political stunt. It is a bit of an unfortunate irony that the ICRP is now being disbanded – I hope that what replaces it will not be a compromised arrangement like that of the BBC.

As I write, Israel still refuses to apologise to Turkey for the killing of its citizens, and

the release of the final UN report into the affair can be postponed no longer for the sake of America's political agenda. And for the ABC – I'm all ears!

The ICRP's report can be read at:-

<http://abc.net.au/corp/pubs/statements/s3254757.htm>

Anthony Lawson's video deconstruction of Death in the Med:-

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afBr10f38TI&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afBr10f38TI&feature=player_embedded) 

## Few value the gem of the nation:

# Radio National

Errol Simper  
June 27, 2011

When you read those recurrent stories (as recently in *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*) about Radio National being revamped, overhauled or reviewed, you know differing emotions will fly off in a variety of predictable directions.

Some RN aficionados rapidly become indignant and accuse ABC radio management of intending to dumb down the station. Some listeners become defensive about a particular program they enjoy, and vow that if anything terminal happens to it, RN will never again darken their wireless dial. Those who have barely heard of RN will be stoically unmoved. And commentators of a certain vintage will have seen and heard it all before.

For what it's worth, the scribe's reaction to these all but annual bouts of internal RN scrutiny is despair -- sadness bordering on depression. It isn't brought on by the reported revamp, or whatever it's being called that year. Radio stations, television stations and newspapers are always monitoring their output, tinkering at the margins with something that isn't working, and making judicious notes about the material that's getting a more favourable reception out there.

The thing that brings on the despair is the fact that RN should feel a requirement to fiddle with itself to attract bigger

audiences. The fact is RN should already have bigger audiences. Despite its faults and flaws, it's by far the most cerebral broadcast outlet in Australia. It's true some staple programs and presenters get stale and predictable from time to time. Some programs are good, but not really as good as they could be, or maybe should be. Yet in general terms, RN attempts to approach pretty well every topic on its radar in a thoughtful, logical and sensible manner. It is unashamedly intelligent, eschewing the silly and the sensationalist, as well as that commodity so beloved of lesser stations, the false premise. Even RN's 6pm concession to the talkback format, *Australia Talks*, curtails the false premise, the core of so much commercial radio babble. *Australia Talks* always has a panel of experts tempering, and occasionally correcting, dubious propositions callers may have picked up from a bit of loose talk in a rowdy pub.

All this brings you to the question of why RN's share of the national radio audience, even on a good day, rarely extends beyond 3 per cent. The scribe must concede he can't take you much beyond that ancient but famous explanation from Phillip Adams (*Late Night Live*, RN, 10pm and 4pm) as to why the old pre-commercialised SBS television didn't attract bigger audiences for its more intellectually inclined offerings. Adams, a regular Saturday columnist in this journal, wrote that the fault lay not with SBS or its schedulers -- the problem was the audience. We'd have to apply Adams' formula to RN and reluctantly conclude that Australia, at heart, continues to be

an anti-intellectual place. Because the bulk of Australians either don't want an upmarket, reflective, ideas-driven radio station or they don't know it's there. Or maybe, in some cases, voyeurs have flicked to RN, found the subject matter not to their liking, and vowed never to return. This latter, come to think of it, might have happened to numerous potential RN listeners. Because RN, unlike most of its competitors, tends to have specialist segments: on science, books, architecture and design, indigenous affairs, the law, health, film, rural affairs, philosophy, music and numerous other topics.

To deal briefly and solely with music: Andrew Ford's *The Music Show* (Saturdays, 10am) is one of the most interesting, authoritative music programs you'll hear anywhere in the world. Robyn Johnston's *Into The Music* (Saturdays, 5pm) falls into a similar category. And Nell Schofield's history repeat, *The Story of Pop* (Saturdays, 7pm), is close to superb.

In many ways specialisation is a brilliant radio idea, because those with specific interests know precisely where to turn at a specific time. If you're fascinated by, say, volcanoes, an entire program given over to volcanoes can be irresistible. Equally, a dial-twiddler, not faintly interested in volcanoes, might be inclined to twiddle ever more frenetically.

Anyway, we probably shouldn't discourage the acting RN manager, Michael Mason, from spending the remainder of the year having wise thoughts about how RN, over a three-year period, can be rendered more attractive to a new generation of thirty-somethings. A radio format, however well conceived, can come to sound formulaic and predictable, and a bit of quality-oriented calibration. 

# Outsourcing the arts at Aunty: the problem with commissioning

**NICHOLAS PICKARD, freelance journalist and former NSW government arts advisor, writes:**

Rumours have swirled for just over a week and yesterday ABC management confirmed what had already been suspected: ABC TV's flagship program Arts Nation has been axed and 15 people have also been reportedly offered redundancies.

The program has been screened for just three years with limited publicity and yet Kim Dalton, head of ABC Television, told *The Sydney Morning Herald* that one of the reasons for its axing is audiences had fallen by "about 30-odd per cent over the past few years". The axing will not affect Tuesday's Artscape slot, the First Tuesday Book Club, At The Movies or ABC2 Live arts performances.

Reaction to the move has been aggrieved, primarily because ABC management are keeping their cards close to their chest over how they intend to cover the arts. Many commentators are quick to quote the ABC charter, but the charter is at best vague on how the national broadcaster needs to "encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia".

In a statement to staff, Dalton stated that "the online portal Arts Gateway, will continue as will the Sunday afternoon block of acquired arts programs from Australia and around the world".

This shift to outsourcing content is the move that most concerns the arts industry. The sector has watched as serious arts content has shrunk drastically throughout the mainstream media, most particularly in broadsheet newspapers. Large chunks of available space are regularly taken up by easily found syndicated articles from newspapers in the UK and the United States because of poor resources allocated to arts desks.

A television industry source explained to Crikey yesterday that

"it's not unusual in television for productions to be 'outsourced'. That's what a co-production is and its how most television is made".

According to the source, there are endemic problems with in-house productions at the ABC, "which happen when people within an organisation get promoted to positions they aren't suited to. Not because that's what they should be doing, but because they've earned it through being there so long".

“

Australian society would be much poorer if the ABC were to not provide access to, and analysis of, our cultural output on free-to-air television

To add to the ABC's challenges, the recently appointed ABC Controller Brendan Dahill has been given five years to turn the network's demographic around from a majority of over-65s to an audience from 18-40. That is no mean feat when the ABC is a legacy broadcaster.

There have been instances in recent years that point to good ABC arts program commissions under the Artscape banner including *The Art Life* and *This Is Not Art*.

Others, however, point to a lack of funding resources by the ABC to stick with serious and regular arts programs as it does with politics and sport. They point to programs such as *Express*, *Review* and *Sunday Arts* that have all been left by the wayside. ABC presenter

Quentin Dempster has today been quoted in *The Australian* as saying the removal of in-house productions as an "intentional destruction of the ABC's creative independence".

Arts industry figures were more cautious to condemn the ABC until plans for arts coverage are better outlined by management. Lyndon Terracini, artistic director of Opera Australia, told Crikey that "it seems unthinkable the ABC won't have an arts division [however] there should be a balance between what happens in-house and what happens externally with private producers".

Cassandra Wilkinson, chair of Sydney radio station FBi FM and Music NSW board member, says the problem isn't in producing good arts television -- it's commissioning it.

"Private people make great TV but they need to be commissioned to do it," she told Crikey. "The ABC needs to be clear about what it has an obligation to commission, which in my view includes a body of work that explores and celebrates Australian art and culture."

She pointed to the success of FBi FM (a community radio station focused on local arts, culture and music) that attracts an average of 250,000 listeners: "The audience for Australian music, art and culture is bigger than anyone predicted and just keeps growing. Australian culture shouldn't be treated as a grudging obligation, it's an opportunity for great content and bigger audiences."

Ralph Myers, artistic director at the Sydney-based Belvoir St Theatre, captured the mood of many of the industry people Crikey spoke to yesterday in saying that "a vibrant artistic culture relies on criticism and analysis".

"Australian society would be much poorer if the ABC were to not provide access to, and analysis of, our cultural output on free-to-air television," he said. 

# Ratings chase is no pursuit for a public broadcaster

Margaret Seares  
The Australian

**THERE** have been times over the past year or so when I have thought The Australian was being unduly critical of the ABC and its public broadcaster status. But the recent news of cuts to arts programs and personnel at ABC TV, and the reasons given for those cuts, have caused me to pause and think again.

If ABC TV director Kim Dalton is correctly reported as saying the changes are due to poor ratings, this is a real concern to all who believe in the value of a public broadcaster.

The public-good values that led to governments funding arts and cultural institutions due to their tendency towards “market failure” was the same ethos that led to the establishment of the great public broadcasters of Great Britain, Canada and Australia.

This came with an understanding that education as well as entertainment was an essential part of the broadcaster’s output. The value of the broadcaster was not only about ratings but also about impact on and for the community. And in some parts of the ABC, notably Radio National and Classic FM, these values still seem to be alive and well. But not, it seems, ABC TV.

It’s quite different for the commercial broadcasters, where the numbers are an essential tool in attracting advertisers.

But why does a TV broadcaster that does not have a commercial imperative appear to be so obsessed with ratings, to the extent that commitments in its charter look like being blithely tossed aside?

And why is it seemingly copying the commercial channels, with its ads and promos, with its local news services that rival the commercial channels in terms of “law and order” stories, and with its whittling away of local productions and niche programs?

And why does it seem to have lost interest in the notion of public good? The closer ABC TV comes to looking like a commercial broadcaster, the louder the voices will be who argue that the ABC might as well go commercial and get off the public purse. And what a long-term tragedy that would be for our country.

The internal email announcing the cuts at the ABC apparently spoke of “an increasingly competitive broadcasting environment” and of the need to focus resources on prime-time TV and, apparently, away from the arts.

Why is the ABC so concerned about competing with commercial television? It’s not competing for sponsors, and who says it has to compete for viewers? It must be possible to look at other ways of measuring impact, other than with the crude tool of ratings.

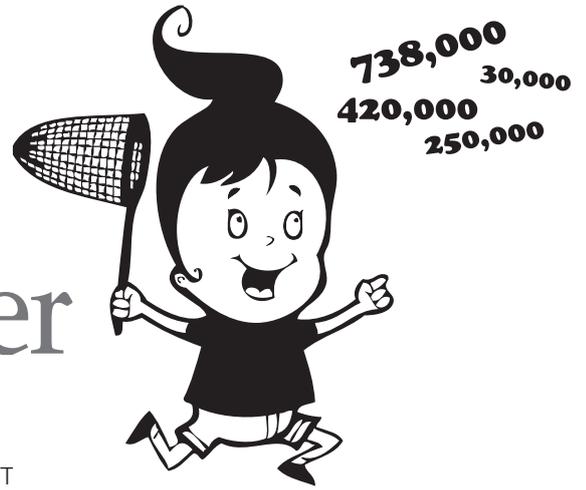
If the ratings drive is coming from pressure from politicians, then perhaps it’s time for a public debate involving our elected representatives about what exactly we think we want from a national broadcaster.

We’ve got enough TV channels that all look pretty similar to one another. Surely we can have one or two that look and sound just a bit different and a bit more interesting?

I’m sure that respondents from the ABC will tell us that there is plenty of exposure for the arts on ABC Online.

That’s great. But why not on television too? After all, there’s news and current affairs on both. There’s cooking on both. What’s wrong with the arts on both?

Is there some sort of cultural cringe going on here, dressed up as a worry about money and ratings? From my time chairing the ABC’s Arts Advisory Committee nearly a decade ago, I recall that savings in the arts would provide such small pickings compared with, for example, news and current affairs across all platforms, that it’s hard not to think that this must be about more than just money and ratings.



The board and management must decide to go back to first principles, back to the ABC’s charter, and look at other ways of dealing with an issue that goes right to the heart of what a public broadcaster is all about.

**Margaret Seares is a former chairwoman of the ABC’s Arts Advisory Committee and of the Australia Council for the Arts.**

## Who watches Media Watch? More than listen to Jones.

**Media Watch last night played a clip from an interview with Sydney radio host Alan Jones last week who disparagingly asked “who watches Media Watch?” and generally bagged the program.**

### Let’s go to the numbers...

Last night, 584,000 people watched Media Watch in the five metro markets. In Sydney, according to radio ratings survey four, a cumulative 501,000 people listened to Alan Jones on his 2GB breakfast shift, and the average daily audience was 172,000. Media Watch’s Sydney audience last night was 202,000.

### So the answer to Jones’s sledging question is:

more people watch Media Watch than listen to Alan Jones, especially in Sydney!

**Glenn Dyer**

Crikey  
August 2, 2011





Glenys Stradijot,  
Friends of the ABC (Vic)

Many issues are raised by the News of the World phone-hacking scandal that rocked Britain. Prominent among them must be who owns the media and how much of it anyone should be allowed to own.

There is the matter of whether Rupert Murdoch is a 'fit and proper' person to hold a media licence. Police say more than 4,000 people may have been the target of NoW phone hacking, including murdered children and their families, the relatives of soldiers killed in action, and London's 2005 terrorist bombing victims. If true, this is not the result of a rogue reporter or executive. The pressure to do what it takes to maximise profit comes from the top and it is difficult to believe that authority for the widely reported payment of £100,000 a year for a contractor who illegally taped phones would not have come from high up the corporate ladder.

However, NoW's reprehensible actions, and the state's failure to act on the root causes when revelations of NoW phone-tapping came to police attention several years ago, are also potent examples of the dangers of insufficient media ownership diversity.

Until the latest shocking revelations, British politicians were reluctant to criticise criminality at News International (News Corporation's British division). The Press Complaints Commission failed to take decisive action on information that indicated the problem of NoW phone-hacking was widespread, and the police inquiry was shamefully inadequate.

The prominent position of Murdoch's News Corporation in the media landscape

# Media matters Murdoch down but not out

has resulted in a media corporation which some governments have a vested interest to support, most politicians are afraid to curtail, and which believes itself to be above the law.

The New Statesman wrote on 7 July: "The issue concerns the intimate relationship between one media corporation and the British state. Many prominent figures in British society live in terror of Mr Murdoch. It is not just concern about how the Sun and NoW can influence opinion, but also the fear that, if they cross News International, its papers might unearth some fragment of their private lives and use it to discredit and embarrass them. Moreover, the tentacles of News Corp reach so deeply into national life that almost everybody of importance has been seduced in some fashion."

“

Will Murdoch be found to have any culpability in what has happened at NoW?

Can his expansion, in Britain at least, be curtailed?

”

It concluded: "This is the result of allowing one corporation to control almost 40 per cent of newspaper circulation."

News Corporation's Australian newspaper circulation is almost 70 per cent.

## It's not the end

News International is retreating only to the extent needed to confine the fallout and leave open the door for future expansion.

News Corporation's sudden closure of NoW was widely considered to be a shrewd attempt to save its plan to take full ownership of Britain's prominent pay TV company. News Corporation subsequently dropped its BSkyB bid, but only when it looked like the British Parliament was set to vote unanimously to urge it to withdraw.

Will Murdoch be found to have any culpability in what has happened at NoW? Can his expansion, in Britain at least, be curtailed?

The corporate business structure exists for owners to outsource their risks and responsibilities in order to maximise their profits.

News Corporation has not ruled out the possibility that it will replace its NoW sensationalist Sunday tabloid by simply extending The Sun to Sunday. The Sun is Britain's best selling daily newspaper, infamous for its semi-naked 'Page 3 girls'.

Murdoch had already gained in-principle government approval to secure total ownership of BSkyB. He is not prohibited from resurrecting the bid, which would deliver him dominance of the British media market, and in the meantime continues to maintain effective voting control of BSkyB.

There is no certainty that the interests of the British public will prevail.

Even before the Murdoch phone-hacking scandal, FABC and many others had expressed serious concern about Australia's dangerously high concentration of commercial media ownership, including the threat it poses to public broadcasters which the powerful Murdoch empire views as competitors for its audience.

Please write to the Australian Government to let them know you want its action to achieve strong media ownership diversity to ensure our culture thrives and our democracy is uncompromised.

# Changes to ABC Television Programming



**Kim Dalton**  
Director  
ABC Television

The over-arching aim, however, is produce quality content for ABC audiences.



In early August ABC Television announced it would not renew *New Inventors* and *Art Nation* and that it would rest *Collectors*. The cancellation of *New Inventors* and *Art Nation* was driven by a number of factors.

While the Corporation has received funding increases for television programming in specific genres in recent triennial funding rounds, technological changes including the introduction of digital multi-channels, the growth of interactive services, the popularity of time-shifted viewing and the range of new devices through which audiences can now watch content, have all fundamentally affected the television industry, including the ABC.

The growth of digital multi-channels has driven increased competition for acquired content. Since mid-2009 the average price paid per hour for acquired content on ABC1 has risen by 8%. The ABC estimates that hourly rates for ABC1 prime time programmes will increase further across 2011/12. At the same time commercial and screenrights revenues returned to ABC Television for reinvestment in programming has been adversely affected.

In determining its schedule, ABC Television must also take into account audience engagement. While ratings do not dictate programming choices they do indicate if a program is in need of a refresh or if the ABC has to find new ways of engaging audiences on important issues and themes.

In the case of *New Inventors*, ABC Television commissioned 314 episodes and invested over \$32 million across its eight series. However, the program's audiences had fallen from a peak of over a million viewers in 2004 to an average of 500,000 in 2010, indicating audience fatigue.

The decision to cancel *Art Nation* reflected similar audience concerns. In 2011 to date, the program has averaged around 77,000 viewers each week, down

from 104,000 the previous year. Sunday Arts, the program that it replaced in 2010, had average audiences of 145,000 in 2009 and 175,000 in 2008. This pattern of declining audiences for a late-afternoon arts program led ABC Television to cancel the series.

As audiences' tastes and interests change so too does programming and program scheduling. From time to time programs are refreshed or cancelled by broadcasters. Sometimes programs end because audiences interest declines and at other times because the performers or producers decide to move onto other things. It is the ABC's responsibility to consider the value of its own productions and output and to make changes to its schedule where necessary.

Some commentators have stated that these programming changes bring into question the ABC's commitment to its Charter obligation to promote the Arts. Others have commented that the changes indicate that the ABC increasingly seeks to outsource its content.

The ABC takes seriously its obligation to promote the Arts and is committed to delivering a diverse range of arts programming that is produced internally, as well as commissioning work with independent Australian artists, performers and program makers.

While *Art Nation* has not been renewed, ABC Television is re-directing funding and resources to alternative high-quality, audience-focused arts programming in the prime-time schedules of ABC1 and ABC2. ABC Television will continue to commission content including live concerts, performances and plays, opera, ballet, choirs, film, dance, performing arts, reviews, interviews and documentaries. The Artscape slot (10pm Tuesdays), will comprise almost entirely Australian content, including the current staples of *First Tuesday Book Club* and Jennifer Byrne presents, a diverse range of one off series and arts documentaries.

Additionally, the online Arts Gateway will continue to be a source of unique arts content and ABC Radio should not be overlooked as a source of great arts content. Last month, ABC Radio launched triplej *Unearthed*, a new digital radio station, which will play 100% Australian music- the first of its kind in the country. In November, Triple j will also present a concert tour paying tribute Nick Cave. Additionally, Radio National has just released its new draft schedule, which will deliver more arts and more music programming with fewer repeats to Australian audiences.

The ABC operates a mixed model for content creation consisting of both internal and independent production. The economics of the television industry make it impossible for the ABC to maintain the massive infrastructure and staff base necessary to only produce television content internally.

Independent production allows the ABC to access creative talent and intellectual property from the broader production industry and to engage with a diversity of ideas. Internal production has delivered many great Australian programs. Similarly the ABC's partnerships with the independent production industry have produced many iconic programs on the ABC over the years. Programs such as *Seachange*, *Kath and Kim*, *the Hollow Men*, *Paper Giants: The Story of Cleo*, *Rake*, *Summer Heights High*, *Constructing Australia: The Bridge*, *The Prime Minister is Missing*, *Gruen Transfer* and *the Chaser*.

The ABC, however, does produce a great deal of television content internally. Over the last 3 years 84% of the ABC's content hours (excluding news/current affairs and *Rage*) were commissioned internally. Regardless of the source of the content however the ABC retains editorial control over the content created for its audience. The ABC's Editorial Policies set strict standards to ensure the Corporation retains its independence and integrity and that all content produced meets the editorial objectives of the ABC.

A key challenge for the ABC, as a taxpayer-funded body, is to meet its Charter and audience commitments in a way that ensure an efficient and effective use of resources. The ABC considers that a mixed-production model allows the ABC to focus its strengths in some areas in its internal productions and also to utilise the skills of the independent production sector to produce quality content in other areas. The over-arching aim, however, is produce quality content for ABC audiences. We will continue to strive to this end. 

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## National Web Portal links to all State Branches.

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

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

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